Reid Mayne

The Quadroon: Adventures in the Far West

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Содержание

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Chapter One
The Father of Waters

Father of Waters! I worship thy mighty stream! As the Hindoo by the shores of his sacred river, I kneel upon thy banks, and pour forth my soul in wild adoration!

Far different are the springs of our devotion. To him, the waters of his yellow Ganges are the symbols of a superstitious awe, commingled with dark fears for the mystic future; to me, thy golden wares are the souvenirs of joy, binding the present to the known and happy past. Yes, mighty river! I worship thee in the past. My heart fills with joy at the very mention of thy name!

Father of Waters! I know thee well. In the land of a thousand lakes, on the summit of the "*Hauteur de terre*," I have leaped thy tiny stream. Upon the bosom of the blue lakelet, the fountain of thy life, I have launched my birchen boat; and yielding to thy current, have floated softly southward. I have passed the meadows where the wild rice ripens on thy banks, where the

white birch mirrors its silvery stem, and tall *coniferae* fling their pyramid shapes, on thy surface. I have seen the red Chippewa cleave thy crystal waters in his bark canoe – the giant moose lave his flanks in thy cooling flood – and the stately wapiti bound gracefully along thy banks. I have listened to the music of thy shores – the call of the cacawee, the laugh of the wa-wa goose, and the trumpet-note of the great northern swan. Yes, mighty river! Even in that far northern land, thy wilderness home, have I worshipped thee!

Onward through many parallels of latitude – through many degrees of the thermal line!

I stand upon thy banks where thou leapest the rocks of Saint Antoine, and with bold frothing current cleavest thy way to the south. Already I note a change in the aspect of thy shores. The *coniferae* have disappeared, and thou art draped with a deciduous foliage of livelier hue. Oaks, elms, and maples, mingle their frondage, and stretch their broad arms over thee. Though I still look upon woods that seem illimitable, I feel that the wilderness is past. My eyes are greeted by the signs of civilisation – its sounds fall upon my ear. The hewn cabin – picturesque in its rudeness – stands among prostrate trunks; and the ring of the lumberer's axe is heard in the far depths of the forest. The silken blades of the maize wave in triumph over fallen trees, its golden tassels giving promise of a rich return. The spire of the church peers above the green spray of the woods, and the prayer of the Christian ascends to heaven sublimely mingling with the roar of

thy waters!

I launch my boat once more on thy buoyant wave; and, with heart as buoyant, glide onward and southward. I pass between bold bluffs that hem thy surging waves, and trace with pleasant wonder their singular and varied outlines – now soaring abruptly upward, now carried in gentle undulations along the blue horizon. I behold the towering form of that noted landmark "*La montaigne qui trempe à l'eau*," and the swelling cone on whose summit the soldier-traveller pitched his tent. I glide over the mirrored bosom of Pepin's lake, regarding with admiration its turreted shores. I gaze with deeper interest upon that precipitous escarpment, the "Lover's Leap," whose rocky wall has oft echoed back the joyous chaunt of the light-hearted voyageur, and once a sadder strain – the death-song of Wanona – beautiful Wanona, who sacrificed life to love!

Onward I glide, where the boundless prairies of the West impinge upon thy stream; and my eye wanders with delight over their fadeless green.

I linger a moment to gaze upon the painted warrior spurring his wild steed along thy banks – to gaze upon the Dacotah girls bathing their lithe limbs in thy crystal wave – then on again past the "Cornice Rocks" – the metalliferous shores of Galena and Dubuque – the aerial tomb of the adventurous miner.

I reach the point where the turbid Missouri rushes rudely upon thee, as though he would force thee from thy onward course. Poised in my light canoe, I watch the struggle. Fierce but short it

is, for thou triumphest, and thy conquered rival is compelled to pay his golden tribute to thy flood that rolls majestically onward!

Upon thy victorious wave I am borne still southward. I behold huge green mounds – the sole monuments of an ancient people – who once trod thy shores. Near at hand I look upon the dwellings of a far different race. I behold tall spires soaring to the sky; domes, and cupolas glittering in the sun; palaces standing upon thy banks, and palaces floating upon thy wave. I behold a great city – a metropolis!

I linger not here. I long for the sunny South; and trusting myself once more to thy current I glide onward.

I pass the sea-like estuary of the Ohio, and the embouchure of another of thy mightiest tributaries, the famed river of the plains. How changed the aspect of thy shores! I no longer look upon bold bluffs and beetling cliffs. Thou hast broken from the hills that enchained thee, and now rollest far and free, cleaving a wide way through thine own alluvion. Thy very banks are the creation of thine own fancy – the slime thou hast flung from thee in thy moments of wanton play – and thou canst break through their barriers at will. Forests again fringe thee – forests of giant trees – the spreading *platanus*, the tall tulip-tree, and the yellow-green cotton-wood rising in terraced groves from the margin of thy waters. Forests stand upon thy banks, and the wreck of forests is borne upon thy bubbling bosom!

I pass thy last great affluent, whose crimson flood just tinges the hue of thy waters. Down thy delta I glide, amid

scenes rendered classic by the sufferings of De Soto – by the adventurous daring of Iberville and La Salle.

And here my soul reaches the acmé of its admiration. Dead to beauty must be heart and eye that could behold thee here, in this thy southern land, without a thrill of sublimest emotion!

I gaze upon lovely landscapes ever changing, like scenes of enchantment, or the pictures of a panorama. They are the loveliest upon earth – for where are views to compare with thine? Not upon the Rhine, with its castled rocks – not upon the shores of that ancient inland sea – not among the Isles of the Ind. No. In no part of the world are scenes like these; nowhere is soft beauty blended so harmoniously with wild picturesqueness.

And yet not a mountain meets the eye – not even a hill – but the dark *cyprières*, draped with the silvery *tillandsia*, form a background to the picture with all the grandeur of the pyrogenous granite!

The forest no longer fringes thee here. It has long since fallen before the planter's axe; and the golden sugar-cane, the silvery rice, and the snowy cotton-plant, flourish in its stead. Forest enough has been left to adorn the picture. I behold vegetable forms of tropic aspect, with broad shining foliage – the *Sabal* palm, the anona, the water-loving tupelo, the catalpa with its large trumpet flowers, the melting *liquidambar*, and the wax-leaved mangolia. Blending their foliage with these fair *indigènes* are an hundred lovely exotics – the orange, lemon, and fig; the Indian-lilac and tamarind; olives, myrtles, and bromelias; while

the Babylonian willow contrasts its drooping fronds with the erect reeds of the giant cane, or the lance-like blades of the *yucca gloriosa*.

Embowered amidst these beautiful forms I behold villas and mansions; of grand and varied aspect – varied as the races of men who dwell beneath their roofs. And varied are they; for the nations of the world dwell together upon thy banks – each having sent its tribute to adorn thee with the emblems of a glorious and universal civilisation. Father of Waters, farewell!

Though not born in this fair southern land, I have long lingered there; and I love it *even better than the land of my birth*. I have there spent the hours of bright youth, of adventurous manhood; and the retrospect of these hours is fraught with a thousand memories tinged with a romance that can never die. There my young heart yielded to the influence of Love – a first and virgin love. No wonder the spot should be to me the most hallowed on earth!

Reader! listen to the story of that love!

Chapter Two
Six Months in the Crescent City

Like other striplings escaped from college, I was no longer happy *at home*. The yearning for travel was upon me; and I longed to make acquaintance with that world, as yet only known to me through the medium of books.

My longing was soon to be gratified; and without a sigh I beheld the hills of my native land sink behind the black waves – not much caring whether I should ever see them again.

Though emerging from the walls of a classic college, I was far from being tinctured with classic sympathies. Ten years spent in pondering over the wild hyperbole of Homer, the mechanical verse-work of Virgil, and the dry indelicacies of Horatius Flaccus, had failed to imbue me with a perception of that classic beauty felt, or pretended to be felt, by the spectacled *savant*. My mind was not formed to live on the ideal, or dream over the past. I delight rather in the real, the positive, and the present. Don Quixotes may play the troubadour among ruined castles, and mincing misses cover the ground of the guide-books. For my part I have no belief in the romance of old-world life. In the modern Tell I behold a hireling, ready to barter his brawny limbs to the use of whatever tyrant; and the picturesque Mazzaroni, upon closer acquaintance, dwindles down to the standard of a

hen-roost thief. Amid the crumbling walls of Athens and the ruins of Rome I encounter inhospitality and hunger. I am not a believer in the picturesqueness of poverty. I have no relish for the romance of rags.

And yet it was a yearning for the romantic that called me from home. I longed for the poetic and picturesque, for I was just at that age when the mind is imbued with its strongest faith in their reality. Ha! mine is not yet disabused of this belief. I am older now, but the hour of disenchantment has not yet come upon me – nor ever will. There is a romance in life, that is no illusion. It lives not in the effete forms and childish ceremonies of the fashionable drawing-room – it has no illustration in the tinsel trappings and gaudy puerilities of a Court. Stars, garters, and titles are its antidotes; red cloth and plush the upas-trees of its existence.

Its home is elsewhere, amid the grand and sublime scenes of Nature – though these are not necessary accompaniments. It is no more incidental to field and forest, rock, river, and mountain, than to the well-trodden ways of the trading-town. Its home is in human hearts – hearts that throb with high aspirations – bosoms that burn with the noble passions of Liberty and Love!

My steps then were not directed towards classic shores, but to lands of newer and more vigorous life. Westward went I in search of romance. I found it in its most attractive form under the glowing skies of Louisiana.

In the month of January, 18 – , I set foot upon the soil of

the New-World – upon a spot stained with English blood. The polite skipper, who had carried me across the Atlantic, landed me in his gig. I was curious to examine the field of this decisive action; for at that period of my life I had an inclination for martial affairs. But something more than mere curiosity prompted me to visit the battle-ground of New Orleans. I then held an opinion deemed heterodox – namely, that the *improvised* soldier is under certain circumstances quite equal to the professional hireling, and that long military drill is not essential to victory. The story of war, superficially studied, would seem to antagonise this theory, which conflicts also with the testimony of all military men. But the testimony of mere military men on such a matter is without value. Who ever heard of a military man who did not desire to have his art considered as mythical as possible? Moreover, the rulers of the world have spared no pains to imbue their people with false ideas upon this point. It is necessary to put forward some excuse for that terrible incubus upon the nations, the "standing army."

My desire to view the battle-ground upon the banks of the Mississippi had chiefly reference to this question. The action itself had been one of my strong arguments in favour of my belief; for upon this spot some six thousand men – who had never heard the absurd command, "Eyes right!" – out-generalled, "whipped," in fact nearly annihilated, a well-equipped and veteran army of twice their number!

Since standing upon that battle-ground I have carried a sword

in more than one field of action. What I then held only as a theory, I have since proved as an experience. The "drill" is a delusion. The standing army a cheat.

In another hour I was wandering through the streets of the Crescent City, no longer thinking of military affairs. My reflections were turned into a far different channel. The social life of the New-World, with all its freshness and vigour, was moving before my eyes, like a panorama; and despite of my assumption of the *nil admirari*, I could not help *wondering as I went*.

And one of my earliest surprises – one that met me on the very threshold of Transatlantic existence – was the discovery of my own utter uselessness. I could point to my desk and say, "There lie the proofs of my erudition – the highest prizes of my college class." But of what use they? The dry theories I had been taught had no application to the purposes of real life. My logic was the prattle of the parrot. My classic lore lay upon my mind like lumber; and I was altogether about as well prepared to struggle with life – to benefit either my fellow-man or myself – as if I had graduated in Chinese mnemonics.

And oh! ye pale professors, who drilled me in syntax and scansion, ye would deem me ungrateful indeed were I to give utterance to the contempt and indignation which I then felt for ye – then, when I looked back upon ten years of wasted existence spent under your tutelage – then, when, after believing myself an educated man, the illusion vanished, and I awoke to the knowledge that I *knew nothing*!

With some money in my purse, and very little knowledge in my head, I wandered through the Streets of New Orleans, wondering as I went.

Six months later, and I was traversing the same streets, with very little money in my purse, but with my stock of knowledge vastly augmented. During this six months I had acquired an experience of the world more extensive, than in any six years of my previous life.

I had paid somewhat dearly for this experience. My travelling fund had melted away in the alembic of cafés, theatres, masquerades, and "quadroon" balls. Some of it had been deposited in that bank (faro) which returns neither principal nor interest!

I was almost afraid to "take stock" of my affairs. At length with an effort I did so; and found, after paying my hotel bills, a balance in my favour of exactly twenty-five dollars! Twenty-five dollars to live upon until I could write home, and receive an answer – a period of three months at the least – for I am talking of a time antecedent to the introduction of Atlantic steamers.

For six months I had been sinning bravely. I was now all repentance, and desirous of making amends. I was even willing to engage in some employment. But my cold classic training, that had not enabled me to protect my purse, was not likely to aid me in replenishing it; and in all that busy city I could find no office that I was fitted to fill!

Friendless – dispirited – a little disgusted – not a little anxious

in regard to my immediate future, I sauntered about the streets. My acquaintances were becoming scarcer every day. I missed them from their usual haunts – the haunts of pleasure. "Whither had they gone?"

There was no mystery in their disappearance. It was now mid-June. The weather had become intensely hot, and every day the mercury mounted higher upon the scale. It was already dancing in the neighbourhood of 100 degrees of Fahrenheit. In a week or two might be expected that annual but unwelcome visitor known by the soubriquet of "Yellow Jack," whose presence is alike dreaded by young and old; and it was the terror inspired by him that was driving the fashionable world of New Orleans, like birds of passage, to a northern clime.

I am not more courageous than the rest of mankind.

I had no inclination to make the acquaintance of this dreaded demon of the swamps; and it occurred to me, that I, too, had better get out of his way. To do this, it was only necessary to step on board a steamboat, and be carried to one of the up-river towns, beyond the reach of that tropical malaria in which the *vomito* delights to dwell.

Saint Louis was at this time the place of most attractive name; and I resolved to go thither; though how I was to live there I could not tell – since my funds would just avail to land me on the spot.

Upon reflection, it could scarce be "out of the frying-pan into the fire," and my resolution to go to Saint Louis became fixed. So, packing up my *impedimenta*, I stepped on board the

steamboat “Belle of the West,” bound for the far “City of the Mounds.”

Chapter Three
The "Belle of the West."

I was on board at the advertised time; but punctuality on a Mississippi steamboat must not be expected; and I found myself too early, by a couple of hours at least.

The time was not thrown away. I spent it to some profit in examining the peculiar craft in which I had embarked. I say, *peculiar*; for the steamers employed upon the Mississippi and its tributary waters are unlike those of any other country – even unlike those in use in the Atlantic or Eastern States.

They are strictly "river-boats," and could not live in anything like a rough sea; though the reckless owners of some of them have occasionally risked them along the coast from Mobile to Galveston, Texas!

The hull is built like that of a sea boat, but differs materially from the latter in depth of hold. So shallow is it, that there is but little stowage-room allowed; and the surface of the main deck is but a few inches above the water-line. Indeed, when the boat is heavily laden, the waves lip over the gunwales. Upon the deck is placed the machinery; and there rest the huge cast-iron boilers, and the grates or "furnaces," necessarily large, because the propelling power is produced from logs of wood. There, also, most of the freight is stowed, on account of the light capacity of

the hold; and on every part, not occupied by the machinery and boilers, may be seen piles of cotton-bales, hogsheads of tobacco, or bags of corn, rising to the height of many feet. This is the freight of a down-river-boat. On the return trip, of course, the commodities are of a different character, and consist of boxes of Yankee furniture, farming implements, and "notions," brought round by ship from Boston; coffee in bags from the West Indies, rice, sugar, oranges, and other products of the tropical South.

On the after-part of this deck is a space allotted to the humbler class of travellers known as "deck passengers." These are never Americans. Some are labouring Irish – some poor German emigrants on their way to the far North-West; the rest are negroes – free, or more generally slaves.

I dismiss the hull by observing that there is a good reason why it is built with so little depth of hold. It is to allow the boats to pass the shoal water in many parts of the river, and particularly during the season of drought. For such purpose the lighter the draught, the greater the advantage; and a Mississippi captain, boasting of the capacity of his boat in this respect, declared, that all he wanted was *a heavy dew upon, the grass, to enable him to propel her across the prairies*!

