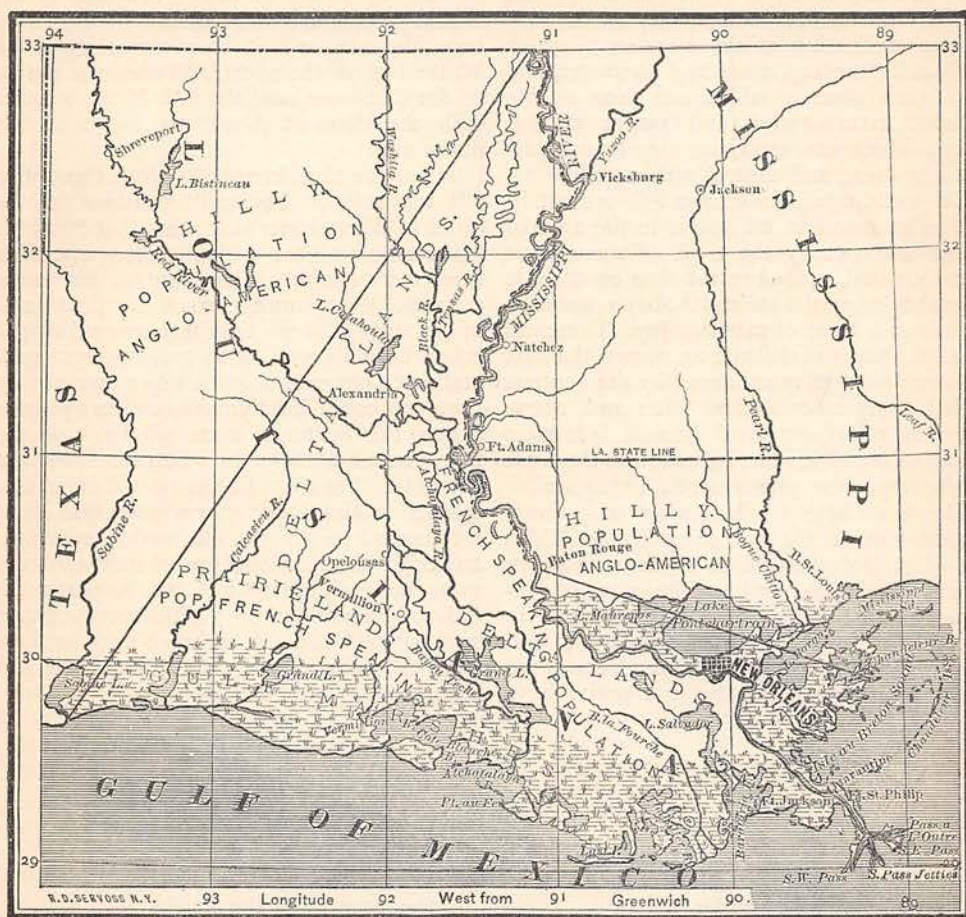


WHO ARE THE CREOLES?

BY GEORGE W. CABLE,

Author of "Old Creole Days," "The Grandissimes," etc.



MAP OF LOUISIANA.

I.

THEIR HOME.

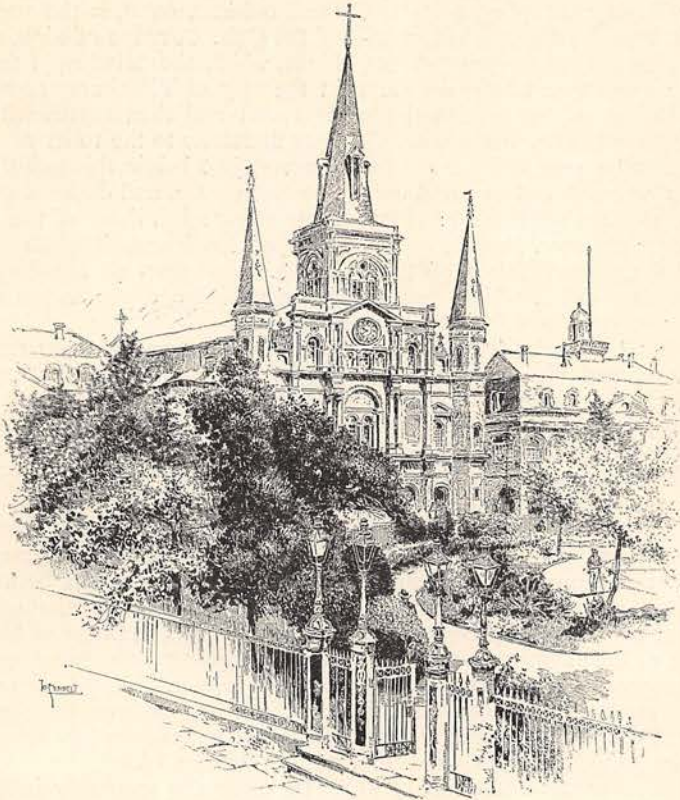
ONE city in the United States is, without pretension or intention, picturesque and antique. A quaint Southern-European aspect is encountered in the narrow streets of its early boundaries, on its old Place d'Armes, along its balconied façades, and about its cool, flowery inner courts.

Among the great confederation of States whose Anglo-Saxon life and inspiration swallows up all alien immigrations, there is one in which a Latin civilization, sinewy, valiant, cultured, rich and proud, holds out against extinction. There is a people in the midst of the population of Louisiana, who send representatives and senators to the Fed-

eral Congress, and who vote for the nation's rulers. They celebrate the Fourth of July; and ten days thereafter, with far greater enthusiasm, they commemorate that great Fourteenth that saw the fall of the Bastille. Other citizens of the United States, but not themselves, they call Americans. Let us see who and where they are.

About half the State of Louisiana is hilly. The portion north of Lake Pontchartrain and east of the Mississippi, and that which lies north of Red River and west of the Washita, are mostly of this character. Their white population is mainly Anglo-American.

But if we draw a line from the southwestern to the north-eastern corner of the State, turning thence down the Mississippi



THE CATHEDRAL AND OLD PLACE D'ARMES, NEW ORLEANS.

to Baton Rouge, crossing eastward through Lakes Maurepas, Pontchartrain, and Borgne, to the Gulf of Mexico, and then passing along the gulf-coast to the starting-point at the mouth of the Sabine, it will indicate rudely, but sufficiently, the State's eighteen thousand seven hundred and fifty square miles of delta lands.

That portion lying north of Red River is, like the regions west of it, occupied principally by Anglo-Americans and blacks, and may be disregarded for the present, since the Creoles are not there.