If there is but little of a Mississippi steamboat under the water, the reverse is true of what may be seen above its surface. Fancy a two-story house some two hundred feet in length, built of plank, and painted to the whiteness of snow; fancy along the upper story a row of green-latticed windows, or rather doors, thickly set, and

opening out upon a narrow balcony; fancy a flattish or slightly rounded roof covered with tarred canvas, and in the centre a range of sky-lights like glass forcing-pits; fancy, towering above all, two enormous black cylinders of sheet-iron, each ten feet in diameter, and nearly ten times as high, the "funnels" of the boat; a smaller cylinder to one side, the "'scape-pipe;" a tall flag-staff standing up from the extreme end of the bow, with the "star-spangled banner" flying from its peak; – fancy all these, and you may form some idea of the characteristic features of a steamboat on the Mississippi.

Enter the cabin, and for the first time you will be struck with the novelty of the scene. You will there observe a splendid saloon, perhaps a hundred feet in length, richly carpeted and adorned throughout. You will note the elegance of the furniture, – costly chairs, sofas, tables, and lounges; you will note the walls, richly gilded and adorned with appropriate designs; the crystal chandeliers suspended from the ceiling; the hundred doors that lead to the "state-rooms" on each side, and the immense folding-door of stained or ornamental glass, which shuts in the sacred precinct of the "ladies' saloon." In short, you will note all around you a style and luxuriance to which you, as a European traveller, have not been accustomed. You have only read of such a scene in some Oriental tale – in Mary Montagu, or the "Arabian Nights."

And yet all this magnificence is sometimes sadly at variance with the style of the company that occupies it – for this splendid saloon is as much the property of the coarse "rowdy" as of the

refined gentleman. You are startled by the apparition of a rough horse-skin boot elevated along the edge of the shining mahogany; and a dash of brown nicotian juice may have somewhat altered the pattern of the carpet! But these things are exceptional – more exceptional now than in the times of which I write.

Having satisfied myself with examining the interior structure of the "Belle of the West," I sauntered out in front of the cabin. Here a large open space, usually known as the "awning," forms an excellent lounging-place for the male passengers. It is simply the continuation of the "cabin-deck," projected forward and supported by pillars that rest upon the main deck below. The roof, or "hurricane-deck," also carried forward to the same point, and resting on slight wooden props, screens this part from sun or rain, and a low guard-rail running around it renders it safe. Being open in front and at both sides, it affords the best view; and having the advantage of a cool breeze, brought about by the motion of the boat, is usually a favourite resort. A number of chairs are here placed to accommodate the passengers, and smoking is permitted.

He must take very little interest in the movements of human life, who cannot kill an hour by observing it upon the "Levee" of New Orleans; and having seated myself and lighted my cigar, I proceeded to spend an hour in that interesting occupation.

Chapter Four
The Rival Boats

The part of the "Levee" under my eyes was that known as the "Steamboat Landing." Some twenty or thirty boats lay along a series of wooden wharves that projected slightly into the river. Some had just arrived from up-river towns, and were discharging their freight and passengers, at this season a scanty list. Others, surrounded by a bustling swarm, were getting up steam; while still others appeared to be abandoned by both officers and crew – who were no doubt at the time enjoying themselves in the brilliant cafés and restaurants. Occasionally might be seen a jauntily-dressed clerk, with blue cottonade trowsers, white linen coat, costly Panama hat, shirt with cambric ruffles, and diamond studs. This stylish gentleman would appear for a few minutes by one of the deserted boats – perhaps transact a little business with some one – and then hurry off again to his more pleasant haunts in the city.

There were two points upon the Levee where the bustle of active life was more especially observable. These were the spaces in front of two large boats. One was that on which I had taken passage. The other, as I could read upon her wheel-house, was the "Magnolia." The latter was also upon the eve of starting, as I could tell by the movements of her people, by the red fires seen

in her furnaces, and the hissing of steam, that every now and then screamed sharply from the direction of her boilers.

On the Levee directly in front of her "drays" were depositing their last loads, passengers were hurrying forward hat-box in hand, in fear they might be too late; trunks, boxes, bags, and barrels were being rudely pushed or rolled over the staging-planks; the gaily-dressed clerks, armed with book and pencil, were checking them off; and everything denoted the intention of a speedy departure. A scene exactly similar was being enacted in front of the "Belle of the West."

I had not been regarding these movements very long, before I observed that there was something unusual "in the wind." The boats lay at no great distance from each other, and their crews, by a slight elevation of voice, could converse. This they were freely doing; and from some expressions that reached me, coupled with a certain tone of defiance in which they were uttered, I could perceive that the "Magnolia" and the "Belle of the West" were "rival boats." I soon gathered the further information, that they were about to start at the same time, and that a "race" was in contemplation!

I knew that this was no unusual occurrence among what are termed "crack" boats, and both the "Belle" and her rival came under that category. Both were of the first-class in size and magnificence of fitting; both ran in the same "trade," that is, from New Orleans to Saint Louis; and both were commanded by well-known and popular river "captains." They could not be

otherwise than rivals; and this feeling was shared in by the crews of both, from captain to cabin-slave.

As regards the owners and officers in such cases, there is a substantial *money motive* at the bottom of this rivalry. The boat that "whips" in one of these races, wins also the future patronage of the public. The "fast boat" becomes the fashionable boat, and is ever afterwards sure of a strong list of passengers at a high rate of fare – for there is this peculiarity among Americans: many of them will spend their last dollar to be able to say at the end of his journey that he came upon the fashionable boat, just as in England you find many people desirous of making it known that they travelled "first-class." Snobbery is peculiar to no country – it appears to be universal.

With regard to the contemplated trial of speed between the "Belle of the West" and the "Magnolia," the feeling of rivalry pervaded not only the crews of both boats, but I soon discovered that the passengers were affected with it. Most of these seemed as eager for the race as an English blackleg for the Derby. Some no doubt looked forward to the sport and excitement, but I soon perceived that the greater number were betting upon the result!

"The Belle's boun' to win!" cried a gold-studded vulgar-looking fellow at my shoulder. "I'll go twenty dollars on the Belle. Will you bet, stranger?"

"No," I replied, somewhat angrily, as the fellow had taken a liberty by laying his hand on my shoulder.

"Well," retorted he, "jest as you like 'bout that;" and

addressing himself to some one else he continued, “the Belle’s the conquering boat for twenty dollars! Twenty dollars on the Belle!”

I confess I had no very pleasant reflections at that moment. It was my first trip upon an American steamboat, and my memory was brimful of stories of “boiler burstings,” “snaggings,” “blowings up,” and boats on fire. I had heard that these races not infrequently resulted in one or other of the above-named catastrophes, and I had reason to know that my information was correct.

Many of the passengers – the more sober and respectable ones – shared my feelings; and some talked of appealing to the Captain not to allow the race. But they knew they were in the minority, and held their peace.

I had made up my mind at least to ask the Captain “his intentions.” I was prompted rather by curiosity than by any other motive.

I left my seat, therefore, and having crossed the staging, walked toward the top of the wharf, where this gentleman was standing.

Chapter Five
A Desirable Fellow-Passenger

Before I had entered into conversation with the Captain, I saw a barouche approaching on the opposite side, apparently coming from the French quarter of the city. It was a handsome equipage, driven by a well-clad and evidently well-fed black, and as it drew near, I could perceive that it was occupied by a young and elegantly-attired lady.

I cannot say why, but I felt a presentiment, accompanied perhaps by a silent wish, that the occupant of the barouche was about to be a fellow-passenger. It was not long before I learnt that such was her intention.

The barouche drew up on the crest of the Levee, and I saw the lady directing some inquiry to a bystander, who immediately pointed to our Captain. The latter, perceiving that he was the object inquired after, stepped up to the side of the carriage, and bowed to the lady. I was close to the spot, and every word reached me.

"Monsieur! are you the captain of the Belle of the West?"

The lady spoke in French, a smattering of which the Captain in his intercourse with the Creoles had picked up.

"Yes, madame," was the reply.

"I wish to take passage with you."

"I shall be most happy to accommodate you, madame. There is still one state-room disengaged, I believe, Mr Shirley?"

Here the Captain appealed to the clerk, in order to ascertain if such was the case.

"Never mind!" said the lady, interrupting him, "for the matter of a state-room it is of no importance! You will reach my plantation before midnight, and therefore I shall not require to sleep aboard."

The phrase, "my plantation," evidently had an effect upon the Captain. Naturally not a rude man, it seemed to render him still more attentive and polite. The proprietor of a Louisiana plantation is a somebody not to be treated with nonchalance; but, when that proprietor chances to be a young and charming lady, who could be otherwise than amiable? Not Captain B., commander of the "Belle of the West!" The very name of his boat negatived the presumption!

Smiling blandly, he inquired where he was to land his fair charge.

"At Bringiers," replied the lady. "My residence is a little below, but our landing is not a good one; besides, there is some freight which it would be better to put ashore at Bringiers."

Here the occupant of the barouche pointed to a train of drays, loaded with barrels and boxes, that had just driven up, and halted in the rear of the carriage.

The sight of the freight had a still further pleasant effect on the Captain, who was himself *part owner* of his boat. He became

profuse in offers of service, and expressed his willingness to accommodate his new passenger in every way she might desire.

"Monsieur Capitaine," continued this handsome lady, still remaining seated in her carriage, and speaking in a tone of good-natured seriousness, "I must make one condition with you."

"Please to name it, madame."

"Well then! It is reported that your boat is likely to have a race with some other one. If that be so, I cannot become your passenger." The Captain looked somewhat disconcerted. "The fact is," continued she, "I had a narrow escape once before, and I am determined to run no such risk in future."

"Madame – ," stammered the Captain – then hesitating —

"Oh, then!" interrupted the lady, "if you cannot give me the assurance that you will not race, I must wait for some other boat."

The Captain hung his head for some seconds. He was evidently reflecting upon his answer. To be thus denied the anticipated excitement and pleasure of the race – the victory which he confidently expected, and its grand consequences; to appear, as it were, afraid of trying the speed of his boat; afraid that she would be beaten; would give his rival a large opportunity for future bragging, and would place himself in no enviable light in the eyes of his crew and passengers – all of whom had already made up their minds for a race. On the other hand, to refuse the request of the lady – not very unreasonable when properly viewed – and still more reasonable when it was considered that that lady was the proprietress of several dray-loads of freight, and

when still further considered that that lady was a rich *plantress* of the "French coast," and might see fit next fall to send several hundred casks of sugar and as many hogsheads of tobacco down on his (the Captain's) boat; – these considerations, I say, made the request quite reasonable. And so we suppose, upon reflection, it must have appeared to Captain B – , for after a little hesitation he granted it. Not with the best grace, however. It evidently cost him a struggle; but interest prevailed, and he granted it.

"I accept your conditions, madame. The boat shall *not* run. I give you my promise to that effect."

"*Assez*! thanks! Monsieur le Capitaine; I am greatly obliged to you. If you will be so good as to have my freight taken aboard. The carriage goes along. This gentleman is my steward. Here, Antoine! He will look to everything. And now pray, Capitaine, when do you contemplate starting?"

"In fifteen minutes, madame, at the latest."

"Are you sure of that, mon Capitaine?" she inquired, with a significant laugh, which told she was no stranger to the want of punctuality of the boats.

"Quite sure, madame," replied the Captain; "you may depend on the time."

"Ah! then, I shall go aboard at once!" And, so saying, she lightly tripped down the steps of the barouche, and giving her arm to the Captain, who had gallantly proffered himself, was conducted to the ladies' cabin, and of course for a time lost to the admiring eyes, not only of myself, but of a goodly number of

others who had already been attracted to gaze upon this beautiful apparition.

Chapter Six
Antoine the Steward

I had been very much struck by the appearance of this dame. Not so much on account of her physical beauty – though that was of a rare kind – as by the air that characterised her. I should feel a difficulty in describing this, which consisted in a certain *braverie* that bespoke courage and self-possession. There was no coarseness of manner – only the levity of a heart gay as summer, and light as gossamer, but capable, when occasion required, of exhibiting a wonderful boldness and strength. She was a woman that would be termed beautiful in any country; but with her beauty there was combined elegance, both in dress and manner, that told you at once she was a lady accustomed to society and the world. And this, although still young – she certainly could not have been much over twenty. Louisiana has a precocious climate, however; and a Creole of twenty will count for an Englishwoman of ten years older.

Was she married? I could not bring myself to think so; besides the expressions, "my plantation" and "my steward," would scarcely have been used by a lady who had "somebody" at home, unless, indeed, that somebody were held in very low estimation – in short, considered a "nobody." A widow she might be – a very young widow – but even that did not seem to me

probable. She had not the "cut" of a widow in my eyes, and there was not the semblance of a "weed" either about her dress or her looks. The Captain had styled her *Madame*, but he was evidently unacquainted with her, and also with the French idiom. In a doubtful case such as this, it should have been "Mademoiselle."

Inexperienced as I was at the time – "green," as the Americans have it – I was not without some curiosity in regard to women, especially when these chanced to be beautiful. My curiosity in the present case had been stimulated by several circumstances. First, by the attractive loveliness of the lady herself; second, by the style of her conversation and the facts it had revealed; third, by the circumstance that the lady was, or I fancied her to be, a "Creole."

I had as yet had but little intercourse with people of this peculiar race, and was somewhat curious to know more about them. I had found them by no means ready to open their doors to the Saxon stranger – especially the old "Creole *noblesse*," who even to this hour regard their Anglo-American fellow-citizens somewhat in the light of invaders and usurpers! This feeling was at one time deeply rooted. With time, however, it is dying out.

A fourth spur to my curiosity was found in the fact, that the lady in passing had eyed me with a glance of more than ordinary inquisitiveness. Do not be too hasty in blaming me for this declaration. Hear me first. I did not for a moment fancy that that glance was one of admiration. I had no such thoughts. I was too young at the time to flatter myself with such fancies.

Besides, at that precise moment I was far from being "in my zenith." With scarce five dollars in my purse, I felt rather forlorn; and how could I have fancied that a brilliant beauty such as she – a star of first magnitude – a rich proprietress – the owner of a plantation, a steward, and a host of slaves – would condescend to look admiringly on such a friendless wretch as I?

In truth, I did not flatter myself with such thoughts. I supposed that it was simple curiosity on her part – and no more. She saw that I was not of her own race. My complexion – the colour of my eyes – the cut of my garments – perhaps something *gauche* in my manner – told her I was a stranger to the soil, and that had excited her interest for a passing moment. A mere ethnological reflection – nothing more.

The act, however, had helped to pique my curiosity; and I felt desirous of knowing at least the name of this distinguished creature.

The "steward," thought I, may serve my purpose, and I turned towards that individual.

He was a tall, grey-haired, lathy, old Frenchman, well-dressed, and sufficiently respectable-looking to have passed for the lady's father. His aspect, too, was quite venerable, giving you the idea of long service and a very old family.

I saw, as I approached him, that my chances were but indifferent. I found him as "close as a clam." Our conversation was very brief; his answers laconic.

"Monsieur, may I ask who is your mistress?"

"A lady."

"True: any one may tell that who has the good fortune of looking at her. It was her name I asked for."

"It does not concern you to know it."

"Not if it be of so much importance to keep it a secret!"

"*Sacr-r-ré*!"

This exclamation, muttered, rather than spoken aloud, ended the dialogue; and the old fellow turned away on giving expression to it – no doubt cursing me in his heart as a meddling Yankee.

I applied myself to the sable Jehu of the barouche, but with no better success. He was getting his horses aboard, and not liking to give direct answers to my questions, he "dodged" them by dodging around his horses, and appearing to be very busy on the offside. Even the *name* I was unable to get out of him, and I also gave *him* up in despair.

The name, however, was furnished me shortly after from an unexpected source. I had returned to the boat, and had seated myself once more under the awning, watching the boatmen, with rolled-up red shirts, use their brawny arms in getting their freight aboard. I saw it was the same which had been delivered from the drays – the property of the lady. It consisted, for the most part, of barrels of pork and flour, with a quantity of dried hams, and some bags of coffee.

"Provisions for her large establishment," soliloquised I.

Just then some packages of a different character were pushed upon the staging. These were leathern trunks, travelling bags,

rosewood cases, bonnet-boxes, and the like.

"Ha! her personal luggage," I again reflected, and continued to puff my cigar. Regarding the transfer of the trunks, my eye was suddenly attracted to some lettering that appeared upon one of the packages – a leathern portmanteau. I sprang from my seat, and as the article was carried up the gangway stair I met it halfway. I glanced my eye over the lettering, and read —

"*Mademoiselle Eugénie Besançon*."