Across the southern end of the State, from Sabine Lake to Chandeleur Bay, with a north-and-south width of from ten to thirty miles and an average of about fifteen, stretch the Gulf marshes, the wild haunt of myriads of birds and water-fowl, serpents and saurians, hares, raccoons, wild-cats, deep-bellowing frogs, and clouds of insects, and by a few hunters and oystermen, whose solitary and rarely frequented huts speck the wide, green horizon at remote intervals. Neither is the home of the Creoles to be found here.

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North of these marshes and west of the Bayou Têche lies a beautiful expanse of faintly undulating prairie, some thirty-nine hundred square miles in extent, dotted with artificial homestead groves, with fields of sugar-cane, cotton, and corn, and with herds of ponies and keen-horned cattle feeding on its short, nutritious turf. Their herdsmen speak an ancient French patois, and have the blue eyes and light brown hair of Northern France.

The remaining division, which the description of the others has thus circumscribed, is of that character popularly accepted as typical of Louisiana entire: a labyrinth of small lakes and streams, bounded by low, alluvial banks, green, in season, with stretches of sugar-cane, corn, and rice, or white with cotton, and sloping gently downward and backward away from the water's edge into densely wooded and noxious swamps, whose tangled depths are penetrable only by the hunter's or wood-cutter's canoe.

In these two latter divisions, the prairie country and the swamp country, dwell most of the French-speaking people of Louisiana,

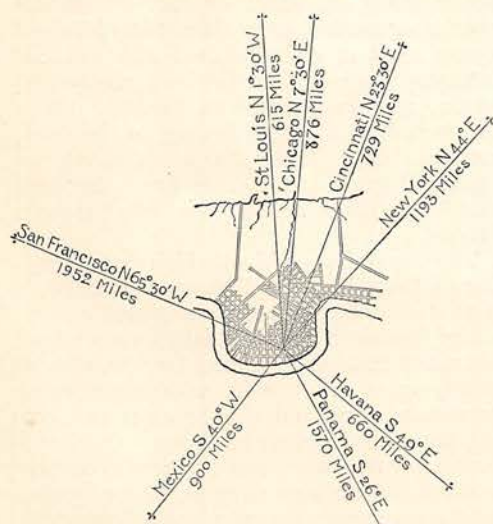
both white and colored. Here the names of bayous, lakes, villages, and plantations are, for the most part, French; the parishes (counties) are named after saints and church-feasts, and although for more than fifty years there has been an inflow of Anglo-Americans and English-speaking blacks, the youth still receive their education principally from the priests and nuns of small colleges and convents, and two languages are current: in law and trade, English; at home, French.

Here are still found the children of those famed Nova Scotian exiles, whose banishment from their homes by British arms in 1755 has so often been celebrated in history and romance, and who yet bear the name of Acadians. In some districts they are outnumbered; but in others, especially in the vast prairies of Attakapas and Opelousas, they largely outnumber those who endeavor to monopolize the more pretentious appellation of Creole.

But the Creoles pure and simple are principally found in the country lying between the mouth of Red River on the north and the Gulf marshes on the south, east of the Têche and south of Lakes Borgne, Pontchartrain, and Maurepas, and the Bayou Manchac. Near the south-eastern limit of this region is the spot where their French ancestors first struck permanent root, and the growth of their peculiar and interesting civilization began.

II.

ORLEANS ISLAND.



LOCATION CHART, NEW ORLEANS, LA.

LET us give a final glance at the map. It is the general belief that a line of elevated land,

now some eighty or ninety miles due north of the Louisiana coast, is the prehistoric shore of the Gulf. A range of high, abrupt hills or bluffs, which the Mississippi first encounters at the city of Vicksburg, and whose south-westward and then southward trend it follows thereafter to the town of Baton Rouge, swerves, just below this point, rapidly to a due east course, and declines gradually until, some thirty miles short of the eastern boundary of Louisiana, it sinks entirely down into a broad tract of sea-marsh that skirts, for many leagues, the waters of Mississippi Sound.

Close along under these subsiding bluffs, where they stretch to the east, the Bayou Manchac, once Iberville River, and the lakes beyond it, before the bayou was artificially obstructed, united the waters of Mississippi River with those of Mississippi Sound. Apparently this line of water was once the river itself. Now, however, the great flood, turning less abruptly, takes a south-easterly course, and, in so doing, cuts off between itself and its ancient channel a portion of its own delta formation. This fragment of half-made country, comprising something over seventeen hundred square miles of river-shore, swamp-land, and marsh, was once widely known, both in commerce and in international politics, as Orleans Island.

Its outline is extremely irregular. At one place, it is fifty-seven miles across from the river shore to the eastern edge of the marshes. Near the lower end there is scarcely the range of a "musket-shot" between river and sea. At a point almost midway of the island's length, the river and Lake Pontchartrain approach to within six miles of each other. It was here that, in February, 1718, was founded the city of New Orleans.

In 1699, three transatlantic powers, almost at the same moment, had essayed to occupy the southern outlet of the Mississippi valley. D'Iberville, in command of a French fleet sent from Brest for this purpose, had found the Spaniards just establishing themselves at Pensacola, and too old in diplomacy to listen to his fair speeches; wherefore he had sailed farther west and planted his colony on the eastern shore of Biloxi Bay. His young brother, Bienville, only a few weeks later, while exploring the waterways of the country westward, had met a British officer ascending the Mississippi with two vessels, in search of a spot favorable for colonization, and by ingenious words had induced him to withdraw, at a point where a long bend of the river is still known as the English Turn.

During the nineteen years that followed,

the colony of Louisiana never exceeded a few hundred souls. D'Iberville had left as governor his brother, Sauvolle, who, dying two years after, had been succeeded by Bienville. This young midshipman of twenty-four

Mississippi. Bienville, from the beginning, urged this wiser design. For years he was overruled under the commercial policy of the merchant monopolist, Anthony Crozat, to whom the French king had farmed the province. But when Crozat's large but unremunerative privileges fell into the hands of John Law, director-general of the renowned Mississippi Company, Bienville's counsel prevailed, and steps were taken for removing to the banks of the Mississippi the handful of French and Canadians who were struggling against starvation, in their irrational search after sudden wealth on the sterile beaches of Mississippi Sound and Massacre Island.

The first rude structure of logs had hardly been erected at Biloxi, before Bienville had become the foremost explorer of the colony. The year before he secured this coveted authorization to found a new post on the Mississippi, he had selected its site. It was immediately on the bank of the stream. No later sagacity has succeeded in pointing out a more favorable site on which to put up the gates of the great valley; and here—though the land was only ten feet above sea-level at the water's edge, and sank quickly back to a minimum height of a few inches; though it was almost wholly covered with a cypress swamp and was visibly subject to frequent, if not annual overflow; and though a hundred miles lay between it and the mouth of a river whose current, in times of flood, it was maintained, no vessel could overcome—here, Bienville, in 1718, placed a detachment of twenty-five convicts and as many carpenters, who, with some voyageurs from the Illinois River, made a clearing and erected a few scattered huts along the bank of the river, as the beginning of that which he was determined later to make his capital.

III.

THE CREOLES' CITY.

was the seventh of a remarkably brilliant group of brothers, sons of Lemoyne de Bienville, a gentleman of Quebec. The governorship of the province, which he thus early assumed, he did not finally lay down until he had reached the age of sixty-five, and had more than earned the title of "the father of Louisiana"; and he was on one occasion still her advocate before the minister of France, when bowed by the weight of eighty-six years.

D'Iberville was the original projector and founder of New Orleans. From the first, the colony had been divided into two factions: one bent on finding gold and silver, on pearl-fishing, a fur trade, and a commerce with South America, and, therefore, in favor of a sea-coast establishment; the other advocating the importation of French agriculturists, and their settlement on the alluvial banks of the

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FROM THE RELIEF IN THE NEW ORLEANS CUSTOM-HOUSE.



THE OLD CONVENT.

tlement "to choose a suitable site for a city worthy to become the capital of Louisiana."

Thereupon might have been seen this engineer, the *Sieur Le Blond de la Tour*, in the garb of a knight of St. Louis, modified as might be by the exigencies of the frontier, in command of a force of galley-slaves and artisans, driving stakes, drawing lines, marking off streets and lots, a place for the

church and a middle front square for a *place-d'armes*; day by day ditching and palisading; throwing up a rude levee along the river front, and gradually gathering the scattered settlers of the neighborhood into the form of a town. But the location remained the same.

A hundred frail palisade huts, some rude shelters of larger size to serve as church,



IN THE NEW CONVENT GARDEN.

hospital, government house, and company's warehouses, a few vessels at anchor in the muddy river, a population of three hundred, mostly men—such was the dreary hunter's camp, hidden in the stifling undergrowth of the half-cleared, miry ground, where, in the naming of streets, the dukes of Orleans, Chartres, Maine, and Bourbon, the princes of Conti and Condé, and the Count of Toulouse, had been honored; where, finally, in June to August, 1722, the royal commissioners consenting, the company's effects and troops were gradually removed and Bienville set up his head-quarters; and where this was but just done when, in September, a tornado whisked away church, hospital, and thirty dwellings, prostrated the crops, and, in particular, destroyed the rice.

The next year, 1723, brought no better fortune. At home, the distended Mississippi Bubble began to show its flimsiness, and the distress which it spread everywhere came across the Atlantic. As in France, the momentary stay-stomach was credit. On this basis the company's agents and the plantation grantees harmonized; new industries, notably indigo culture, were introduced; debts were paid with paper, and the embryo city reached the number of sixteen hundred inhabitants; an agricultural province, whose far-scattered plantations, missions, and military posts counted nearly five thousand souls, promised her its commercial tribute.

Then followed collapse, the scaling of debts by royal edict, four repetitions of this gross expedient, and, by 1726, a sounder, though a shorn, prosperity.

The year 1728 completed the first decade of the town's existence. Few who know its history will stand to-day in Jackson square and glance from its quaint, old-fashioned gardening to the foreign and antique aspect of the surrounding architecture,—its broad verandas, its deep arcades, the graceful patterns of its old wrought-iron balconies, its rich effects of color, of blinding sunlight, and of cool shadow,—without finding the fancy presently stirred up to overleap the beginning of even these time-stained features, and recall the humbler town of Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne de Bienville, as it huddled about this classic spot when but ten years had passed since the first blow of the settler's ax had echoed across the waters of the Mississippi.

This, from the beginning, was the Place d'Armes. It was of the same rectangular figure it has to-day: larger only by the width of the present sidewalks, an open plat of coarse, native grass, crossed by two diagonal paths and occupying the exact middle of the

town front. Behind it, in the mid-front of a like apportionment of ground reserved for ecclesiastical uses, where St. Louis Cathedral now overlooks the square, stood the church, built, like most of the public buildings, of brick. On the church's right were a small guard-house and prisons, and on the left the dwelling of some Capuchins. The spiritual care of all that portion of the province between the mouths of the Mississippi and the Illinois was theirs. On the front of the square that flanked the Place d'Armes above, the government-house looked out upon the river. In the corresponding square, on the lower side, but facing from the river and diagonally opposite the Capuchins, were the quarters of the government employés. The grounds that faced the upper and lower sides of the Place d'Armes were still unoccupied, except by cordwood, entrenching tools, and a few pieces of parked artillery, on the one side, and a small house for issuing rations on the other. Just off the river front, in Toulouse street, were the smithies of the Marine; correspondingly placed in Du Maine street were two long, narrow buildings, the king's warehouses.

Ursulines street was then Arsenal street. On its first upper corner was the hospital, with its grounds extending back to the street behind; while the empty square opposite, below, reserved for an arsenal, was just receiving, instead, the foundations of the convent-building that stands there to-day. A company of Ursuline nuns had come the year before from France to open a school for girls, and to attend the sick in hospital, and were quartered at the other end of the town awaiting the construction of their nunnery. It was finished in 1730. They occupied it for ninety-four years, and vacated it only in 1824 to remove to the larger and more retired convent on the river shore, near the present lower limits of the city, where they remain at the present day. The older house—one of the oldest, if not the oldest building, standing in the Mississippi Valley—became, in 1831, the State-house, and in 1834, as at present, the seat of the archbishop of Louisiana.

For the rest, there was little but forlorn confusion. Though the plan of the town comprised a parallelogram of five thousand feet river front by a depth of eighteen hundred, and was divided into regular squares of three hundred feet front and breadth, yet the appearance of the place was disorderly and squalid. A few cabins of split boards, thatched with cypress bark, were scattered confusedly over the ground, surrounded and isolated from each other by willow-brakes and reedy

ponds and sloughs bristling with dwarf palmetto and swarming with reptiles. No one had built beyond Dauphine street, the fifth from the river, though twenty-two squares stood empty to choose among; nor below the hospital, nor above Bienville street, except that the governor himself dwelt at the extreme upper corner of the town, now the corner of Customhouse and Decatur streets. Orleans street, cutting the town transversely in half behind the church, was a quarter favored by the unimportant; while along the water-front, and also in Chartres and Royale streets, just behind, rose the homes of the colony's official and commercial potentates: some small, low, and built of cypress, others of brick, or brick and frame, broad, and two or two and a half stories in height. But about and over all was the rank growth of a wet semi-tropical land, especially the water-willow, planted here and there in avenues, and elsewhere springing up at wild random amid occasional essays at gardening.