Chapter Seven
The Starting

The last bell rings – the "can't-get-away" folks rush ashore – the staging-plank is drawn in – some heedless wight has to jump for it – the cable is pulled aboard and coiled – the engineer's bell tinkles – the great wheels revolve, lashing the brown water into foam – the steam "whistles" and screams at the boilers, and booms from the 'scape-pipe in regular repetitions – neighbouring boats are pressed out of their places – their planks cringe and crackle – guards are broken, or the slight timbers of wheel-houses, causing a cross-fire of curses between the crews – and after some minutes of this pandemoniac confusion, the huge craft clears herself, and rides out upon the broad bosom of the river.

She heads up-stream; a few strokes of the revolving paddles and the current is mastered; and the noble boat yielding to the mighty propulsion, cleaves her liquid way, "walking the water like a thing of life!"

Perchance the boom of a cannon announces her departure; perchance it is animated by the harmonious swell of brazen instruments; or still more appropriate, some old "boatman's song," with its lively chorus, is heard issuing from the rude, though not unmusical throats of the "hands" below.

Lafayette and Carrolton are soon passed; the humbler roofs

of stores and dwellings sink out of sight; and the noble dome of Saint Charles, the spires of churches, and the towers of the great cathedral, are all of the Crescent City that remain above the horizon. These, at length, go down; and the "floating palace" moves on in stately grandeur between the picturesque shores of the Mississippi.

I have said "picturesque." This word does not satisfy me, nor can I think of one that will delineate my idea. I must make use of a phrase, "picturesquely beautiful," to express my admiration of the scenery of those shores. I have no hesitation in pronouncing it the finest in the world.

I am not gazing upon it with a mere cold eye-glance. I cannot separate scenery from its associations – not its associations of the past, but with the present. I look upon the ruined castles of the Rhine, and their story impresses me with a feeling of disgust for what *has been*. I look upon its modern homes and their dwellers; I am equally filled with disgust for what *is*. In the Bay of Naples I experience a similar feeling, and roaming "around" the lordly parks of England, I see them through an enclosure of wretchedness and rags, till their loveliness seems an illusion!

Here alone, upon the banks of this majestic river, do I behold wealth widely diffused, intelligence broadcast, and comfort for all. Here, in almost every house, do I meet the refined taste of high civilisation – the hospitality of generous hearts combined with the power to dispense it. Here can I converse with men by thousands, whose souls are free – not politically alone, but free

from vulgar error and fanatic superstition; here, in short, have I witnessed, not the perfectedness – for that belongs to a far future time – but the most advanced stage of civilisation yet reached upon the globe.

A dark shadow crosses my eye-glance, and my heart is stung with sudden pain. It is the shadow of a human being with a black skin. *He is a slave*!

For a moment or two the scene looks black! What is there to admire here – in these fields of golden sugar-cane, of waving maize, of snow-white cotton? What to admire in those grand mansions, with their orangeries, their flowery gardens, their drooping shade-trees, and their soft arbours? All this is but the sweat of the slave!

For a while I behold without admiring. The scene has lost its *couleur de rose*; and a gloomy wilderness is before me! I reflect. Slowly and gradually the cloud passes away, and the brightness returns. I reflect and compare.

True, he with the black skin is a slave – but not a *voluntary* slave. That is a difference in his favour at least.

In other lands – mine own among them – I see around me slaves as well, and far more numerous. Not the slaves of an individual, but of an association of individuals – a class – an oligarchy. Not slaves of the corvée – serfs of the feud – but victims of its modern representative the tax, which is simply its commutation, and equally baneful in its effects.

On my soul, I hold that the slavery of the Louisiana black

is less degrading than that of the white pleb of England. The poor, woolly-headed helot is the victim of conquest, and may claim to place himself in the honourable category of a prisoner of war. He has not willed his own bondage; while you, my grocer, and butcher, and baker – ay, and you, my fine city merchant, who fondly fancy yourself a freeman – ye are voluntary in your serfdom; ye are loyal to a political juggle that annually robs ye of half your year's industry; that annually requires some hundred thousands of your class to be sloughed off into exile, lest your whole body should gangrene and die. And all this without even a protest. Nay, worse – you are ever ready to cry "crucify" to him who would attempt to counteract this condition – ever ready to glorify the man and the motion that would fix another rivet in your fetters!

Even while I write, the man who loves you least; he who for forty years – for all his life, in fact – has been your systematic enemy, is the most popular of your rulers! Even while I write the Roman wheel is revolving before your eyes, squibs and crackers sound sweetly in your ears, and you are screaming forth your rejoicings over the acts of a convention that had for its sole object the strengthening of your chains! But a short twelve months ago, you were just as enthusiastic for a war that was equally antagonistic to your interests, equally hostile to the liberties of your kind! Miserable delusion!

I repeat what I have uttered with a feeling of solemnity. On my soul, I hold that the slavery of the Louisiana black is less

degrading than that of the white pleb of England.

True, this black man is a *slave*, and there are three millions of his race in the same condition. Painful thought! but less painful when accompanied by the reflection that the same broad land is trodden by *twenty millions of free and sovereign men*. Three millions of slaves to twenty millions of masters! In mine own land the proportion is exactly reversed!

The truth may be obscure. For all that, I dare say there are some who will understand it.

Ah! how pleasant to turn from these heart-stirring but painful thoughts to the calmer contemplation of themes furnished by science and nature. How sweet was it to study the many novel forms that presented themselves to my eyes on the shores of that magnificent stream! There is a pleasaunce even in the retrospect; and as I now sit dreaming over them far away – perhaps never more to behold them with mortal eye – I am consoled by a fond and faithful memory, whose magic power enables me to recall them before the eye of my mind in all their vivid colouring of green and gold!

Chapter Eight
The "Coast" of the Mississippi

As soon as we had fairly started, I ascended to the "hurricane-deck," in order to obtain a better view of the scenery through which we were passing. In this place I was alone; for the silent pilot, boxed up in his little tower of glass, could hardly be called a companion.

I make the following observations:

The breadth of the Mississippi river has been much exaggerated. It is here about half a mile wide. Sometimes more, occasionally less. (This average width it preserves for more than a thousand miles from its mouth.) Its waters run at the rate of three or four miles to the hour, and are of a yellowish cast, with a slight tincture of "red." The yellow colour it derives from the Missouri, while the deeper tint is obtained by the influx of the "Red."

Driftwood floats thickly upon its surface; here in single logs, there in raft-like clusters. To run a boat against one of these is attended with danger, and the pilot avoids them. Sometimes one swimming below the surface escapes his eye; and then a heavy bumping against the bows shakes the boat, and startles the equanimity of the less experienced passengers. The "snag" is most dreaded. That is a dead tree with heavy roots still adhering.

These, from their weight, have settled upon the bottom, and the *débris* gathering around holds them firmly imbedded. The lighter top, riven of its branches, rises towards the surface; but the pressure of the current prevents it from attaining to the perpendicular, and it is held in a slanting position. When its top rises above the water, the danger is but trifling – unless in a very dark night – it is when the top is hidden a foot or two below the surface that the snag is feared. Then a boat running upon it up-stream, is lost to a certainty. The roots firmly imbedded in the bottom mud, prevent the pile from yielding; and the top, usually a spiky one, penetrates the bow timbers of the boat, sinking her almost instantly. A boat properly "snagged" will go down in a few minutes.

The "sawyer" is a log fixed in the water similarly to the snag, but kept bobbing up and down by the current, thus suggesting the idea of a sawyer engaged at his work – hence the name. A boat getting aground upon a sunken log *crosswise*, is sometimes snagged upon its branches, and sometimes broken into two pieces by the pressure of her own weight.

Among the drift, I notice odd matters that interest me. Stalks of sugar-cane that have been crushed in the press-mill (a hundred miles farther up I should not meet these), leaves and stems of the maize plant, corn-cobs, pieces of broken gourd-shell, tufts of raw cotton, split fence-rails, now and then the carcase of some animal, with a buzzard or black vulture (*Cathartes aura* and *atratus*) perched upon it, or hovering above.

I am within the geographical range of the alligator but here the great Saurian is seldom seen. He prefers the more sluggish *bayous*, or the streams whose shores are still wild. In the rapid current of the Mississippi, and along its well-cultivated banks, he is but rarely observed by the passing traveller.

Alternately the boat approaches both shores of the river ("coasts" they are called). The land is an alluvion of no very ancient formation. It is a mere strip of *terra firma*, varying in breadth from a few hundred yards to several miles, and gradually declining from the banks, so that the river is actually running along the top of a ridge! Beyond this strip commences the "Swamp," a tract that is annually inundated, and consists of a series of lagoons and marshes covered with coarse grass and reeds. This extends in some places for a score of miles, or even farther – a complete wilderness of morass. Some portions of this – where the inundation is only annual – are covered with dark and almost impenetrable forests. Between the cultivated strip on the immediate bank of the river, and the "Swamp" in the rear, runs a belt of this forest, which forms a kind of background to the picture, answering to the mountain-ranges in other lands. It is a high, dark forest, principally composed of cypress-trees (*Cupressus disticka*). But there are other kinds peculiar to this soil, such as the sweet-gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), the live-oak (*Quercus vivens*), the tupelo (*Nyssa aquatica*), the water-locust (*Gleditschia aquatica*), the cotton-wood (*Populus angulata*), with *carya, celtis*, and various species of *acer, cornus,*

juglans, magnolia, and oaks. Here an underwood of palmettoes (*Sabal* palms), *smilax, llianes*, and various species of *vitis*; there thick brakes of cane (*Arundo gigantea*), grow among the trees; while from their branches is suspended in long festoons that singular parasite, the "Spanish moss" (*Tillandsia usneoides*), imparting a sombre character to the forest.

Between this dank forest and the river-banks lie the cultivated fields. The river current is often several feet above their level; but they are protected by the "Levee," an artificial embankment which has been formed on both sides of the river, to a distance of several hundred miles from its mouth.

In these fields I observe the culture of the sugar-cane, of the rice-plant, of tobacco and cotton, of indigo and maize. I see the "gangs" of black slaves at their work, in their cotton dresses of striped and gaudy colours, in which sky-blue predominates. I see huge waggons drawn by mules or oxen returning from the cane-fields, or slowly toiling along the banks. I see the light-bodied Creole, in "cottonade" jacket and trousers of bright blue, mounted upon his small Spanish horse, and galloping along the Levee road. I see the grand mansion of the planter, with its orange-groves and gardens, its green Venetians, cool verandahs, and pretty palings. I see the huge sugar-house, or tobacco-shed, or cotton "pickery;" and there, too, are the neat "cabins," clustering together or running in a row, like the bathing-boxes at a fashionable watering-place.

Now we are passing a plantation where they are making merry

– a *fête champètre*. Many horses stand under the trees, "hitched" in the shade with saddles on, not a few of which are "ladies' saddles." In the verandah, the lawn, and through the orange shrubbery, may be seen moving about gentlemen and ladies richly attired. Music is heard, and there is dancing in the open air. One cannot help envying these happy Creoles the enjoyment of their Arcadian life.

Scenes varied and lovely were passing panorama-like before my eyes. Lost in admiration of them, I had for the moment forgotten *Eugénie Besançon*.

Chapter Nine
Eugénie Besançon

No, Eugénie Besançon was not forgotten. Every now and then her sylph-like form flitted before my imagination, and I could not help associating it with the scenery through which we were passing, and amidst which, no doubt, she was born and nurtured – its fair *indigène*. The glimpse of the *fête champètre*, where several Creole-like girls were conspicuous, brought her more forcibly into my thoughts; and, descending from the hurricane-deck, I entered the cabin with some curiosity, once more to look upon this interesting lady.

For some time I dreaded disappointment. The great glass folding-door of the ladies' cabin was closed; and although there were several ladies outside in the main saloon, the Creole was not among the number. The ladies' cabin, which occupies the after-part of the boat, is a sacred precinct, into which bachelors are admitted only when they enjoy the privilege of having a friend inside – then only at certain hours.

I was not one of the privileged. Out of the hundred and odd passengers on board, I did not know a soul, male or female; and I had the happiness or misfortune of being equally unknown to them. Under these circumstances my entry into the ladies' cabin would have been deemed an intrusion; and I sat down in the main

saloon, and occupied myself in studying the physiognomy and noting the movements of my fellow-passengers.

They were a mixed throng. Some were wealthy merchants, bankers, money or commission brokers from New Orleans, with their wives and daughters, on their annual migration to the north, to escape from the yellow fever, and indulge in the more pleasant epidemic of life at a fashionable watering-place. There were corn and cotton-planters from the up-country, on their return home, and storekeepers from the up-river towns; boatmen who, in jean trousers and red flannel shirts, had pushed a "flat" two thousand miles down stream, and who were now making the back trip in shining broadcloth and snow-white linen. What "lions" would these be on getting back to their homes about the sources of Salt River, the Cumberland, the Licking, or the Miami! There were Creoles, too – old wine-merchants of the French quarter – and their families; the men distinguished by a superabundance of ruffles, plaited pantaloons, shining jewellery, and light-coloured cloth boots.

There was a sprinkling of jauntily-dressed clerks, privileged to leave New Orleans in the dull season; and there were some still more richly-dressed gentlemen, with the finest of cloth in their coats, the whitest of linen and raffles, the brightest of diamonds in their studs, and the most massive of finger-rings. These last were "sportsmen." They had already fathered around a table in the "smoking-saloon," and were fingering a span new pack of cards – the implements of their peculiar industry.

Among these I observed the fellow who had so loudly challenged me to bet upon the boat-race. He had passed me several times, regarding me with a glance that appeared anything but friendly.

Our close friend the steward was seated in the saloon. You must not suppose that his holding the office of steward, or overseer, disentitled him to the privileges of the first-class cabin. There is no "second saloon" on board an American steamer. Such a distinction is not known so far west as the Mississippi.

The overseers of plantations are usually men of rude and brutal dispositions. The very nature of their calling makes them so. This Frenchman, however, seemed to be an exception. He appeared a most respectable old gentleman. I rather liked his looks, and began to feel quite an interest in him, though he by no means appeared to reciprocate the feeling.

Some one complained of the mosquitoes, and suggested the opening of the folding-doors of the ladies' cabin. This suggestion was backed up by several others – ladies and gentlemen. The clerk of the boat is the man charged with such responsibilities. He was at length appealed to. The appeal was reasonable – it was successful; and the great gates of the steamboat Paradise were thrown open. The result was a current of air which swept through the long saloon from stem to stern; and in less than five minutes not a mosquito remained on board, except such as had escaped the blast by taking shelter in the state-rooms. This was certainly a great relief.

The folding-doors were permitted to remain open – an arrangement quite satisfactory to all, but particularly to a number of the gaily-dressed young clerks, who could now command a full view of the interior of the harem. Several of them might be observed taking advantage of the new arrangement – not staring broadly, as that would be accounted rude and noted against them. They only appealed to the sacred shrine by side-glances, or over books which they pretended to read, or pacing up and down approached the favoured limit, glancing in at intervals, as if undesignedly. Some appeared to have acquaintances inside, though not upon terms of sufficient familiarity to give them the right of entry. Others were in hopes of making acquaintances, should opportunity offer. I could detect expressive looks, and occasionally a smile that seemed to denote a mutual intelligence. Many a pleasant thought is conveyed without words. The tongue is often a sad disenchanter. I have known it to spoil many a nice love-plot silently conceived, and almost ripe for being carried out.

I was amused at this speechless pantomime, and sat for some minutes regarding it. My eyes wandered at intervals towards the interior of the ladies' saloon, guided thither partly by a common curiosity. I have an observant habit. Anything new interests me, and this cabin-life on an American steamboat was entirely new, and not a little *piquante*. I desired to study it. Perhaps I was somewhat interested in another way – desirous of having one more look at the young Creole, Besançon.

My desire, then, was gratified. I saw the lady at last. She had come out of her state-room, and was moving around the saloon, graceful and gay. She was now unbonneted, and her rich golden tresses were arranged *à la Chinoise*– a Creole fashion as well. The thick masses, coiled into a large "club" at the back of the head, denoted the luxuriance of her hair: and the style of coiffure, displaying her noble forehead and finely-formed neck, became her well. Fair hair with blonde complexion, although rare among the Creoles, is sometimes met with. Dark hair with a brunette skin is the rule, to which Eugénie Besançon was a remarkable exception.

Her features expressed gaiety, approaching to volatility; yet one could not help feeling that there was firmness of character *en perdu*. Her figure was beyond criticism; and the face, if not strikingly beautiful was one that you could not look upon without emotions of pleasure.