Such was New Orleans in 1728. The restraints of social life had, until now, been few and weak. Some of the higher officials had brought their wives from France, and a few Canadians theirs from Canada; but they were a small fraction of all. The mass of the men, principally soldiers, trappers, redemptioners bound to three years' service, miners, galley-slaves, knew little, and cared less, for citizenship or public order; while the women, still few, were almost all the unreformed and forcibly transported inmates of houses of correction, with a few Choctaw squaws and African slaves. Gambling, dueling, and vicious idleness were indulged in to a degree that gave the authorities grave concern.*

Now the company, as required by its charter, had begun to improve the social as well as the architectural features of its provincial capital. The importation of male vagabonds had ceased; stringent penalties had been laid upon gambling, and, as already noted, steps had been taken to promote education and religion. The aid of the Jesuits had been enlisted for the training of the male youth and the advancement of agriculture.

In the winter of 1727-28 a crowning benefit had been reached in the arrival from France of the initial consignment of reputable girls, allotted to the care of the Ursulines, to be disposed of under their discretion in marriage. They were supplied by the king, on their departure from France, each with a small chest of clothing, and, with similar companies imported in subsequent years, were long known in the traditions of their colo-

nial descendants by the honorable distinction of the "*filles à la cassette*,"—the girls with trunks, the casket-girls. There cannot but linger a regret around this slender fact, so full of romance and the best poetry of real life. But the Creoles have never been careful for the authentication of their traditions, and the only assurance left to us so late as this is that the good blood of these modest maidens of long-forgotten names and of the brave soldiers to whom they gave their hands with the king's assent and dower, flows in the veins of the best Creole families of the present day.

Thus, at the end of the first ten years, the town summed up all the true, though roughly outlined, features of a civilized community: the church, the school, courts, hospital, council-hall, virtuous homes, a military arm and a commerce. This last was fettered by the monopoly rights of the company; but the thirst for gold, silver, and pearls had yielded to wiser thought, a fur trade had developed, and the scheme of an agricultural colony was rewarded with success.

But of this town and province, to whose development their founder had dedicated all his energies and sagacity, Bienville was no longer governor. In October, 1726, the schemes of official rivals had procured not only his displacement, but that of his various kinsmen in the colony. It was under a new commandant-general, M. Périer, that protection from flood received noteworthy attention, and that the first levee worthy of the name was built on the bank of the Mississippi. On the 15th of November, 1726, he completed a levee of eighteen feet crown, exceeding in length the entire front of the town; later, he continued it on smaller proportions eighteen miles up, and as many down the stream.

IV.

FARMS AND FORESTS IN THE DELTA.

THE Mississippi Company's agricultural colonial scheme was based on the West Indian idea of African slave labor. Already the total number of blacks had risen to equal that of the whites, and within the Delta, outside of New Orleans, they must have largely preponderated. In 1727 this idea began to be put into effect just without the town's upper boundary, where the Jesuit fathers accommodated themselves to it in model form, and between 1726 and 1745 gradually acquired and put under cultivation the whole tract of land now covered by the First District of New Orleans, the center of the city's wealth and commerce. The slender, wedge-shaped

* "Sans religion, sans justice, sans discipline, sans ordre, et sans police."—*Drouet de Valdeterre*.

space between Common and Canal streets, and the subsequent accretions of soil on the river front, are the only parts of the First District not once comprised in the Jesuits' plantations. Education seems not to have had their immediate attention, but a myrtle orchard was planted on their river-front, and the orange, fig, and sugar-cane were introduced by them into the country at later intervals.

Other and older plantations were yearly sending in the products of the same unfortunate agricultural system. The wheat and the flour from the Illinois and the Wabash were the results of free farm and mill labor; but the tobacco, the timber, the indigo, and the rice came mainly from the slave-tilled fields of the company's grantees scattered at wide intervals in the more accessible regions of the great Delta. The only free labor of any note employed within that basin was a company of Alsations, which had been originally settled on the Arkansas by John Law, but which had descended to within some thirty miles of New Orleans, had there become the market-gardeners of the growing town, and, in more than one adverse season, had been its main stay.

If this system of livelihood was so widely different from that of the transatlantic civilization from which the colonist of the Mississippi Delta had been drawn, the face of nature was not less altered. He found the swamp country of Louisiana a region of incessant and curious natural paradoxes. The feature, elsewhere so nearly universal, of streams rising from elevated sources, growing by tributary inflow, and moving on to empty into larger water-courses, was entirely absent. The circuit of inland water supply, to which his observation was accustomed,—commencing with evaporation from remote watery expanses, and ending with the junction of streams and their down-flow to the sea,—he here saw in great part reversed; it began with the influx of streams into and over the land, and though it included the seaward movement in the channels of main streams, yet it yielded up no small part of its volume by an enormous evaporation from millions of acres of overflowed swamp. It was not in the general rise of waters, but in their subsidence, that the smaller streams delivered their contents toward the sea. From Red River to the Gulf the early explorers of Louisiana found the Mississippi, on its western side, receiving no true tributary; but, instead, all streams, though tending toward the sea, yet doing so by a course directed away from some larger channel. Being the offspring of the larger streams, and either still issuing from them or being cut off from them only by the growth of sedimentary de-

posits, these smaller bodies were seen taking their course obliquely away from the greater, along the natural aqueducts raised slightly above the general level by the deposit of their own alluvion. This deposit, therefore, formed the bed and banks of each stream, and spread outward and gently downward on each side of it, varying in width from a mile to a few yards, in proportion to the size of the stream and the distance from its mouth.

Such streams called for a new generic term, and these explorers, generally military engineers, named them bayous, or boyaus: in fortification, a branch trench. The Lafourche ("the fork"), the Bœuf, and other bayous were manifestly mouths of the Red and the Mississippi, gradually grown longer and longer through thousands of years. From these the lesser bayous branched off confusedly hither and thither on their reversed watersheds, not tributaries, but, except in low water, tribute takers, bearing off the sediment-laden back waters of the swollen channels, broad-casting it in the intervening swamps, and, as the time of subsidence came on, returning them, greatly diminished by evaporation, in dark, wood-stained, and sluggish, but clear streams. The whole system was one primarily of irrigation, and only secondarily of drainage.

On the banks of this immense fretwork of natural dykes and sluices, though navigation is still slow, circuitous and impeded with risks, now lie hundreds of miles of the richest plantations in America; and here it was that the French colonists, first on the Mississippi and later on the great bayous, laid the foundations of the State's agricultural wealth.