She appeared to know some of her fellow-passengers – at least she was conversing with them in a style of easy freedom. Women, however, rarely exhibit embarrassment among themselves; women of French race, never.

One thing I observed – her cabin companions appeared to regard her with deference. Perhaps they had already learnt that the handsome carriage and horses belonged to her. That was very, very likely!

I continued to gaze upon this interesting lady. Girl I cannot call her, for although young enough, she had the air of a woman

– a woman of experience. She appeared quite at ease; seemed mistress of herself, and indeed of everything else.

"What an air of *insouciance*," thought I. "That woman is not in love!"

I cannot tell why I should have made these reflections, or why the thought pleased me; but certainly it did. Why? She was nothing to me – she was far above me. I dared scarce look upon her. I regarded her as some superior being, and with timid stolen glances, as I would regard beauty in a church. Ho! she was nothing to me. In another hour it would be night, and she was to land in the night; I should never see her again! I should think of her though for an hour or two, perhaps for a day – the longer that was now foolish enough to sit gazing upon her! I was weaving a net for myself – a little agony that might last for some time after she was gone.

I had formed a resolution to withdraw from the fascinating influence, and return to my meditation on the hurricane-deck. A last look at the fair Creole, and I should depart.

Just at that moment she flung herself into a chair.

It was of the kind known as a "rocking-chair," and its motions displayed the fine proportion and outlines of her form. As she now sat she was facing the door, and her eye for the first time rested upon me. By Heavens! she was gazing on me just as before! What meant that strange glance? those burning eyes?

Stedfast and fixed, they remained bent upon mine – and mine trembled to answer them!

Thus for some moments her eyes dwelt upon me, without motion or change of direction. I was too young at that time to understand the expression that was in them. I could translate such an one afterwards, but not then.

At length she rose from her seat with an air of uneasiness, as if displeased either with herself or me; and, turning away her head, she opened the latticed door and passed into her state-room.

Had I done anything to give offence? No! not by word, nor look, nor gesture. I had not spoken – I had not moved, and my timid glance could not have been construed into one of rudeness.

I was somewhat bewildered by the conduct of Mademoiselle Besançon; and, in the full belief that I should never see her again, I hurried away from the saloon, and once more climbed up to the hurricane-deck.

Chapter Ten
A New Mode of raising the Steam

It was near sunset – the fiery disc was going down behind the dark outline of cypress forest that belted the western horizon, and a yellow light fell upon the river. Promenading back and forward upon the canvas-covered roof, I was gazing upon the scene, wrapt in admiration of its glowing beauty.

My reverie was interrupted. On looking down the river I saw that a large boat was in our wake, and coming rapidly after us. The volume of smoke rolling up out of her tall funnels, and the red glowing of her fires, showed that she was moving under a full head of steam. Her size, as well as the loud reports of her 'scape-pipe, told that she was a boat of the first-class. She was the "Magnolia." She was moving with great velocity, and I had not watched her long, before I perceived that she was fast gaining upon us.

At this moment my ears were assailed by a variety of sounds coming from below. Loud voices in earnest tones, the stamping and pattering of feet, as of men rushing over the wooden decks and along the guard-ways. The voices of women, too, were mingled in the medley.

I surmised what all this meant. The approach of the rival boat was the cause of the excitement.

Up to this time the boat-race seemed to have been nearly forgotten. It had got abroad among both "hands" and passengers that the Captain did not intend to "run;" and although this backing-out had been loudly censured at first, the feeling of disappointment had partially subsided. The crew had been busy at their work of stowage – the firemen with their huge billets of cord-wood – the gamblers with their cards – and the passengers, in general, with their portmanteaus, or the journal of the day. The other boat not starting at the same time, had been out of sight until now, and the feeling of rivalry almost "out of mind."

The appearance of the rival produced a sudden change. The gamblers flung down the half-dealt pack, in hopes of having something more exciting to bet upon; the readers hastily closed their books, and tossed aside their newspapers; the rummagers of trunks banged down the lids; the fair occupants of rocking-chairs suddenly sprang to their feet; and all ran out of the cabins, and pressed towards the after-part of the boat.

My position on the hurricane-deck was the best possible for a good view of the rival boat, and I was soon joined by a number of my fellow-passengers. I wished, however, to witness the scene on the cabin-deck, and went below.

On reaching the main saloon, I found it quite forsaken. All the passengers, both male and female, had gone out upon the guard-way; and leaning against the guards were anxiously watching the approach of the Magnolia.

I found the Captain under the front-cabin awning. He was

surrounded by a crowd of gentlemen-passengers, all of whom appeared to be in a high state of excitement. One after the other was proffering speech to him. They were urging him to "raise the steam."

The Captain, evidently wishing to escape from these importunities, kept passing from place to place. It was to no purpose. Wherever he went he was met or followed by a knot of individuals, all with the same request in their mouths – some even begging him for "God's sake" not to let the Magnolia pass him!

"Wal, Cap!" cried one, "if the Belle don't run, I guess she'll never be heerd of on these waters agin, she won't."

"You're right!" added another. "For my part the next trip I make I'll try the Magnolia."

"She's a fast boat that 'ere Magnolia!" remarked a third.

"She ain't anything else," rejoined the first speaker: "she's got her steam on a few, I reckon."

I walked out on the guard-way in the direction of the ladies' cabin. The inmates of the latter were clustered along the guards, and seemingly as much interested in the boat-race as the men. I could hear several of them expressing their wishes aloud that the boats would run. All idea of risk or fear of consequences had departed; and I believe that if the company had been "polled" at the moment in favour of the race, there would not have been three dissentient voices. I confess that I, myself, would have voted for running, – I had caught the infection, and no longer thought of "snags," "sawyers," or bursting boilers.

As the Magnolia drew near the excitement increased. It was evident that in a few minutes more she would be alongside, and then pass us. The idea was unsupportable to some of the passengers; and loud words could be heard, now and then interspersed with an angry oath. The poor Captain had to bear all this – for it was known that the rest of the officers were well disposed for a trial of speed. It was the Captain only who "showed the white feather."

The Magnolia was close in our wake; her head bearing a little to one side. She was evidently preparing to pass us!

Her officers and crew were moving actively about; both pilots were seen above at the wheel-house; the firemen were all at work upon the deck; the furnace-doors were glowing red-hot; and the bright blaze stood several feet above the tops of her tall funnels! One might have fancied she was on fire!

"They are burning bacon hams!" shouted a voice.

"They are by – !" exclaimed another. "See, yonder's a pile of them in front of the furnace!"

I turned my eyes in that direction. It was quite true. A pyramidal-shaped mass of dark-brown objects lay upon the deck in front of the fires. Their size, shape, and colour told what they were – dried hams of bacon. The firemen were seen taking them from the pile, and thrusting them one after another up the red tunnels of the furnace!

The Magnolia was still gaining upon us. Already her head was even with the wheel-house of the Belle. On the latter boat the

excitement increased, and the noise along with it. An occasional taunt from the passengers of the rival boat added fuel to the flame; and the Captain was once more abjured to run. Men almost threatened him with violence!

The Magnolia continued to advance. She was now head for head with us. Another minute passed – a minute of deep silence – the crews and passengers of both boats watched their progress with hearts too full for utterance. Another minute, and the Magnolia had shot ahead!

A triumphant cheer rang along her decks, mingled with taunting shouts and expressions of insult.

"Throw us a line, and we'll tow you!" cried one.

"Whar's yer old ark now?" shouted another.

"Hurraw for the Magnolia! Three groans for the Belle of the West! Three groans for the old dugout!" vociferated a third, amidst jeers and shouts of laughter.

I can hardly describe the mortification felt by those on board the Belle. It was not confined to the officers and crew. The passengers, one and all, seemed to partake of the feeling. I shared it myself, more than I could have believed to be possible.

One dislikes to be among the conquered, even on any terms of association. Besides, one involuntarily catches the impulse of the moment. The sentiment that surrounds you – perhaps by physical laws which you cannot resist – for the moment becomes your own; and even when you know the object of exultation to be worthless or absurd, you are controlled by the electric current

to join in the enthusiasm. I remember once being thus carried away, and mingled my voice with the rude throats that cheered the passing cortege of royalty. The moment it was past, however, my heart fell, abashed at its own meanness and wickedness.

Both his crew and passengers seemed to think our Captain imprudent in his prudence: and a general clamour, mingled with cries of "Shame!" was heard all over the boat.

The poor Captain! I had my eyes upon him all this while. I really pitied him. I was perhaps the only passenger on board, beside the fair Creole, who knew his secret; and I could not help admiring the chivalric fortitude with which he kept it to himself. I saw his cheek glow, and his eye sparkle with vexation; and I felt satisfied, that had he been called upon to make that promise then, he would not have done so for the privilege of carrying all the freight upon the river.

Just then, as if to escape the importunities that beset him, I saw him steal back and pass through the ladies' cabin. There he was at once recognised, and a general onset was made upon him by his fair passengers, who were almost as noisy in their petitions as the men. Several threatened him, laughingly, that they would never travel by his boat again; while others accused him of a want of gallantry. Surely it was impossible to resist such banterings; and I watched the Captain closely, expecting a crisis one way or the other. The crisis was at hand.

Drawing himself up in the midst of a knot of these importunates, he thus addressed them: —

"Ladies! Nothing would give me more pleasure than to gratify you, but before leaving New Orleans I gave my promise – in fact, passed my word of honour to a lady – " Here the gallant speech was interrupted by a young lady, who, rushing up from another part of the boat, cried out —

"Oh, Capitaine! cher Capitaine! do not let that wicked boat get ahead of us! do put on more steam, and pass her – that is a dear Captain!"

"Why, Mademoiselle!" replied the Captain, in astonishment, "it was to you I gave the promise not to run – it was – "

"Pardieu!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Besançon, for it was she. "So you did. I had quite forgotten it. Oh, cher Capitaine, I release you from that promise. *Hélas*! I hope it is not too late. For Heaven's sake, try to pass her! *Écoutez! les polissons*! how they taunt us!"

The Captain's face brightened up for a moment, and then suddenly resumed its vexed expression. He replied —

"Mademoiselle, although grateful to you, I regret to say that under the circumstances I cannot hope to run successfully against the Magnolia. We are not on equal terms. *She is burning bacon hams*, of which she has a large supply. I should have had the same, but after promising you not to run, I, of course, did not take any on board. It would be useless to attempt a race with only common cord-wood – unless indeed the Belle be much the faster boat, which we do not yet know, as we have never tried her speed."

Here appeared to be a dilemma, and some of the ladies regarded Mademoiselle Besançon with looks of displeasure.

"Bacon hams!" she exclaimed; "bacon hams did you say, cher Capitaine? How many would be enough? Would two hundred be enough?"

"Oh! less than that," replied the Captain.

"Here! Antoine! Antoine!" continued she, calling to the old steward. "How many bacon hams have you on board?"

"Ten barrels of them, Mademoiselle," answered the steward, bowing respectfully.

"Ten barrels! that will do, I suppose? Cher Capitaine, they are at your service!"

"Mademoiselle, I shall pay you for them," said the Captain, brightening up, and becoming imbued with the general enthusiasm.

"No – no – no! Let the expense be mine. I have hindered you. They were for my plantation people, but they are not in want. We shall send down for more. Go, Antoine! go to the firemen. Knock in the heads of the barrels! Use them as you please, but do not let us be beaten by that wicked Magnolia! Hark! how they cheer! Ha! we shall pass them yet."

So saying, the fiery Creole rushed back to the guard-way, followed by a group of admirers.

The Captain's "dander" was now fairly up; and the story of the bacon hams soon spreading over the boat, still further heightened the enthusiasm of both passengers and crew. Three loud cheers

were given for the young lady, which seemed to mystify the Magnolians, who had now been for some time in the enjoyment of their triumph, and had forged a considerable distance ahead.

All hands went to work with a will – the barrels were rolled-up, their heads knocked in, and part of their contents "chucked" up the blazing furnace. The iron walls soon grew red – the steam rose – the boat trembled under the increased action of the engine – the bells of the engineers tinkled their signals – the wheels revolved more rapidly, and an increase of velocity was soon perceptible.

Hope had stifled clamour – comparative silence was restored. There was heard only an occasional utterance – the expression of an opinion upon the speed of the rival boats – the fixing the conditions of a bet – and now and then some allusion to the story of the bacon hams.

At intervals, all eyes were bent upon the water eagerly glancing along the line that separated the rival steamers.

Chapter Eleven
A Boat-Race upon the Mississippi

It had now become quite dark. There was no moon in the sky – not a speck of a star. A clear heaven over the lower region of the Mississippi, at night, is rather rare than otherwise. The film of the swamp too often obscures it.

There was light enough for the race. The yellow water shone clear. It was easily distinguishable from the land. The track was a wide one; and the pilots of both boats – old hands – knew every "shute" and sand-bar of the river.

The rival steamers were quite visible to one another. No lamps needed to be hung out, although the gaff over the bow of each boat carried its coloured signal. The cabin windows of both were full of light, and the blaze of the bacon fires flung a vermilion glare far over the water.

Upon each boat the spectators could be seen from the other in their state-room windows, or leaning against the guards, in attitudes that betokened their interest.

By the time the Belle had fairly got up steam, the Magnolia was a full half-mile in advance of her. This distance, though nothing where there is a large difference of speed, is not so easily overtaken where the swiftness of the boats approximates to anything like an equality. It was a long while, therefore, before

the people of the Belle could be certain as to whether she was gaining upon her rival; for it is somewhat difficult to tell this when one vessel is running in the wake of the other. Questions were put by passengers to the various officials and to one another, and "guesses" were continually being made on this interesting point.

At length an assurance was derived from the Captain, that several hundred yards had been already taken up. This produced general joy, though not *universal*; for there were some "unpatriotic" individuals on board the Belle who had risked their dollars on the Magnolia.

In another hour, however, it was clear to all that our boat was fast gaining upon the Magnolia, as she was now within less than a quarter of a mile of her. A quarter of a mile on smooth water appears but a short distance, and the people of the two boats could hold converse at will. The opportunity was not neglected by those of the Belle to pay back the boasts of the Magnolians. Shouts of banter reached their ears, and their former taunts were now returned with interest.

"Have you any message for Saint Louis? We're going up there, and will be happy to carry it for you," shouted one from the Belle.

"Hurraw for the bully-boat Belle!" vociferated another.

"How are you off for bacon hams?" asked a third. "We can lend you a few, if you're out."

"Where shall we say we left you?" inquired a fourth. "In Shirt-tail Bend?" And loud peals of laughter followed this joking allusion to a point in the river well-known to the boatmen.

It had now approached the hour of midnight, and not a soul on either boat had thought of retiring to rest. The interest in the race precluded the idea of sleep, and both men and women stood outside the cabins, or glided out and in at short intervals to note the progress. The excitement had led to drinking, and I noticed that several of the passengers were already half intoxicated. The officers, too, led on by those, were indulging too freely, and even the Captain showed symptoms of a similar condition. No one thought of censure – prudence had fled from the boat.

It is near midnight, and amidst the growling and grinding of the machinery, the boats are moving on! There is deep darkness upon the water, but this is no impediment. The red fires glow; the blaze stands high above the tall funnels; steam booms from the iron pipes; the huge paddles lash the water into foam; the timbers creak and tremble under the fierce pressure, and the boats move on!

It is near midnight. A space of two hundred yards alone separates the steamers – the Belle is bounding upon the waves of the Magnolia. In less than ten minutes her head will overlap the stern of her rival. In less than twenty, and the cheer of victory rising from her deck will peal from shore to shore!

I was standing by the Captain of our boat, regarding him not without a feeling of solicitude. I regretted to see him pass so often to the "bar." He was drinking deeply.

He had returned to his station by the wheel-house, and was gazing ahead. Some straggling lights were gleaming on the right

bank of the river, a mile farther up. The sight of these caused him to start, and utter a wild exclamation: —

"By Heavens! it is *Bringiers*!"

"Ye-e-s," drawled the pilot at his elbow. "We've reached it in quick time, I reckon."

"Great God! I must lose the race!"

"How?" said the other, not comprehending him; "what has that got to do with it?"

"I must land there. I must – I must – the lady who gave us the hams – I must land her!"

"Oh! *that*," replied the phlegmatic pilot; "a darned pity it is," he added; "but if you must, you must. Darn the luck! We'd a-beat them into shucks in another quarter, I reckon. Darn the luck!"

"We must give it up," said the Captain. "Turn her head in."