The scenery of this land, where it is still in its wild state, is weird and funereal; but on the banks of the large bayous, broad fields of corn, of cotton, of cane, and of rice, open out at frequent intervals on either side of the bayou, pushing back the dark, pall-like curtain of moss-draped swamp, and presenting to the passing eye the neat and often imposing residence of the planter, the white double row of field-hands' cabins, the tall red chimney and broad gray roof of the sugar-house, and beside it the huge, square, red brick bagasse-burner, into which, during the grinding season, the residuum of crushed sugar-cane passes unceasingly day and night, and is consumed with the smoke and glare of a conflagration.

Even when the forests close in upon the banks of the stream there is a wild and solemn beauty in the shifting scene which appeals to the imagination with special strength when the cool morning lights or the warmer glows of evening impart the colors of the atmosphere

to the surrounding wilderness, and to the glassy waters of the narrow and tortuous bayous that move among its shadows. In the last hour of day, these scenes are often illuminated with an extraordinary splendor. From the boughs of the dark, broad-spreading live-oak, and the phantom-like arms of lofty cypresses, the long, motionless pendants of pale gray moss point down to their inverted images in the unruffled waters beneath them. Nothing breaks the wide-spread silence. The light of the declining sun at one moment brightens the tops of the cypresses, at another glows like a furnace behind their black branches, or, as the voyager reaches a western turn of the bayou, swings slowly round, and broadens down in dazzling crimsons and purples upon the mirror of the stream. Now and then, from out some hazy shadow, a heron, white or blue, takes silent flight, an alligator crossing the stream sends out long, tinted bars of widening ripple, or on some high, fire-blackened tree a flock of roosting vultures, silhouetted on the sky, linger with half-opened, unwilling wing, and flap away by ones and twos until the tree is bare. Should the traveler descry, first as a mote intensely black in the midst of the brilliancy that overspreads the water, and by and by revealing itself in true outline and proportion as a small canoe containing two men, whose weight seems about to engulf it, and by whose paddle-strokes it is impelled with such evenness and speed that a long, glassy wave gleams continually at either side, a full inch higher than the edge of the boat, he will have before him a picture of nature and human life that might have been seen at any time since the French fathers of the Louisiana Creoles colonized the Delta.

V.

INDIAN WARS.

THE Indians in the lower part of the Mississippi Valley had welcomed the settling of the French with feasting and dancing. The erection of forts among them at Biloxi, Mobile, the Natchez bluffs, and elsewhere, gave no confessed offense. Their game, the spoils of their traps, their lentils, their corn, and their woodcraft were always at the white man's service, and had, more than once, come between him and starvation. They were not the less acceptable because their donors counted on generous offsets in powder and ball, brandy, blankets, and gewgaws.

In the Delta proper, the Indians were a weak and divided remnant of the Alibamon race, dwelling in scattered sub-tribal villages

of a few scores or hundreds of warriors each. It was only beyond these limits that the powerful nations of the Choctaws, the Chickasaws, and the Natchez, offered any suggestion of possible war.

Bienville had, from his first contact with them, shown a thorough knowledge of the Indian character. By a patronage supported on one side by inflexibility, and on the other by good faith, he inspired the respect and confidence of all alike; and, for thirty years, neither the slothful and stupid Alibamons of the Delta nor the proud and fierce nations around his distant posts gave any serious cause to fear the disappearance of good-will.

But M. Périer, who had succeeded Bienville, though upright in his relations with his ministerial superiors, was more harsh than wise, and one of his subordinates, holding the command of Fort Rosalie, among the Natchez (a position of the greatest delicacy), was arrogant, cruel, and unjust. Bienville had not long been displaced when it began to be likely that the Frenchmen who had come to plant a civilization in the swamps of Louisiana, under circumstances and surroundings so new and strange as those we have noticed, would have to take into their problem of development the additional factor of a warfare with the savages of the country.

When the issue came, its bloody scenes were far removed from that region which has grown to be specially the land of the Creoles; and, in that region, neither Frenchman nor Creole was ever forced to confront the necessity of defending his home from the torch, or his wife and children from the tomahawk.

The first symptom of danger was the visible discontent of the Chickasaws, with whom the English were in amity, and of the Choctaws. Périer, however, called a council of their chiefs in New Orleans, and these departed with protestations of friendship and loyalty that deceived him.

Suddenly, in the winter of 1729-30, a single soldier arrived in New Orleans from Fort Rosalie, with the word that the Natchez had surprised and destroyed the place, massacred over two hundred men, and taken captive ninety-two women and one hundred and fifty-five children. A few others, who, with their forerunner, were all who had escaped, appeared soon after and confirmed the news. Smaller settlements on the Yazoo River and on Sicily Island, on the Washita, had shared a like fate.

In New Orleans all was confusion and alarm, with preparations for war, offensive and defensive. Arms and ammunition were hurriedly furnished to every house in the town and on the neighboring plantations. Through

the weedy streets and in from the adjacent country, along the levee top and by the plantation roads and causeways, the militia, and, from their wretched barracks in Royale street, the dilapidated regulars, rallied to the Place d'Armes. Thence the governor presently dispatched three hundred of each, under one of his captains, to the seat of war. The entrenching tools and artillery were brought out of the empty lot in St. Peter street, and a broad moat was begun, on which work was not abandoned until at the end of a year the town was, for the first time, surrounded with a line of rude fortifications.

Meantime, the burdens of war distributed themselves upon the passive as well as upon the active: terror of attack, sudden alarms, false hopes, anxious suspense, further militia levies, the issue of colonial paper, industrial stagnation, the care of homeless refugees, and, by no means least, the restiveness of the negroes. The bad effects of slave-holding began to show themselves. The nearness of some small vagrant bands of friendly Indians, habitual hangers-on of the settlement, became "a subject of terror," and, with a like fear of the blacks, led to an act of shocking cruelty. A band of negroes, slaves of the company, armed and sent for the purpose by Périer himself, fell upon a small party of chouachas Indians dwelling peaceably on the town's lower border, and massacred the entire village. Emboldened by this, the negroes plotted a blow for their own freedom; but their plans were discovered and the leaders were executed. In the year after, the same blacks, incited by fugitive slaves sent among them by the Chickasaws, agreed upon a night for the massacre of the whites; but a negress who had been struck by a soldier let slip the secret in her threats, and the ringleaders, eight men and the woman, were put to death, she on the gallows and they on the wheel. The men's heads were stuck upon posts at the upper and lower ends of the town front, and at the Tchoupitoulas settlement and the king's plantation on the farther side of the Mississippi.

We now turn a page of the record that shows human nature in a kindlier aspect. Two hundred and fifty women and children taken by the Natchez had been retaken, and were brought to New Orleans and landed on the Place d'Armes. There they were received by the people with tears and laughter and open arms. At first, room was made for them in the public hospital; but the Ursulines, probably having just moved into their completed convent, adopted the orphan girls. The boys found foster-parents in well-to-do families, and the whole number of refugees was pres-

ently absorbed, many of the widows again becoming wives.