Saying this, he hurried below; and, observing his excited manner, I followed him.

A group of ladies stood upon the guard-way where the Captain descended over the wheel-house. The Creole was among them.

"Mademoiselle," said the Captain, addressing himself to this lady, "we must lose the race after all."

"Why?" asked she in surprise; "are there not enough? Antoine! have you delivered them all?"

"No, Mademoiselle," replied the Captain, "it is not that, thanks to your generosity. You see those lights?"

"Yes – well?"

"That is *Bringiers*."

"Oh! it is, is it?"

"Yes; – and of course you must be landed there."

"And that would lose you the race?"

"Certainly."

"Then, of course, I must *not* be landed there. What care I for a day? I am not so old but that I can spare one. Ha! ha! ha! You shall not lose your race, and the reputation of your fine boat, on my account. Think not of landing, cher Capitaine! Take me on to Baton Rouge. I can get back in the morning!"

A cheer rose from the auditory; and the Captain, rushing back to the pilot, countermanded his late order.

The Belle again stands in the wake of the Magnolia, and again scarce two hundred yards of the river lie between. The rumbling of their machinery – the booming of their steam – the plashing of their paddles – the creaking of their planks – the shouts of those on board, mingle in rude concert.

Up forges the Belle – up – up – gaining in spite of the throes of her antagonist. Up, nearer still – nearer, till her head laps upon the stern, then the wheel-house, then the foredeck of the Magnolia! Now the lights of both cross each other – their fires glow together upon the water – they are head and head!

Another foot is gained – the Captain waves his hat – and the cheer of triumph peals forth!

That cheer was never finished. Its first notes had scarce broke upon the midnight air, when it was interrupted by an explosion like the bursting of some vast magazine – an explosion that

shook the air, the earth, and the water! Timbers crashed and flew upward – men shouted as their bodies were projected to the heavens – smoke and vapour filled the air – and one wild cry of agony arose upon the night!

Chapter Twelve
The Life-Preserver

The concussion, unlike anything I had ever heard, was, nevertheless, significant of the nature of the catastrophe. I felt an instantaneous conviction that the boilers had burst, and such in reality was the fact.

At the moment, I chanced to be on the balcony in rear of my state-room. I was holding by the guard-rail, – else the shock and the sudden lurch of the boat would have flung me headlong.

Scarce knowing what I did, I staggered into my state-room, and through the opposite door into the main saloon.

Here I paused and looked around me. The whole forward part of the boat was shrouded in steam and smoke, and already a portion of the hot scalding vapour floated through the cabin.

Dreading the contact of this, I rushed aft; but by a fortunate chance the lurch of the boat had brought her stern to windward, and the breeze blew the dangerous element away.

The engine was now silent – the wheels had ceased to move – the 'scape-pipe no longer gave out its booming notes; but instead of these sounds, others of terrible import fell upon the ear. The shouts of men, mingled with oaths – wild, awful imprecations – the more shrill piercing shrieks of women – the groans of rounded from the deck below – the agonised cry of those blown

into the water and drowning – all rang upon the ear with terrible emphasis!

How changed the tones from those that, but a moment before, pealed from the self-same lips!

The smoky vapour was soon partially blown off, and I could catch a glimpse of the forward part of the boat. There a complete chaos met the eye. The smoking-saloon, the bar with its contents, the front awning, and part of the starboard wheel-house, were completely carried away – blown up as if a mine had been sprung beneath them – and the huge sheet-iron funnels had fallen forward upon the deck! At a glance I was convinced that captain, pilots, all who had been upon that part of the boat, must have perished!

Of course such reflections passed with the rapidity of thought itself, and occupied me not a moment of time. I felt that *I* was still unhurt, and my first natural thought was that of preserving my life. I had sufficient presence of mind to know there was no danger of a second explosion; but I perceived that the boat was badly injured, and already leaning to one side. How long would she swim?

I had hardly asked myself the question when it was answered by a voice that, in terrified accents, shouted out: —

"Good God! she is sinking! she is sinking!"

This announcement was almost simultaneous with the cry of "Fire!" and at the same moment flames were seen bursting forth and shooting up to the height of the hurricane-deck! Whether by

burning up or going down, it was evident the wreck would afford us but short refuge.

The thoughts of the survivors were now turned to the Magnolia. I looked in the direction of that boat. I perceived that she was doing her best to back, and put round toward us; but she was still several hundred yards off! In consequence of the Belle having steered a while towards the Bringiers landing, the boats no longer ran in the same track; and, although they were head and head at the moment of the explosion, they were separated from each other by a wide stretch of the river. A full quarter of a mile distant appeared the Magnolia; and it was evident that a considerable time must elapse before she could get alongside. Would the wreck of the Belle keep afloat so long?

At a glance I was convinced it would not. I felt it settling down under my feet inch by inch; and the blaze already threatened the after-part of the boat, licking the light wood-work of the gaudy saloon as if it had been flax! Not a moment was to be lost: we must take voluntarily to the water, be drawn in by the sinking wreck, or driven to it by the fire. One of the three was inevitable!

You will fancy me to have been in a state of extreme terror at this moment. Such, however, was not the case. I had not the slightest fear for my own safety: not that I was redeemed from the common lot by any superior courage, but simply that I had confidence *in my resources*. Though sufficiently reckless in my temperament, I have never been a fatalist. I have saved my life more than once by acts of volition – by presence of mind

and adroitness. The knowledge of this has freed me from the superstitions of fore-ordination and fatalism; and therefore, when not too indolent, I take precautions against danger.

I had done so on the occasion of which I am writing. In my portmanteau I carried – I do so habitually – a very simple contrivance, a life-preserver. I always carry it in such a position as to be ready to the hand. It is but the work of a moment to adjust this, and with it around my body I feel no fear of being plunged into the broadest river, or even a channel of the sea. It was the knowledge of this, and not any superior courage, that supported me.

I ran back to my state-room – the portmanteau was open – and in another moment I held the piece of quilted cork in my hands. In a few seconds its strap was over my head, and the strings securely knotted around my waist.

Thus accoutred, I stood *inside* the state-room, intending to remain there till the wreck should sink nearer the surface of the water. Settling rapidly as it was, I was convinced I should not have long to wait. I closed the inner door of the room, and turned the bolt. The outer one I held slightly ajar, my hand firmly clutching the handle.

I had my object in thus shutting myself up. I should be less exposed to the view of the terror-stricken wretches that ran to and fro like spectres – for any fear I now had was of *them*– not of the water. I knew that, should the life-preserver be discovered, I should have a crowd around me in a moment – in fact, that escape

by such means would be hopeless. Dozens would follow me into the water – would cling to my limbs – would drag me, in their despairing grasp, to the bottom!

I knew this; and, clutching the Venetian door with firmer grasp, I stood peering through the apertures in stealthy silence.

Chapter Thirteen
"Blessé."

I had not been in this position more than a few seconds, when some figures appeared in front of the door, and voices fell upon my ear that I thought I recognised. Another glance revealed the speakers. They were the young Creole and her steward.

The conversation passing between them was not a dialogue, but a series of exclamations – the hurried language of terror. The old man had got together a few cabin chairs; and with trembling hands was endeavouring to bind them together, with the design of forming a raft. He had no other cord than a handkerchief, and some strips of silk, which his young mistress was tearing from her dress! It would have been but a feeble raft, had it been completed – not fit to have floated a cat. It was but the effort of the drowning man "catching at straws." I saw at a glance that it would afford to neither of them the respite of a minute's life. The chairs were of heavy rosewood; and, perchance, would have gone to the bottom of themselves!

The scene produced upon me an impression indescribably strange. I felt myself standing upon a crisis. I felt called upon to choose between self and self-sacrifice. Had the choice left no chance of saving my own life, I fear I should have obeyed the "first law of nature;" but, as already stated, of my own life I felt

secure; the question was, whether it would be possible for me also to save the lady?

I reasoned rapidly, and as follows; – The life-preserver – a very small one – will not sustain us both! What if I fasten it upon her, and swim alongside? A little help from it now and then will be sufficient to keep me afloat. I am a good swimmer. How far is it to the shore?

I looked in that direction. The glare of the blazing boat lit up the water to a wide circumference. I could see the brown bank distinctly. It was full a quarter of a mile distant, with a sharp cross-current running between it and the wreck.

"Surely I can swim it?" thought I: "sink or swim, I shall make the attempt to save her!"

I will not deny that other reflections passed through my mind as I was forming this resolve. I will not deny that there was a little *French* gallantry mixed up with better motives. Instead of being young and lovely, had Mademoiselle Besançon been old and plain, I think – that is – I – I fear – she would have been left to Antoine and his raft of chairs! As it was, my resolve was made; and I had no time to reflect upon motives.

"Mademoiselle Besançon!" I called out of the door.

"Ha! Some one calls me;" said she, turning suddenly. "Mon Dieu! who is there?"

"One who, Mademoiselle – "

"*Peste*!" muttered the old steward, angrily, as his eyes fell upon my face. He was under the belief that I wished to share his raft.

"*Peste*!" he repeated; "'twill not carry two, monsieur."

"Nor one," I replied. "Mademoiselle," I continued, addressing myself to the lady; "those chairs will not serve, – they will rather be the means of drowning you, – here – take this! it will save your life."

As I spoke I had pulled off the preserver, and held it towards her.

"What is this?" she inquired hastily; and then, comprehending all, she continued, "No – no – no, Monsieur! Yourself – yourself!"

"I believe I can swim ashore without it. Take it, Mademoiselle! Quick! quick! there is no time to be lost. In three minutes the boat will go down. The other is not near yet: besides, she may fear to approach the fire! See the flames! they come this way! Quick! Permit me to fasten it for you?"

"My God! – my God! generous stranger – !"

"No words; now – now it is on! Now to the water! Have no fear! plunge in, and strike out from the wreck! fear not! I shall follow and guide you! Away!"

The girl, partly influenced by terror, and partly yielding to my remonstrances, sprang off into the water; and the next moment I saw her body afloat, distinguishable by the whitish drapery of her dress, that still kept above the surface.

At that instant I felt some one grasping me by the hand. I turned round. It was Antoine.

"Forgive me, noble youth! forgive me!" he cried, while the

tears ran down his cheeks.

I would have replied, but at the moment I perceived a man rush forward to the guards, over which the girl had just passed. I could see that his eye was fixed upon her, and that he had marked the life-preserver! His intention was evident – he had mounted the guard-rail, and was just springing off as I reached the spot. I caught him by the collar, and drew him back. As I did so his face came under the blaze, and I recognised my betting bully. "Not so fast, Sir!" said I, still holding him. He uttered but one word in reply – and that was a fearful oath – but at the moment I saw in his uplifted hand the shining blade of a bowie-knife! So unexpectedly did this weapon appear, that I had no chance of evading the blow; and the next moment I felt the cold steel passing through my arm. It was not a fatal stab, however; and before the brute could repeat it, I had, in the phraseology of the ring, "planted" a blow upon his chin, that sent him sprawling over the chairs, while at the same time the knife flew out of his grasp. This I caught up, and hesitated for a moment whether to use it upon the ruffian; but my better feelings overcame my passion, and I flung the weapon into the river.

Almost instantaneously I plunged after. I had no time to tarry. The blaze had reached the wheel-house, close to which we were, and the heat was no longer to be borne. My last glance at the spot showed me Antoine and my antagonist struggling among the chairs!

The white drapery served me for a beacon, and I swam after it.

The current had already carried it some distance from the boat, and directly down stream.

I had hurriedly divested myself of coat and boots, and as my other garments were of light material they did not impede me. After a few strokes I swam perfectly free; and, keeping the white dress before my eyes, I continued on down the river.

Now and then I raised my head above the surface and looked back. I still had fears that the ruffian might follow; and I had nerved myself for a struggle in the water!

In a few minutes I was alongside my *protegée*; and, after half-a-dozen hurried words of encouragement, I laid hold of her with one hand, and with the other endeavoured to direct our course towards the shore.

In this way the current carried us in a diagonal line, but we still floated down stream at a rapid rate. A long and weary swim it seemed to me. Had it been much longer I never should have reached the end of it.

At length we appeared to be near the bank; but as we approached it my strokes became feebler, and my left hand grasped my companion with a sort of convulsive effort.

I remember reaching land, however; I remember crawling up the bank with great difficulty, my companion assisting me! I remember seeing a large house directly in front of where we had come ashore; I remember hearing the words —

"*C'est drôle! c'est ma maison—ma maison veritable*!"

I remember staggering across a road, led by a soft hand, and

entering a gate, and a garden where there were benches, and statues, and sweet-smelling flowers – I remember seeing servants come from the house with lights, and that my arms were red, and my sleeves dripping with blood! I remember from a female voice the cry —

"*Blessé*!" followed by a wild shriek; and of that scene I remember no more!

Chapter Fourteen
Where am I?

When I awoke to consciousness, it was day. A bright sun was pouring his yellow light across the floor of my chamber; and from the diagonal slanting of the beam, I could perceive that it was either very early in the morning, or near sunset.

But birds were singing without. It must be morning, reasoned I.

I perceived that I was upon a low couch of elegant construction – without curtains – but in their stead a mosquito-netting spread its gauzy meshes above and around me. The snow-white colour and fineness of the linen, the silken gloss of the counterpane, and the soft yielding mattress beneath, imparted to me the knowledge that I lay upon a luxurious bed. But for its extreme elegance and fineness, I might not have noticed this; for I awoke to a sense of severe bodily pain.

The incidents of the preceding night soon came into my memory, and passed rapidly one by one as they had occurred. Up to our reaching the bank of the river, and climbing out of the water, they were all clear enough. Beyond that time I could recall nothing distinctly. A house, a large gateway, a garden, trees, flowers, statues, lights, black servants, were all jumbled together on my memory.

There was an impression on my mind of having beheld amid this confusion a face of extraordinary beauty – the face of a lovely girl! Something angelic it seemed; but whether it had been a real face that I had seen, or only the vision of a dream, I could not now tell. And yet its lineaments were still before me, so plainly visible to the eye of my mind, so clearly outlined, that, had I been an artist, I could have portrayed them! The face alone I could remember nothing else. I remembered it as the opium-eater his dream, or as one remembers a beautiful face seen during an hour of intoxication, when all else is forgotten! Strange to say, I did not associate this face with my companion of the night; and my remembrance painted it not at all like that of Eugénie Besançon!

Was there any one besides – any one on board the boat that my dream resembled? No, not one – I could not think of one. There was none in whom I had taken even a momentary interest – with the exception of the Creole – but the lineaments my fancy, or memory, now conjured up were entirely unlike to hers: in fact, of quite an opposite character!

Before my mind's eye hung masses of glossy black hair, waving along the brows and falling over the shoulders in curling clusters. Within this ebon framework were features to mock the sculptor's chisel. The mouth, with its delicate rose-coloured ellipse; the nose, with smooth straight outline, and small recurvant nostril; the arching brows of jet; the long fringes upon the eyelids; all were vividly before me, and all unlike the features of Eugénie Besançon. The colour of the skin, too – even that

was different. It was not that Circassian white that characterised the complexion of the Creole, but a colour equally clear, though tinged with a blending of brown and olive, which gave to the red upon the cheeks a tint of crimson. The eye I fancied, or remembered well – better than aught else. It was large, rounded, and of dark-brown colour; but its peculiarity consisted in a certain expression, strange but lovely. Its brilliance was extreme, but it neither flashed nor sparkled. It was more like a gorgeous gem viewed by the spectator while at rest. Its light did not blaze – it seemed rather to burn.

Despite some pain which I felt, I lay for many minutes pondering over this lovely portrait, and wondering whether it was a memory or a dream. A singular reflection crossed my mind. I could not help thinking, that if such a face were real, I could forget Mademoiselle Besançon, despite the romantic incident that had attended our introduction!

The pain of my arm at length dissipated the beautiful vision, and recalled me to my present situation. On throwing back the counterpane, I observed with surprise that the wound had been dressed, and evidently by a surgeon! Satisfied on this head, I cast my eye abroad to make a reconnoissance of my quarters.

The room I occupied was small, but notwithstanding the obstruction of the mosquito bar, I could see that it was furnished with taste and elegance. The furniture was light – mostly cane-work – and the floor was covered with a matting of sea-grass finely woven, and stained into various colours. The

windows were garnished with curtains of silk damask and muslin, corresponding to the colour of the wood-work. A table richly inlaid was near the centre of the floor, another, with *portefeuille*, pens, and ornamental ink stand, stood by the wall, and over this last was a collection of books ranged upon shelves of red cedar-wood. A handsome clock adorned the mantelpiece; and in the open fireplace was a pair of small "andirons," with silver knobs, cast after a fanciful device, and richly chased. Of course, there was no fire at that season of the year. Even the heat caused by the mosquito bar would have been annoying, but that the large glass-door on one side, and the window on the other, both standing open, gave passage to the breeze that penetrated through the nettings of my couch.

Along with this breeze came the most delicious fragrance – the essence of flowers. Through both door and window I could see their thousand clustering corollas – roses, red, pink, and white – the rare camelia – azaleas, and jessamines – the sweet-scented China-tree – and farther off a little I could distinguish the waxen leaves and huge lily-like blossoms of the great American laurel – the *Magnolia grandiflora*. I could hear the voices of many singing-birds, and a low monotonous hum that I supposed to be the noise of falling water. These were the only sounds that reached my ears.

Was I alone? I looked inquiringly around the chamber. It appeared so – no living thing met my glance.

I was struck with a peculiarity in the apartment I occupied. It

appeared to stand by itself, and did not communicate with any other! The only door I could see, opened directly to the outside. So did the window, reaching door-like to the ground. Both appeared to lead into a garden filled with shrubs and flowers. Excepting the chimney, I could perceive no other inlet or outlet to the apartment!

This at first seemed odd; but a moment's reflection explained it. It is not uncommon upon American plantations to have a kind of office or summer-house apart from the main building, and often fitted up in a style of comfort and luxuriance. This becomes upon occasions the "stranger's room." Perhaps I was in such an apartment.

At all events, I was under an hospitable roof, and in good hands; that was evident. The manner in which I was encouched, along with certain preparations, – the signs of a projected *dejeuner* that appeared upon the table, attested this. But who was my host? or was it a hostess? Was it Eugénie Besançon? Did she not say something of her house – "*ma maison*?" or did I only dream it?

I lay guessing and reflecting over a mass of confused memories; but I could not from these arrive at any knowledge of whose guest I was. Nevertheless, I had a sort of belief that I was in the house of my last night's companion.

I became anxious, and in my weakness perhaps felt a little vexed at being left alone. I would have rung, but no bell was within reach. At that moment, however, I heard the sound of

approaching footsteps.

Romantic miss! you will fancy that those footsteps were light and soft, made by a small satin slipper, scarcely discomposing the loosest, tiniest pebble – stealthily drawing near lest their sound might awake the sleeping invalid – and then, in the midst of bird-music, and humming waters, and the sweet perfume of flowers, a fair form appeared in the doorway, and I saw a gentle face, with a pair of soft, lovely eyes, in a timid inquiring glance, gazing upon me. You will fancy all this, no doubt; but your fancy is entirely at fault, and not at all like the reality.

The footsteps I heard were made by a pair of thick "brogans" of alligator leather, and full thirteen inches in length; which brogans the next moment rested upon the sill of the door directly before my eyes.

On raising my glance a little higher, I perceived a pair of legs, in wide copper-coloured "jeans," pantaloons; and carrying my eye still higher, I perceived a broad, heavy chest, covered with a striped cotton shirt; a pair of massive arms and huge shoulders, surmounted by the shining face and woolly head of a jet black negro!

The face and head came under my observation last; but on these my eyes dwelt longest, scanning them over and over, until I at length, despite the pain I was suffering, burst out into a sonorous laugh! If I had been dying, I could not have helped it; there was something so comic, so irresistibly ludicrous, in the physiognomy of this sable intruder.

He was a full-grown and rather large negro, as black as charcoal, with a splendid tier of "ivories;" and with eyeballs, pupil and irides excepted, as white as his teeth. But it was not these that had tickled my fancy. It was the peculiar contour of his head, and the set and size of his ears. The former was as round as a globe, and thickly covered with small kinky curlets of black wool, so closely set that they seemed to root at both ends, and form a "nap!" From the sides of this sable sphere stood out a pair of enormous ears, suggesting the idea of wings, and giving to the head a singularly ludicrous appearance.

It was this peculiarity that had set me laughing; and, indecorous though it was, for the life of me I could not help it.

My visitor, however, did not seem to take it amiss. On the contrary, he at once opened his thick lips, and displaying the splendid armature of his mouth in a broad and good-natured grin, began laughing as loudly as myself!

Good-natured was he. His bat-like ears had infused nothing of the vampire into his character. No – the very type of jollity and fun was the broad black face of "Scipio Besançon," for such was the cognomen of my visitor.

Chapter Fifteen
"Ole Zip."

Scipio opened the dialogue: —

"Gollies, young mass'r! Ole Zip 'joiced to see um well 'gain – daat he be."

"Scipio is it?"

"Ye', mass'r – daat same ole nigger. Doctor told um to nuss de white genl'um. Won't young missa be glad haself! – white folks, black folks – all be glad, Wugh!"

The finishing exclamation was one of those thoracic efforts peculiar to the American negro, and bearing a strong resemblance to the snort of a hippopotamus. Its utterance signified that my companion had finished his sentence, and waited for me to speak.

"And who is 'young missa'?" I inquired.

"Gorramighty! don't mass'r know? Why, de young lady you fotch from de boat, when twar all ober a blaze. Lor! what a swum you make – half cross de riber! Wugh!"

"And am I in her house?"

"Ob sartin, mass'r – daat ar in de summer-house – for de big house am on oder side ob de garden – all de same, mass'r."

"And how did I get here?"

"Golly! don't mass'r 'member how? Why, ole Zip carried 'im

in yar in dese berry arms. Mass'r an young missa come 'shore on de Lebee, down dar jes by de gate. Missa shout – black folks come out an find um – white genl'um all blood – he faint, an missa have him carried in yar."

"And after?"

"Zip he mount fastest hoss – ole White Fox – an gallop for de doctor – gallop like de debil, too. Ob course de doctor he come back along and dress up mass'r's arm.

"But," continued Scipio, turning upon me an inquiring look, "how'd young mass'r come by de big ugly cut? Dat's jes wha de Doc wanted to know, an dat's jes wha young missa didn't know nuffin 'tall 'bout."

For certain reasons I forbore satisfying the curiosity of my sable nurse, but lay for a moment reflecting. True, the lady knew nothing of my encounter with the bully. Ha! Antoine – then. Had he not come ashore? Was he – ? Scipio anticipated the question I was about to put. His face became sad as he recommenced speaking.

"Ah! young mass'r, Mamselle 'Génie be in great 'stress dis mornin – all de folks be in great 'stress. Mass'r Toney! Poor Mass'r Toney."

"The steward, Antoine? What of him? Tell me, has he not come home?"

"No, mass'r – I'se afeerd he nebber, nebber will – ebberybody 'feerd he be drownded – folks a been to de village – up an down de Lebee – ebery wha. No Toney. Captain ob de boat blowed

clar into de sky, an fifty passengers gone to de bottom. Oder boat save some; some, like young mass'r, swam 'shore: but no Toney – no Mass'r Toney!"

"Do you know if he could swim?" I asked.

"No, mass'r, ne'er a stroke. I knows daat, 'kase he once falled into de bayou, and Ole Zip pull 'im out. No – he nebber swim – nebber."

"Then I fear he is lost indeed."

I remembered that the wreck went down before the Magnolia had got close alongside. I had noticed this on looking around. Those who could not swim, therefore, must have perished.

"Poor Pierre, too. We hab lost Pierre."

"Pierre? Who was he?"

"De coachman, mass'r, he war."

"Oh! I remember. You think he is drowned, also?"

"I'se afeerd so, mass'r. Ole Zip sorry, too, for Pierre. A good nigger war daat Pierre. But, Mass'r Toney, Mass'r Toney, ebberybody sorry for Mass'r Toney."

"He was a favourite among you?"

"Ebberybody like 'im – black folks, white folks, all lub 'im. Missa 'Génie lub 'im. He live wi' ole Mass'r Sançon all him life. I believe war one ob Missy 'Génie gardiums, or whatever you call 'em. Gorramighty! what will young Missa do now? She hab no friends leff; and daat ole fox Gayarre – he no good – "

Here the speaker suddenly interrupted himself, as if he feared that his tongue was going too freely.

The name he had pronounced and the expression by which it was qualified, at once awakened my curiosity – the name more than the qualification.

"If it be the same," thought I, "Scipio has characterised him not otherwise than justly. Can it be the same?"

"You mean Monsieur Dominique Gayarre, the *avocat*?" I asked, after a pause.

Scipio's great white eyeballs rolled about with an expression of mingled surprise and apprehension, and rather stammeringly he replied: —

"Daat am de genl'um's name. Know 'im, young mass'r?"

"Only very slightly," I answered, and this answer seemed to set my companion at his ease again.

The truth is, I had no *personal* acquaintance with the individual mentioned; but during my stay in New Orleans, accident had brought me in contact with the name. A little adventure had befallen me, in which the bearer of it figured – not to advantage. On the contrary, I had conceived a strong dislike for the man, who, as already stated, was a lawyer, or *avocat* of the New Orleans bar. Scipio's man was no doubt the same. The name was too rare a one to be borne by two individuals; besides, I had heard that he was owner of a plantation somewhere up the coast – at Bringiers, I remembered. The probabilities were it was he. If so, and Mademoiselle Besançon had no other friend, then, indeed, had Scipio spoken truly when he said, "She hab no friends leff."

Scipio's observation had not only roused my curiosity, but had imparted to me a vague feeling of uneasiness. It is needless to say that I was now deeply interested in this young Creole. A man who has saved a life – the life of a beautiful woman – and under such peculiar circumstances, could not well be indifferent to the after-fate of her he has rescued.

Was it a lover's interest that had been awakened within me?

My heart answered, No! To my own astonishment, it gave this answer. On the boat I had fancied myself half in love with this young lady; and now, after a romantic incident – one that might appear a very provocative to the sublime passion – I lay on my couch contemplating the whole affair with a coolness that surprised even myself! I felt that I had lost much blood – had my incipient passion flowed out of my veins at the same time?

I endeavoured to find some explanation for this rare psychological fact; but at that time I was but an indifferent student of the mind. The land of love was to me a *terre inconnue*.

One thing was odd enough. Whenever I essayed to recall the features of the Creole, the dream-face rose up before me more palpable than ever!

"Strange!" thought I, "this lovely vision! this dream of my diseased brain! Oh! what would I not give to embody this fair spectral form!"

I had no longer a doubt about it. I was certain I did not love Mademoiselle Besançon, and yet I was far from feeling indifferent towards her. Friendship was the feeling that now

actuated me. The interest, I felt for her was that of a friend. Strong enough was it to render me anxious on her account – to make me desirous of knowing more both of herself and her affairs.

Scipio was not of secretive habit; and in less than half an hour I was the confidant of all he knew.

Eugénie Besançon was the daughter and only child of a Creole planter, who had died some two years before, as some thought wealthy, while others believed that his affairs were embarrassed. Monsieur Dominique Gayarre had been left joint-administrator of the estate with the steward Antoine, both being "guardiums" (sic Scipio) of the young lady. Gayarre had been the lawyer of Besançon, and Antoine his faithful servitor. Hence the trust reposed in the old steward, who in latter years stood in the relation of friend and companion rather than of servant to Besançon himself.

In a few months mademoiselle would be of age; but whether her inheritance was large, Scipio could not tell. He only knew that since her father's death, Monsieur Dominique, the principal executor, had furnished her with ample funds whenever called upon; that she had not been restricted in any way; that she was generous; that she was profuse in her expenditure, or, as Scipio described it, "berry wasteful, an flung about de shinin dollars as ef dey war *donicks*!"

The black gave some glowing details of many a grand ball and *fête champètre* that had taken place on the plantation, and hinted

at the expensive life which "young missa" led while in the city, where she usually resided during most part of the winter. All this I could easily credit. From what had occurred on the boat, and other circumstances, I was impressed with the belief that Eugénie Besançon was just the person to answer to the description of Scipio. Ardent of soul – full of warm impulses – generous to a fault – reckless in expenditure – living altogether in the present – and not caring to make any calculation for the future. Just such an heiress as would exactly suit the purposes of an unprincipled administrator.

I could see that poor Scipio had a great regard for his young mistress; but, even ignorant as he was, he had some suspicion that all this profuse outlay boded no good. He shook his head as he talked of these matters, adding —

"I'se afeerd, young mass'r, it'll nebber, nebber last. De Planters' bank hisseff would be broke by such a constant drawin ob money."

When Scipio came to speak of Gayarre he shook his head still more significantly. He had evidently some strange suspicions about this individual, though he was unwilling, just then, to declare them.

I learnt enough to identify Monsieur Dominique Gayarre with my *avocat* of the Rue – , New Orleans. No doubt remained on my mind that it was the same. A lawyer by profession, but more of a speculator in stocks – a money-lender, in other words, usurer. In the country a planter, owning the plantation adjoining that of

Besançon, with more than a hundred slaves, whom he treats with the utmost severity. All this is in correspondence with the calling and character of my Monsieur Dominique. They are the same.

Scipio gives me some additional details of him. He was the law adviser and the companion of Monsieur Besançon – Scipio says, "Too often for ole mass'r's good," and believes that the latter suffered much from his acquaintance: or, as Scipio phrases it, "Mass'r Gayarre humbug ole mass'r; he cheat 'im many an many a time, I'se certain."

Furthermore, I learn from my attendant, that Gayarre resides upon his plantation during the summer months; that he is a daily visitor at the "big house" – the residence of Mademoiselle Besançon – where he makes himself quite at home; acting, says Scipio, "as ef de place 'longed to him, and he war de boss ob de plantation."

I fancied Scipio knew something more about this man – some definite matter that he did not like to talk about. It was natural enough, considering our recent acquaintance. I could see that he had a strong dislike towards Gayarre. Did he found it on some actual knowledge of the latter, or was it instinct – a principle strongly developed in these poor slaves, who are not permitted to *reason*?

His information, however, comprised too many facts to be the product of mere instinct: it savoured of actual knowledge. He must have learnt these things from some quarter. Where could he have gathered them?

“Who told you all this, Scipio?”
“Aurore, mass’r.”
“Aurore!”

Chapter Sixteen
Monsieur Dominique Gayarre

I felt a sudden desire, amounting almost to anxiety, to learn who was "Aurore." Why? Was it the singularity and beauty of the name, – for novel and beautiful it sounded in my Saxon ears? No. Was it the mere euphony of the word; its mythic associations; its less ideal application to the rosy hours of the Orient, or the shining phosphorescence of the North? Was it any of these associate thoughts that awoke within me this mysterious interest in the name "Aurore?"

I was not allowed time to reflect, or question Scipio farther. At that moment the door was darkened by the entrance of two men; who, without saying a word, stepped inside the apartment.

"Da doctor, mass'r," whispered Scipio, falling back, and permitting the gentlemen to approach.

Of the two it was not difficult to tell which was the "doctor." The professional face was unmistakeable: and I knew that the tall pale man, who regarded me with interrogative glance, was a disciple of Esculapius, as certainly as if he had carried his diploma in one hand and his door-plate in the other.

He was a man of forty, not ill-featured, though the face was not one that would be termed handsome. It was, however, interesting, from a quiet intellectuality that characterised it, as well as an

habitual expression of kind feeling. It had been a German face some two or three generations before, but an American climate, – political, I mean, – had tamed down the rude lines produced by ages of European despotism, and had almost restored it to its primitive nobility of feature. Afterwards, when better acquainted with American types, I should have known it as a Pennsylvanian face, and such in reality it was. I saw before me a graduate of one of the great medical schools of Philadelphia, Dr Edward Reigart. The name confirmed my suspicion of German origin.

Altogether my medical attendant made a pleasing impression upon me at first sight.

How different was that I received on glancing toward his companion – antagonism, hatred, contempt, disgust! A face purely French; – not that noble French face we see in the Duguesclins, the Jean Barts, and among many of the old Huguenot heroes; and in modern days in a Rollin, a Hugo, an Arago, or a Pyat; – but such an one as you may see any day by hundreds sneaking around the Bourse or the *coulisses* of the Opera, or in thousands scowling from under a shako in the ranks of a ruffian soldiery. A countenance that I cannot describe better than by saying that its features forcibly reminded me of those of a fox. I am not in jest. I observed this resemblance plainly. I observed the same obliquity of eyes, the same sharp quick glance that betokened the presence of deep dissimulation, of utter selfishness, of cruel inhumanity.

In the Doctor's companion I beheld a type of this face, – the

fox in human form, and with all the attributes of this animal highly developed.