The Chickasaws and Yazoos became allies of the Natchez, and the Choctaws of the French. But space does not permit nor our object require us to follow the camp of the latter, to recount their somewhat dilatory successes on the Natchez hills, and in the swamps of the Washita, or on the distant banks of Red River under the intrepid St. Denis. The Natchez nation was completely dismembered. The few survivors were adopted into the Chickasaw nation, and by repeated depredations, they qualified the limited peace that followed.

In 1733, Bienville was restored to the governorship; but his power to command the confidence and good faith of the savages was lost. In 1735, aggressions still continuing, he demanded of the Chickasaws the surrender of their Natchez and Yazoo refugees, and was refused. Thereupon he was ordered to make war, and the early spring of 1736 saw New Orleans again in the stirring confusion of marshaling a small army. The scene of its embarkation was the little village of St. John, on the bayou of that name, where, in thirty barges and as many canoes, this motley gathering of uniformed regulars, leather-shirted militia, naked blacks, and feathered and painted Indians, set out, by way of the lakes and the Alabama River, to exterminate the Chickasaws. A few months passed, and the same spot witnessed another scene, when Bienville disembarked the remnant of his forces, sick, wounded, and discouraged, after a short, inglorious, and disastrous campaign in northern Alabama.

Bienville's years—he was now fifty-six—will hardly account for the absence of that force and sagacity which had once made him so admirable and of such great value; but whatever may have been the cause, the colonists, in whose affections he still held the foremost place, found in him only a faltering and mismanaging leader into disasters, whose record continued from this time to be an unbroken series of pathetic failures.

The year 1739 saw the French authority still defied and the colony's frontier harrassed. In September, Bienville mustered another force. The regulars, the militia, three companies of marines lately from France, and sixteen hundred Indians, filed out through Tchoupitoulas gate and started for the Chickasaw country, this time by way of the Mississippi. At the present site of Memphis, they were joined by levies from Canada and elsewhere, and Bienville counted a total force in hand of thirty-six hundred men, white, red, and black. No equal force had ever taken the field in Louisiana. But plans had miscarried, provis-

ions were failing, ill-health was general, the wide country lying eastward and still to be crossed was full of swollen streams, and when the little army again took up the line of march, it actually found itself in full retreat without having reached the enemy's country. Only a detachment of some six or seven hundred Canadians, French and northern-Indians, under a subordinate officer, moved upon the Chickasaws, and meeting them with sudden energy, before their own weakness could be discovered, extorted some feeble concessions in exchange for peace. In the spring of 1740 Bienville returned with a sick and starving remnant of his men, and with no better result than a discreditable compromise.

Ten years of unrest, of struggle against savage aggression, and for the mastery over two other races, had now passed. Meantime, the commerce of the colony had begun to have a history. The Company of the Indies, into which the *Compagnie de l'Occident*, or Mississippi Company, had been absorbed, discouraged by the Natchez war and better pleased with its privileges on the Guinea coast, and in the East Indies, had, as early as June, 1731, tendered, and in April had effected, the surrender of its western charter. The king had thereupon established between Louisiana and his subjects elsewhere a virtual free-trade; a fresh intercourse had sprung up with France and the West Indies; an immigration had set in from these islands, and, despite the Chickasaw campaigns and paper money, had increased from year to year. At the close of these campaigns, business further revived, and the town, as it never had done before, began spontaneously to develop from within outward by the enterprise of its own inhabitants.

The colony's star was rising, but Bienville's was still going down. The new prosperity and growth was not attributed, nor is it traceable, to his continued government. As time passed on he was made easily to see that he had lost the favor of the French minister. He begged to be recalled; and in May, 1743, on the arrival of the Marquis de Vaudreuil as his successor, he bade a last farewell to the city he had founded and to that Louisiana of which it was proper for the people still to call him "the father."

VI.

THE NEW GENERATION.

WHEN, on the 10th of May, 1743, the Marquis de Vaudreuil landed in New Orleans, private enterprise,—the true foundation of material prosperity,—was firmly established.

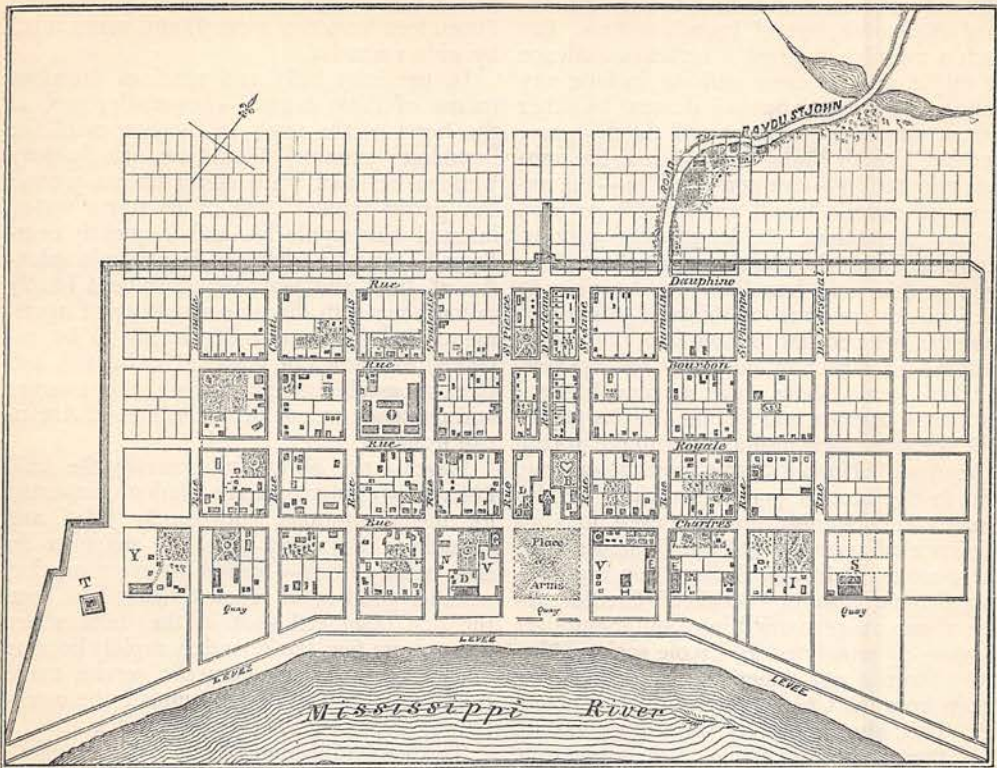
Indigo, rice, and tobacco were moving in quantity to Europe, and lumber to the West Indies. Ships that went out loaded came back loaded again, especially from St. Domingo; and traffic with the Indians, and with the growing white population along the immense length of the Mississippi and its tributaries, was bringing money into the town and multiplying business year by year.

Hope ran high when the marquis was appointed. His family had much influence at court, and anticipations were bright of royal patronage and enterprise in the colony and in its capital. But these expectations, particularly as to New Orleans, were feebly met. There was an increase in the number of the troops and a great enhancement of superficial military splendor, with an unscrupulous getting and reckless spending of Government goods and money, and a large importation of pretentious frivolity from the Bourbon camps and palaces. By 1751, every second man in the streets of New Orleans was a soldier in dazzling uniform. They called the governor the "Grand Marquis." He was graceful and comely, dignified in bearing, fascinating in address, amiable, lavish, fond of pleasure, and, with his marchioness, during the twelve years of his sojourn in Louisiana, maintained the little colonial court with great pomp and dissipation.

Otherwise the period was of a quiet, formative sort, and the few stimulants to growth offered by Government overshot the town and fell to the agricultural grantees. The production of tobacco and myrtle-wax was encouraged, but it was also taxed. Through the Jesuit fathers, sugar-cane was introduced. But one boon eclipsed all the rest: year by year came the casket-girls, and were given in marriage to the soldiers chosen for good conduct, with a tract of land to begin life on. The last ship-load came ashore in 1751.

The most conspicuous attentions offered New Orleans were a prohibition against trading with the English and Dutch, and further inundations of paper money. The little port continued to grow, though pirates infested the Gulf, British privateers were sometimes at the very mouth of the river, seasons were adverse, and Indian allies insolent. It was reported with pride, that forty-five brick houses were erected between the autumns of 1749 and 1752.

Among the people a transmutation was going on. French fathers were moving aside to make room for Creole sons. The life of the seniors had been what the life of redemptorists and liberated convicts, combining with that of a French and Swiss line and staff in and about the outposts of such a frontier, might be: idle, thriftless, gallant, bold,



NEW ORLEANS UNDER THE FRENCH. [ADAPTED FROM ORIGINALS OF 1728 AND 1761.]

A. Church. B, B. Presbytery and Garden of the Capuchins. C, G. Quarters of Government employes. D. Directorate, afterward Spanish Government House. E, E. Royal Ware-houses. H. Commissariat. I. Hospital. K. Guard-house. L. Prison. N. Government forges. O. Barracks. S. Convent of the Ursulines. T. Powder magazine. V, V. Site of later barracks. Y. Bienville's House and Gardens.

rude, free, and scornful of labor, which the company had brought into permanent contempt by the introduction of African slaves. In this atmosphere they had brought up their children. Now these children were taking their parents' places, and with Latin ductility were conforming to the mold of their nearest surroundings. They differed from their transatlantic stock much as the face of nature in Louisiana differed from that in France. A soil of unlimited fertility became, through slavery, not an incentive to industry, but a promise of unearned plenty. A luxurious and enervating climate joined its influence with this condition to debase even the Gallic love of pleasure to an unambitious apathy and an untrained sensuality. The courteous manners of France were largely retained; but the habit of commanding a dull and abject slave class, over which a "black code" gave every white man full powers of police, induced a certain fierce imperiousness of will and temper; while that proud love of freedom, so pervasive throughout the American wilderness, rose at times to an attitude of arrogant superiority over all constraint, and became the occasion of harsh comment in the reports sent to France by

the officers of their king. In the lakes, canebrakes, and swamps, and on the bayou ridges, of their dark, wet forests, and on the sunny expanses of their marshes, a great abundance of bears, panthers, deer, swan, geese, and lesser game gave a bold zest to arduous sport. The chase became almost the only form of exertion, and woodcraft often the only education.

As for the gentler sex, catching less grossness from negro slavery and less rudeness from the wilderness, they were, in mind as well as morals, superior to the men. They could read and write and make a little music. Such French vivacity as still remained chose the ball-room as their chief delight, while the gaming-table was the indoor passion of the men. Unrestrained, proud, intrepid, self-reliant, rudely voluptuous, of a high intellectual order, yet uneducated, unreasoning, impulsive, and inflammable,—such was the first native-born generation of Franco-Louisianians.

VII.

THE FIRST CREOLES.

WHAT is a Creole? Even in Louisiana the question would be variously answered. The

title did not, here, first belong to the descendants of Spanish, but of French settlers. But such a meaning implied a certain excellence of origin, and so came early to include any native, of French or Spanish descent by either parent, whose non-alliance with the slave race entitled him to social rank. Later, the term was adopted by—not conceded to—the natives of mixed blood, and is still so used among themselves. At length the spirit of commerce saw the money-value of so honored a title, and broadened its meaning to take in any creature or thing of variety of manufacture peculiar to Louisiana that might become an object of sale: as Creole ponies, chickens, cows, shoes, eggs, wagons, baskets, cabbages, negroes, etc. Yet the Creoles proper will not share their distinction with the worthy "Acadian." He is a Creole only by courtesy, and in the second person singular. Besides French and Spanish, there are even, for convenience of speech, "colored" Creoles; but there are no Italian, or Sicilian, nor any English, Scotch, Irish, or "Yankee" Creoles, unless of parentage married into, and themselves thoroughly proselyted in, Creole society. Neither Spanish nor American domination has taken from the Creoles their French vernacular. This, also, is part of their title; and, in fine, there seems to be no more serviceable definition of the Creoles of Louisiana than this: that they are the French-speaking, native, ruling class.

There is no need to distinguish between the higher and humbler grades of those from whom they sprang. A few settlers, only, were persons of rank and station. Many were the children of the casket-girls, and many were of such stock as society pronounces less than nothing; yet, in view of that state of society which the French revolution later overturned, any present overplus of honor may as well fall to the children of those who filled the prisons before, as of those who filled them during that bloody convulsion.

In the days of De Vaudreuil, the dwellings of the better class that had stood at first on the immediate front of the town, or on the first street behind, seem to have drawn back a square or two. They were also spreading toward and out through a gate in the palisade wall near its north corner. Bayou Road, now a street of the city, issued from this gate northward to the village and bayou of St. John. Along this suburban way, surrounded by broad grounds, deeply shaded with live-oaks, magnolias, and other evergreen forest trees, and often having behind them plantations of indigo or myrtle, rose the wide, red-roofed, but severely plain frame dwellings of the rich, generally of one or one

and a half stories, but raised on pillars often fifteen feet from the ground, and surrounded by wide verandas.