My instincts chimed with Scipio's, for I had not the slightest doubt that before me stood Monsieur Dominique Gayarre. It was he.

A man of small stature he was, and thinly built, but evidently one who could endure a great deal before parting with life. He had all the subtle wiry look of the *carnivora*, as well as their disposition. The eyes, as already observed, obliqued strongly downwards. The balls were not globe-shaped, but rather obtuse cones, of which the pupil was the apex. Both pupils and irides were black, and glistened like the eyes of a weasel. They seemed to sparkle in a sort of habitual smile; but this smile was purely cynical and deceptive. If any one knew themselves guilty of a weakness or a crime they felt certain that Dominique Gayarre knew it, and it was at this he was laughing. When a case of misfortune did really present itself to his knowledge, his smile became more intensely satirical, and his small prominent eyes sparkled with evident delight. He was a lover of himself and a hater of his kind.

For the rest, he had black hair, thin and limp – shaggy dark brows, set obliquely – face without beard, of pale cadaverous hue, and surmounted by a parrot-beak nose of large dimensions. His dress had somewhat of a professional cut, and consisted of dark broadcloth, with vest of black satin; and around his neck, instead of cravat, he wore a broad black ribbon. In age he looked fifty.

The doctor felt my pulse, asked me how I had slept, looked at my tongue, felt my pulse a second time, and then in a kindly way desired me to keep myself "as quiet as possible." As an inducement to do so he told me I was still very weak, that I had lost a good deal of blood, but hoped that a few days would restore me to my strength. Scipio was charged with my diet, and was ordered to prepare tea, toast, and broiled chicken, for my breakfast.

The doctor did not inquire how I came by my wound. This I thought somewhat strange, but ascribed it to his desire that I should remain quiet. He fancied, no doubt, that any allusion to the circumstances of the preceding night might cause me unnecessary excitement. I was too anxious about Antoine to remain silent, and inquired the news. Nothing more had been heard of him. He was certainly lost.

I recounted the circumstances under which I had parted with him, and of course described my encounter with the bully, and how I had received the wound. I could not help remarking a strange expression that marked the features of Gayarre as I spoke. He was all attention, and when I told of the raft of chairs, and expressed my conviction that they would not support the steward a single moment, I fancied I saw the dark eyes of the *avocat* flashing with delight! There certainly was an expression in them of ill-concealed satisfaction that was hideous to behold. I might not have noticed this, or at all events not have understood it, but for what Scipio had already told me. Now its meaning

was unmistakeable, and notwithstanding the "poor Monsieur Antoine!" to which the hypocrite repeatedly gave utterance, I saw plainly that he was secretly delighted at the idea of the old steward's having gone to the bottom!

When I had finished my narrative, Gayarre drew the doctor aside; and the two conversed for some moments in a low tone. I could hear part of what passed between them. The doctor seemed not to care whether I overheard him, while the other appeared equally anxious that their conversation should not reach me. From the replies of the doctor I could make out that the wily lawyer wished to have me removed from my present quarters, and taken to an hotel in the village. He urged the peculiar position in which the young lady (Mademoiselle Besançon) would be placed – alone in her house with a stranger – a young man, etcetera, etcetera.

The doctor did not see the necessity of my removal on such grounds. The lady herself did not wish it – in fact, would not hear of it; he pooh-poohed the "peculiarity" of the "situation," good Doctor Reigart! – the accommodation of the hotel was none of the best; besides, it was already crowded with other sufferers; and here the speaker's voice sank so low I could only catch odd phrases, as "stranger,", "not an American," "lost everything," "friends far away," "the hotel no place for a man without money." Gayarre's reply to this last objection was that *he* would be responsible for my hotel bill.

This was intentionally spoken loud enough for me to hear

it; and I should have felt grateful for such an offer, had I not suspected some sinister motive for the lawyer's generosity. The doctor met the proposal with still further objections.

"Impossible," said he; "bring on fever," "great risk," "would not take the responsibility," "bad wound," "much loss of blood," "must remain where he is for the present at least," "might be taken to the hotel in a day or two when stronger."

The promise of my removal in a day or two appeared to satisfy the weasel Gayarre, or rather he became satisfied that such was the only course that could be taken with me, and the consultation ended.

Gayarre now approached the bed to take leave, and I could trace that ironical expression playing in the pupils of his little eyes as he pronounced some pretended phrases of consolation. He little knew to whom he was speaking. Had I uttered my name it would perhaps have brought the colour to his pale cheek, and caused him to make an abrupt exit. Prudence prevented me from declaring it; and when the doctor requested to know upon whom he had the honour of attending, I adopted the pardonable strategy, in use among distinguished travellers, of giving a *nom du voyage*. I assumed my maternal patronymic of Rutherford, – Edward Rutherford.

Recommending me to keep myself quiet, not to attempt leaving my bed, to take certain prescriptions at certain hours, etcetera, etcetera, the doctor took his leave; Gayarre having already gone out before him.

Chapter Seventeen
"Aurore."

I was for the moment alone, Scipio having betaken himself to the kitchen in search of the tea, toast, and chicken "fixings." I lay reflecting upon the interview just ended, and especially upon the conversation between the doctor and Gayarre, in which had occurred several points that suggested singular ideas. The conduct of the doctor was natural enough, indeed betokened the true gentleman; but for the other there was a sinister design – I could not doubt it.

Why the desire – an anxiety, in fact – to have me removed to the hotel? Evidently there was some strong motive, since he proposed to pay the expenses; for from my slight knowledge of the man I knew him to be the very opposite to generous!

"What can be his motive for my removal?" I asked myself.

"Ha! I have it – I have the explanation! I see through his designs clearly! This fox, this cunning *avocat*, this guardian, is no doubt in love with his own ward! She is young, rich, beautiful, a belle, and he old, ugly, mean, and contemptible; but what of that? He does not think himself either one or the other; and she – bah! – he may even hope: far less reasonable hopes have been crowned with success. He knows the world; he is a lawyer; he knows at least her world. He is her solicitor; holds her affairs

entirely in his hands; he is guardian, executor, agent – all; has perfect and complete control. With such advantages, what can he not effect? All that he may desire – her marriage, or her ruin. Poor lady! I pity her!"

Strange to say, it was only *pity*. That it was not another feeling was a mystery I could not comprehend.

The entrance of Scipio interrupted my reflections. A young girl assisted him with the plates and dishes. This was "Chloe," his daughter, a child of thirteen, or thereabouts, but not black like the father! She was a "yellow girl," with rather handsome features. Scipio explained this. The mother of his "leettle Chlo," as he called her, was a mulatta, and "'Chlo' hab taken arter de ole 'oman. Hya! hya!"

The tone of Scipio's laugh showed that he was more than satisfied – proud, in fact – of being the father of so light-skinned and pretty a little creature as Chloe!

Chloe, like all her kind, was brimful of curiosity, and in rolling about the whites of her eyes to get a peep at the buckra stranger who had saved her mistress' life, she came near breaking cups, plates, and dishes; for which negligence Scipio would have boxed her ears, but for my intercession. The odd expressions and gestures, the novel behaviour of both father and daughter, the peculiarity of this slave-life, interested me.

I had a keen appetite, notwithstanding my weakness. I had eaten nothing on the boat; in the excitement of the race, supper had been forgotten by most of the passengers, myself among the

number. Scipio's preparations now put my palate in tune, and I did ample justice to the skill of Chloe's mother, who, as Scipio informed me, was "de boss in de kitchen." The tea strengthened me; the chicken, delicately fricasséed and garnished upon rice, seemed to refill my veins with fresh blood. With the exception of the slight pain of my wound, I already felt quite restored.

My attendants removed the breakfast things, and after a while Scipio returned to remain in the room with me, for such were his orders.

"And now, Scipio," I said, as soon as we were alone, "tell me of Aurore!"

"'Rore, mass'r!"

"Yes – Who is Aurore?"

"Poor slave, mass'r; jes like Ole Zip heamseff."

The vague interest I had begun to feel in "Aurore" vanished at once.

"A slave!" repeated I, involuntarily, and in a tone of disappointment.

"She Missa 'Génie's maid," continued Scipio; "dress missa's hair – wait on her – sit wi' her – read to her – do ebbery ting – "

"Read to her! what! – a slave?"

My interest in Aurore began to return.

"Ye, mass'r – daat do 'Rore. But I 'splain to you. Ole Mass'r 'Sançon berry good to de coloured people – teach many ob um read de books – 'specially 'Rore. 'Rore he 'struckt read, write, many, many tings, and young Missa 'Génie she teach her de

music. 'Rore she 'complish gal – berry 'complish gal. Know many ting; jes like de white folks. Plays on de peany – plays on de guitar – guitar jes like banjo, an Ole Zip play on daat heamseff – he do. Wugh!"

"And withal, Aurore is a poor slave just like the rest of you, Scipio?"

"Oh! no, mass'r; she be berry different from de rest. She lib different life from de other nigga – she no hard work – she berry vallyble – she fetch two thousand dollar!"

"Fetch two thousand dollars!"

"Ye, mass'r, ebbery cent – ebbery cent ob daat."

"How know you?"

"'Case daat much war bid for her. Mass'r Marigny want buy 'Rore, an Mass'r Crozat, and de American Colonel on de oder side ob ribber – dey all bid two thousand dollar – ole mass'r he only larf at um, and say he won't sell de gal for no money."

"This was in old master's time?"

"Ye – ye – but one bid since – one boss ob ribber-boat – he say he want 'Rore for de lady cabin. He talk rough to her. Missa she angry – tell 'im go. Mass'r Toney he angry, tell 'im go; and de boat captain he go angry like de rest. Hya! hya! hya!"

"And why should Aurore command such a price?"

"Oh! she berry good gal – berry good gal – but – "

Scipio hesitated a moment – "but – "

"Well?"

"I don't b'lieve, mass'r, daat's de reason."

"What, then?"

"Why, mass'r, to tell de troof, I b'lieve dar all bad men daat wanted to buy de gal."

Delicately as it was conveyed, I understood the insinuation.

"Ho! Aurore must be beautiful, then? Is it so, friend Scipio?"

"Mass'r, 'taint for dis ole nigger to judge 'bout daat; but folks dey say – bof white folks an black folks – daat she am de best-lookin' an hansomest quaderoom in all Loozyanna."

"Ha! a *quadroon*?"

"Daat are a fact, mass'r, daat same – she be a gal ob colour – nebber mind – she white as young missa herseff. Missa larf and say so many, many time, but fr'all daat dar am great difference – one rich lady – t'other poor slave – jes like Ole Zip – ay, jes like Ole Zip – buy 'em, sell 'em, all de same."

"Could you describe Aurore, Scipio?"

It was not idle curiosity that prompted me to put this question. A stronger motive impelled me. The dream-face still haunted me – those features of strange type – its strangely-beautiful expression, not Caucasian, not Indian, not Asiatic. Was it possible – probable —

"Could you describe her, Scipio?" I repeated.

"'Scribe her, mass'r; daat what you mean? ye – yes."

I had no hope of a very lucid painting, but perhaps a few "points" would serve to identify the likeness of my vision. In my mind the portrait was as plainly drawn as if the real face were before my eyes. I should easily tell if Aurore and my dream were

one. I began to think it was no dream, but a reality.

"Well, mass'r, some folks says she am proud, case de common niggers envy ob her – daat's de troof. She nebber proud to Ole Zip, daat I knows – she talk to 'im, an tell 'im many tings – she help teach Ole Zip read, and de ole Chloe, and de leettle Chloe, an she – "

"It is a description of her person I ask for, Scipio."

"Oh! a 'scription ob her person – ye – daat is, what am she like?"

"So. What sort of hair, for instance? What colour is it?"

"Brack, mass'r; brack as a boot."

"Is it straight hair?"

"No, mass'r – ob course not – Aurore am a quaderoom."

"It curls?"

"Well, not dzactly like this hyar;" here Scipio pointed to his own kinky head-covering; "but for all daat, mass'r, it curls – what folks call de wave."

"I understand; it falls down to her shoulders?"

"Daat it do, mass'r, down to de berry small ob her back."

"Luxuriant?"

"What am dat, mass'r?"

"Thick – bushy."

"Golly! it am as bushy as de ole coon's tail."

"Now the eyes?"

Scipio's description of the quadroon's eyes was rather a confused one. He was happy in a simile, however, which I felt

satisfied with: “Dey am big an round – dey shine like de eyes of a deer.” The nose puzzled him, but after some elaborate questioning, I could make out that it was straight and small. The eyebrows – the teeth – the complexion – were all faithfully pictured – that of the cheeks by a simile, “like de red ob a Georgium peach.”

Comic as was the description given, I had no inclination to be amused with it. I was too much interested in the result, and listened to every detail with an anxiety I could not account for.

The portrait was finished at length, and I felt certain it must be that of the lovely apparition. When Scipio had ended speaking, I lay upon my couch burning with an intense desire to see this fair – this priceless quadroon. Just then a bell rang from the house.

“Scipio wanted, mass’r – daat him bell – be back, ’gain in a minute, mass’r.”

So saying, the negro left me, and ran towards the house.

I lay reflecting on the singular – somewhat romantic – situation in which circumstances had suddenly placed me. But yesterday – but the night before – a traveller, without a dollar in my purse, and not knowing what roof would next shelter me – to-day the guest of a lady, young, rich, unmarried – the invalid guest – laid up for an indefinite period; well cared for and well attended.

These thoughts soon gave way to others. The dream-face drove them out of my mind, and I found myself comparing it with Scipio’s picture of the quadroon. The more I did so, the more I

was struck with their correspondence. How could I have dreamt a thing so palpable? Scarce probable. Surely I must have seen it? Why not? Forms and faces were around me when I fainted and was carried in; why not hers among the rest? This was, indeed, probable, and would explain all. But was she among them? I should ask Scipio on his return.

The long conversation I had held with my attendant had wearied me, weak and exhausted as I was. The bright sun shining across my chamber did not prevent me from feeling drowsy; and after a few minutes I sank back upon my pillow, and fell asleep.

Chapter Eighteen
The Creole and Quadroon

I slept for perhaps an hour soundly. Then something awoke me, and I lay for some moments only half sensible to outward impressions.

Pleasant impressions they were. Sweet perfumes floated around me; and I could distinguish a soft, silky rustling, such as betokens the presence of well-dressed women.

"He wakes, ma'amselle!" half whispered a sweet voice.

My eyes, now open, rested upon the speaker. For some moments I thought it was but the continuation of my dream. There was the dream-face, the black profuse hair, the brilliant orbs, the arching brows, the small, curving lips, the damask cheek – all before me!

"Is it a dream? No – she breathes; she moves; she speaks!"

"See! ma'amselle – he looks at us! Surely he is awake!"

"It is no dream, then – no vision; it is she – it is Aurore!"

Up to this moment I was still but half conscious. The thought had passed from my lips; but, perhaps, only the last phrase was uttered loud enough to be heard. An ejaculation that followed fully awoke me, and I now saw two female forms close by the side of my couch. They stood regarding each other with looks of surprise. One was Eugénie; beyond doubt the other was Aurore!

"Your name!" said the astonished mistress.

"My name!" repeated the equally astonished slave.

"But how? – he knows your name – how?"

"I cannot tell, ma'amselle."

"Have you been here before?"

"No; not till this moment."

"'Tis very strange!" said the young lady, turning towards me with an inquiring glance.

I was now awake, and in full possession of my senses – enough to perceive that I had been talking too loud. My knowledge of the quadroon's name would require an explanation, and for the life of me I knew not what to say. To tell what I had been thinking – to account for the expressions I had uttered – would have placed me in a very absurd position; and yet to maintain silence might leave Ma'amselle Besançon busy with some strange thoughts. Something must be said – a little deceit was absolutely necessary.

In hopes she would speak first, and, perchance, give me a key to what I should say, I remained for some moments without opening my lips. I pretended to feel pain from my wound, and turned uneasily on the bed. She seemed not to notice this, but remained in her attitude of surprise, simply repeating the words —

"'Tis very strange he should know your name!"

My imprudent speech had made an impression. I could remain silent no longer; and, turning my face once more, I pretended now for the first time to be aware of Mademoiselle's presence,

at the same time offering my congratulations, and expressing my joy at seeing her.

After one or two anxious inquiries in relation to my wound, she asked —

"But how came you to name Aurore?"

"Aurore!" I replied. "Oh! you think it strange that I should know her name? Thanks to Scipio's faithful portraiture, I knew at the first glance that this was Aurore."

I pointed to the quadroon, who had retired a pace or two, and stood silent and evidently astonished.

"Oh! Scipio has been speaking of her?"

"Yes, ma'amselle. He and I have had a busy morning of it. I have drawn largely on Scipio's knowledge of plantation affairs. I am already acquainted with Aunt Chloe, and little Chloe, and a whole host of your people. These things interest me who am strange to your Louisiana life."

"Monsieur," replied the lady, seemingly satisfied with my explanation, "I am glad you are so well. The doctor has given me the assurance you will soon recover. Noble stranger! I have heard how you received your wound. For me it was – in my defence. Oh! how shall I ever repay you? – how thank you for my life?"

"No thanks, ma'amselle, are necessary. It was the fulfilment of a simple duty on my part. I ran no great risk in saving you."

"No risk, monsieur! Every risk – from the knife of an assassin – from the waves. No risk! But, monsieur, I can assure you my gratitude shall be in proportion to your generous gallantry. My

heart tells me so; – alas, poor heart! it is filled at once with gratitude and grief."

"Yes, ma'amselle, I understand you have much to lament, in the loss of a faithful servant."

"Faithful servant, monsieur, say, rather, friend. Faithful, indeed! Since my poor father's death, he has been my father. All my cares were his; all my affairs in his hands. I knew not trouble. But now, alas! I know not what is before me."

Suddenly changing her manner, she eagerly inquired —

"When you last saw him, monsieur, you say he was struggling with the ruffian who wounded you?"

"He was. – It was the last I saw of either. There is no hope – none – the boat went down a few moments after. Poor Antoine! poor Antoine!"

Again she burst into tears, for she had evidently been weeping before. I could offer no consolation. I did not attempt it. It was better she should weep. Tears alone could relieve her.

"The coachman, Pierre, too – one of the most devoted of my people – he, too, is lost. I grieve for him as well; but Antoine was my father's friend – he was mine – Oh! the loss – the loss; – friendless; and yet, perhaps, I *may soon need friends. Pauvre Antoine*!"

She wept as she uttered these phrases. Aurore was also in tears. I could not restrain myself – the eyes of childhood returned, and I too wept.

This solemn scene was at length brought to a termination by

Eugénie, who appearing suddenly to gain the mastery over her grief, approached the bedside.

"Monsieur," said she, "I fear for some time you will find in me a sad host. I cannot easily forget my friend, but I know you will pardon me for thus indulging in a moment of sorrow. For the present, adieu! I shall return soon, and see that you are properly waited upon. I have lodged you in this little place, that you might be out of reach of noises that would disturb you. Indeed I am to blame for this present intrusion. The doctor has ordered you not to be visited, but – I – I could not rest till I had seen the preserver of my life, and offered him my thanks. Adieu, adieu! Come, Aurore!"

I was left alone, and lay reflecting upon the interview. It had impressed me with a profound feeling of friendship for Eugénie Besançon; – more than friendship – sympathy: for I could not resist the belief that, somehow or other, she was in peril – that over that young heart, late so light and gay, a cloud was gathering.

I felt for her regard, friendship, sympathy, – nothing more. And why nothing more? Why did I not love her, young, rich, beautiful? Why?

Because I loved another —*I loved Aurore*!

Chapter Nineteen
A Louisian Landscape

Life in the chamber of an invalid – who cares to listen to its details? They can interest no one – scarce the invalid himself. Mine was a daily routine of trifling acts, and consequent reflections – a monotony, broken, however, at intervals, by the life-giving presence of the being I loved. At such moments I was no longer *ennuyé*; my spirit escaped from its death-like lassitude; and the sick chamber for the time seemed an Elysium.

Alas! these scenes were but of a few minutes' duration, while the intervals between them were hours – long hours – so long, I fancied them days. Twice every day I was visited by my fair host and her companion. Neither ever came alone!

There was constraint on my part, often bordering upon perplexity. My conversation was with the *Creole*, my thoughts dwelt upon the *Quadroon*. With the latter I dare but exchange glances. Etiquette restrained the tongue, though all the conventionalities of the world could not hinder the eyes from speaking in their own silent but expressive language.

Even in this there was constraint. My love-glances were given by stealth. They were guided by a double dread. On one hand, the fear that their expression should not be understood and reciprocated by the Quadroon. On the other, that they might

be too well understood by the Creole, who would regard me with scorn and contempt. I never dreamt that they might awaken jealousy – I thought not of such a thing. Eugénie was sad, grateful, and friendly, but in her calm demeanour and firm tone of voice there was no sign of love. Indeed the terrible shock occasioned by the tragic occurrence, appeared to have produced a complete change in her character. The sylph-like elasticity of her mind, formerly a characteristic, seemed to have quite forsaken her. From a gay girl she had all at once become a serious woman. She was not the less beautiful, but her beauty impressed me only as that of the statue. It failed to enter my heart, already filled with beauty of a still rarer and more glowing kind. The Creole loved me not; and, strange to say, the reflection, instead of piquing my vanity, rather gratified me!

How different when my thoughts dwelt upon the Quadroon! Did *she* love me? This was the question, for whose answer my heart yearned with fond eagerness. She always attended upon Mademoiselle during her visits; but not a word dare I exchange with *her*, although my heart was longing to yield up its secret. I even feared that my burning glances might betray me. Oh! if Mademoiselle but knew of my love, she would scorn and despise me. What! in love with a slave! her slave!

I understood this feeling well – this black crime of her nation. What was it to me? Why should I care for customs and conventionalities which I at heart despised, even outside the levelling influence of love? But under that influence, less did I

care to respect them. In the eyes of Love, rank loses its fictitious charm – titles seem trivial things. For me, Beauty wears the crown.

So far as regarded my feelings, I would not have cared a straw if the whole world had known of my love – not a straw for its scorn. But there were other considerations – the courtesy due to hospitality – to friendship; and there were considerations of a less delicate but still graver nature – the promptings of *prudence*. The situation in which I was placed was most peculiar, and I knew it. I knew that my passion, even if reciprocated, must be secret and silent. Talk of making love to a young miss closely watched by governess or guardian – a ward in Chancery – an heiress of expectant thousands! It is but "child's play" to break through the *entourage* that surrounds one of such. To scribble sonnets and scale walls is but an easy task, compared with the bold effrontery that challenges the passions and prejudices of a people!

My wooing promised to be anything but easy; my love-path was likely to be a rugged one.

Notwithstanding the monotony of confinement to my chamber, the hours of my convalescence passed pleasantly enough. Everything was furnished me that could contribute to my comfort or recovery. Ices, delicious drinks, flowers, rare and costly fruits, were constantly supplied to me. For my dishes I was indebted to the skill of Scipio's helpmate, Chloe, and through her I became acquainted with the Creole delicacies of "gumbo," "fish chowder," fricasséed frogs, hot "waffles," stewed tomatoes,

and many other dainties of the Louisiana *cuisine*. From the hands of Scipio himself I did not refuse a slice of "roasted 'possum," and went even so far as to taste a "'coon steak," – but only once, and I regarded it as once too often. Scipio, however, had no scruples about eating this fox-like creature, and could demolish the greater part of one at a single sitting!

By degrees I became initiated into the little habitudes and customs of life upon a Louisiana plantation. "Ole Zip" was my instructor, as he continued to be my constant attendant. When Scipio's talk tired me, I had recourse to books, of which a good stock (mostly French authors,) filled the little book-case in my apartment. I found among them nearly every work that related to Louisiana – a proof of rare judgment on the part of whoever had made the collection. Among others, I read the graceful romance of Chateaubriand, and the history of Du Pratz. In the former I could not help remarking that want of *vraisemblance* which, in my opinion, forms the great charm of a novel; and which must ever be absent where an author attempts the painting of scenes or costumes not known to him by actual observation.

With regard to the historian, he indulges largely in those childish exaggerations so characteristic of the writers of the time. This remark applies, without exception, to all the old writers on American subjects – whether English, Spanish, or French – the chroniclers of two-headed snakes, crocodiles twenty yards long, and was big enough to swallow both horse and rider! Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how these old authors gained credence for

their incongruous stories; but it must be remembered that science was not then sufficiently advanced "to audit their accounts."

More than in anything else was I interested in the adventures and melancholy fate of La Salle; and I could not help wondering that American writers have done so little to illustrate the life of the brave chevalier – surely the most picturesque passage in their early history – the story and the scene equally inviting.

"The scene! Ah! lovely indeed!"

With such an exclamation did I hail it, when, for the first time, I sat at my window and gazed out upon a Louisiana landscape.

The windows, as in all Creole houses, reached down to the floor; and seated in my lounge-chair, with the sashes wide open, with the beautiful French curtains thrown back, I commanded an extended view of the country.

A gorgeous picture it presented. The pencil of the painter could scarcely exaggerate its vivid colouring.

My window faces westward, and the great river rolls its yellow flood before my face, its ripples glittering like gold. On its farther shore I can see cultivated fields, where wave the tall graceful culms of the sugar-cane, easily distinguished from the tobacco-plant, of darker hue. Upon the bank of the river, and nearly opposite, stands a noble mansion, something in the style of an Italian villa, with green Venetians and verandah. It is embowered in groves of orange and lemon-trees, whose frondage of yellowish green glistens gaily in the distance. No mountains meet the view – there is not a mountain in all Louisiana; but the

tall dark wall of cypress, rising against the western rim of the sky, produces an effect very similar to a mountain background.

On my own side of the river the view is more gardenesque, as it consists principally of the enclosed pleasure-ground of the plantation Besançon. Here I study objects more in detail, and am able to note the species of trees that form the shrubbery. I observe the *Magnolia*, with large white wax-like flowers, somewhat resembling the giant *nympha* of Guiana. Some of these have already disappeared, and in their stead are seen the coral-red seed-cones, scarce less ornamental than the flowers themselves.

Side by side with this western-forest queen, almost rivalling her in beauty and fragrance, and almost rivalling her in fame, is a lovely exotic, a native of Orient climes – though here long naturalised. Its large doubly-pinnate leaves of dark and lighter green, – for both shades are observed on the same tree; its lavender-coloured flowers hanging in axillary clusters from the extremities of the shoots; its yellow cherry-like fruits – some of which are already formed, – all point out its species. It is one of the *meliaceae*, or honey-trees, – the "Indian-lilac," or "Pride of China" (*Melia azedarach*). The nomenclature bestowed upon this fine tree by different nations indicates the estimation in which it is held. "Tree of Pre-eminence," lays the poetic Persian, of whose land it is a native; "Tree of Paradise" (*Arbor de Paraiso*), echoes the Spaniard, of whose land it is an exotic. Such are its titles.

Many other trees, both natives and exotics, meet my gaze. Among the former I behold the "catalpa," with its silvery bark

and trumpet-shaped blossoms; the "Osage orange," with its dark shining leaves; and the red mulberry, with thick shady foliage, and long crimson calkin-like fruits. Of exotics I note the orange, the lime, the West Indian guava (*Psidium pyriferum*), and the guava of Florida, with its boxwood leaves; the tamarisk, with its spreading minute foliage, and splendid panicles of pale rose-coloured flowers; the pomegranate, symbol of democracy – "the queen who carries her crown upon her bosom" – and the legendary but flowerless fig-tree, here not supported against the wall, but rising as a standard to the height of thirty feet.

Scarcely exotic are the *yuccas*, with their spherical heads of sharp radiating blades; scarcely exotic the *cactacea*, of varied forms – for species of both are indigenous to the soil, and both are found among the flora of a not far-distant region.

The scene before my window is not one of still life. Over the shrubbery I can see the white-painted gates leading to the mansion, and outside of these runs the Levee road. Although the foliage hinders me from a full view of the road itself, I see at intervals the people passing along it. In the dress of the Creoles the sky-blue colour predominates, and the hats are usually palmetto, or "grass," or the costlier Panama, with broad sun-protecting brims. Now and then a negro gallops past, turbaned like a Turk; for the chequered Madras "toque" has much the appearance of the Turkish head-dress, but is lighter and even more picturesque. Now and then an open carriage rolls by, and I catch a glimpse of ladies in their gossamer summer-dresses.

I hear their clear ringing laughter; and I know they are on their way to some gay festive scene. The travellers upon the road – the labourers in the distant cane-field, chanting their chorus songs – occasionally a boat booming past on the river – more frequently a flat silently floating downward – a "keel," or a raft with its red-shirted crew – are all before my eyes, emblems of active life.

Nearer still are the winged creatures that live and move around my window. The mock-bird (*Turdus polyglotta*) pipes from the top of the tallest magnolia; and his cousin, the red-breast (*Turdus migratorius*), half intoxicated with the berries of the *melia*, rivals him in his sweet song. The oriole hops among the orange-trees, and the bold red cardinal spreads his scarlet wings amidst the spray of the lower shrubbery.

Now and then I catch a glimpse of the "ruby-throat," coming and going like the sparkle of a gem. Its favourite haunt is among the red and scentless flowers of the buck-eye, or the large trumpet-shaped blossoms of the *bignonia*.

Such was the view from the window of my chamber. I thought I never beheld so fair a scene. Perhaps I was not looking upon it with an impartial eye. The love-light was in my glance, and that may have imparted to it a portion of its *couleur de rose*. I could not look upon the scene without thinking of that fair being, whose presence alone was wanted to make the picture perfect.

Chapter Twenty
My Journal

I varied the monotony of my invalid existence by keeping a journal.

The journal of a sick chamber must naturally be barren of incident. Mine was a diary of reflections rather than acts. I transcribe a few passages from it – not on account of any remarkable interest which they possess – but because, dotted down at the time, they represent more faithfully some of the thoughts and incidents that occurred to me during the remainder of my stay on the plantation Besançon.

July 12th. – To-day I am able to sit up and write a little. The weather is intensely hot. It would be intolerable were it not for the breeze which sweeps across my apartment, charged with the delicious perfume of the flowers. This breeze blows from the Gulf of Mexico, by Lakes Borgne, Pontchartrain, and Maauepas. I am more than one hundred miles from the Gulf itself – that is, following the direction of the river – but these great inland seas deeply penetrate the delta of the Mississippi, and through them the tidal wave approaches within a few miles of New Orleans, and still farther to the north. Sea-water might be reached through the swamps at a short distance to the rear of Bringiers.

This sea-breeze is a great benefit to the inhabitants of Lower

Louisiana. Without its cooling influence New Orleans during the summer months would hardly be habitable.

Scipio tells me that a new "overseer" has arrived on the plantation, and thinks that he has been appointed through the agency of Mass'r Dominick. He brought a letter from the *avocat*. It is therefore probable enough.

My attendant does not seem very favourably impressed with the new comer, whom he represents as a "poor white man from de norf, an a Yankee at daat."

Among the blacks I find existing an antipathy towards what they are pleased to call "poor white men" – individuals who do not possess slave or landed property. The phrase itself expresses this antipathy; and when applied by a negro to a white man is regarded by the latter as a dire insult, and usually procures for the imprudent black a scoring with the "cowskin," or a slight "rubbing down" with the "oil of hickory."

Among the slaves there is a general impression that their most tyrannical "overseers" are from the New England States, or "Yankees," as they are called in the South. This term, which foreigners apply contemptuously to all Americans, in the United States has a restricted meaning; and when used reproachfully it is only applied to natives of New England. At other times it is used jocularly in a patriotic spirit; and in this sense every American is proud to call himself a Yankee. Among the southern blacks, "Yankee" is a term of reproach, associated in their minds with poverty of fortune, meanness of spirit, wooden nutmegs,

cypress hams, and such-like chicanes. Sad and strange to say, it is also associated with the whip, the shackle, and the cowhide. Strange, because these men are the natives of a land peculiarly distinguished for its Puritanism! A land where the purest religion and strictest morality are professed.

This would seem an anomaly, and yet perhaps it is not so much an anomaly after all. I had it explained to me by a Southerner, who spoke thus: —

"The countries where Puritan principles prevail are those which produce vice, and particularly the smaller vices, in greatest abundance. The villages of New England – the foci of blue laws and Puritanism. – furnish the greatest number of the *nymphes du pavé* of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans; and even furnish a large export of them to the Catholic capital of Cuba! From the same prolific soil spring most of the sharpers, quacks, and cheating traders, who disgrace the American name. This is not an anomaly. It is but the inexorable result of a pseudo-religion. Outward observance, worship, Sabbath-keeping, and the various forms, are engrafted in the mind; and thus, by complicating the true duties which man owes to his fellow-man, obscure or take precedence of them. The latter grow to be esteemed as only of secondary importance, and are consequently neglected."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.