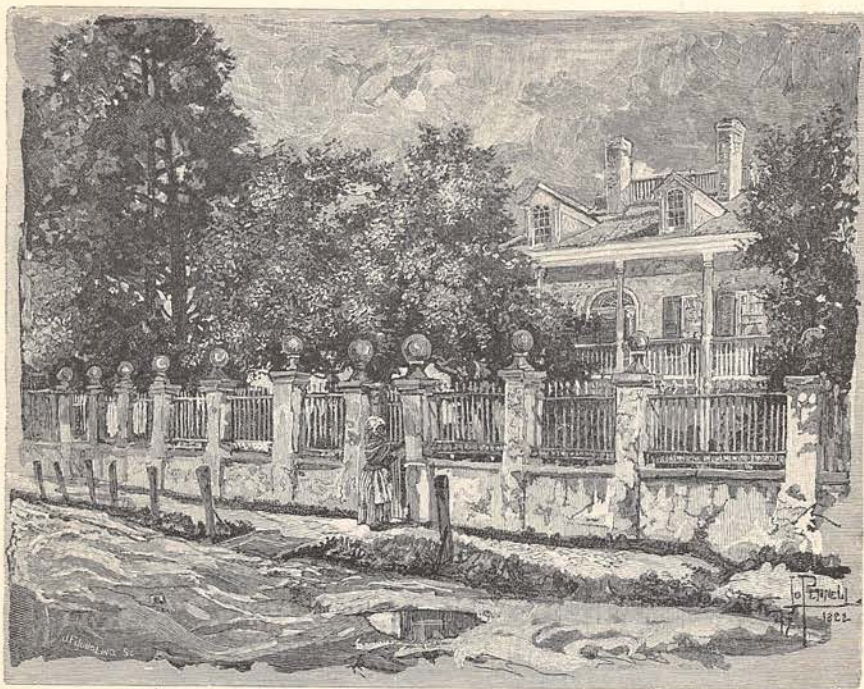
In the lofty halls and spacious drawing-rooms of these homes—frequently, too, in the heart of the town, in the houses of the humblest exterior, their low, single-story wooden or brick walls rising from a ground but partly drained even of its storm water, infested with reptile life and frequently overflowed—was beginning to be shown a splendor of dress and personal adornment hardly in harmony with the rude simplicity of apartments and furniture and scarcely to be expected in a town of unpaved, unlighted, and often impassable streets, surrounded by swamps and morasses on one of the wildest of American frontiers.

Slaves—not always or generally the dull, ill-featured Congo or fierce Banbara, imported for the plantations, but comely Jalaff and Mandingo boys and girls, the shapelier for their scanty dress—waited on every caprice, whether good or ill. New Orleans had been the one colonized spot in the delta where slaves were few, but now they rapidly became numerous, and black domestic service made it easy for the Creoles to emulate the ostentatious living of the colonial officials.

To their bad example in living, these dignitaries, almost without exception, added that of corruption in office. Governors, royal commissaries, post-commandants,—the Marchioness de Vaudreuil conspicuously,—and many lesser ones, stood boldly accusing and accused of the grossest and the pettiest misdemeanors. Doubtless the corruption was exaggerated; yet the testimony is official, abundant, and corroborative, and is verified in the ruinous expenses which at length drove France to abandon the maintenance and sovereignty of the colony she had misgoverned for sixty-three years.

Meanwhile, public morals were debased; idleness and intemperance were general; speculation in the depreciated paper money which flooded the colony became the principal business, and insolvency the common condition.

Religion and education made poor headway. Almost the only item in their history is a "war of the Jesuits and Capuchins." Its "acrimonious writings, squibs, and pasquinades" made much heat for years. Its satirical songs were heard, it appears, in the drawing-rooms as well as in the street; for the fair sex took sides in it with lively zeal. In July, 1763, the Capuchins were left masters of the field. The decree of the French parliament had the year before ordered the Jesuits' expulsion from the realm; their wide plantations just beyond the town



OLD VILLA ON BAYOU ST. JOHN.

walls being desirable, the Creole "Superior Council" became bold, and the lands already described as the site of the richest district in the present New Orleans were confiscated and sold for \$180,000.

In this same year, a flag, not seen there before, began to appear in the yellow harbor of New Orleans. In February, a treaty between England, France, and Spain, gave Great Britain all that immense part of the Mississippi Valley east of the river and north of Orleans Island. The Delta remained to France and to her still vast province of Louisiana. The navigation of the Mississippi was made free to the subjects of both empires alike. Trade with British vessels was forbidden the French colonies; yet a lively commerce soon sprang up with them at a point just above the plantations of the dispossessed Jesuits, afterward the river front of the city of Lafayette, and now of the Fourth District of New Orleans. Here numerous trading vessels, sailing under the British flag, ascending the river and passing the town on the pretext of visiting the new British posts of Manchac and Baton Rouge, landed and carried on a commerce with the merchants of the post they had just passed by.

The corrupt authorities winked at a practice that brought wealth to all, and the getting of honest rights by disingenuous and

dishonest courses became the justified habit of the highest classes and the leading minds. The slave trade, too, received an unfortunate stimulus: a large business was done at this so-called "Little Manchac," in Guinea negroes, whom the colonists bought of the English.

The governor of Louisiana at this time was Kerlerec, a distinguished captain in the French navy. He had succeeded the Marquis in 1753, and had now governed the province for ten years. But he had lately received orders to return to France and render account of his conduct in office. A work of retrenchment was begun. The troops were reduced to three hundred. In June, a M. d'Abbadie landed in New Orleans, commissioned to succeed the governor under the shorn honors and semi-commercial title of director-general. Kerlerec, sailing to France, was cast into the Bastille and "died of grief shortly after his release."

The Creoles noted, with much agitation, these and other symptoms of some unrevealed design to alter their political condition. By and by, rumor of what had secretly been transacted began to reach their ears in the most offensive shape. Yet, for a time, M. d'Abbadie himself remained officially as uninformed as they; and it was only in October, 1764, twenty-three months after the signing of a secret act at Fontainebleau, that the



OLD CANAL ON DAUPHINE STREET. [A RESTORATION.]

authoritative announcement reached New Orleans of her cession, with all of French Louisiana, to the king of Spain.

Such is the origin, surrounding influences, and resulting character and life of the earliest Creoles of Louisiana. With many influences against them, they rose from a chaotic condition below the plane of social order to the station of a proud, freedom-loving, agricultural and commercial people, who, shortly after the date with which these chapters close, struck the first armed blow ever aimed by Americans against a royal decree.

Their descendants would be a community still more unique than they are, had they not the world-wide trait of a pride of ancestry. But they might as easily be excused for boasting of other things which they have overlooked. A pride of ascent would be as well grounded; and it will be pleasant if we are permitted to show in later papers that the decadence imputed to them, sometimes even by themselves, has no foundation in fact, but that their course, instead, has been, in the main, upward from first to last, and so continues to-day.