



INCIDENTS OF FOREST LIFE.

THE annals of the French occupation of Louisiana contain many of those curious traditions and narratives of adventure and character which lend so deep a tinge of romance to the early days of colonial commonwealths. Indians, Frenchmen, Germans, Spaniards, English, Scotch, and Irish, all manner of half-breeds, and mixed bloods, trading, hunting, fighting, intriguing, wandering or settling, as the case might be, pass in fantastic confusion across the scene, and add all the interest of human passions, in their fiercest play, to the wild beauty and savage grandeur of the varied landscape of that vast region. Brief relations of some few of these early tales will both relieve the

gravity of the historical narrative, and supply vivid representations of the life and manners of the times, as well as indispensable items towards the full understanding even of the present situation of the country.

The Chevalier D'Aubant, an officer in the garrison at Mobile, observed one day a female of humble dress, yet lady-like carriage, whose features he seemed to have seen before. Reflecting upon the varied sights of his erratic life, he is startled at the idea that the face of the nameless emigrant, who has come to Mobile with the German settlers for John Law's distant grant upon the Arkansas River, is one which he had seen at St. Petersburg. She is, he cannot but believe, the same whom in that distant capital he had seen high in place, and surrounded with all the semi-barbaric splendour of the court of the great Czar Peter—the wife of the Czarowitz, or heir-apparent, the luckless Alexis Petrowitz, the victim of his brutal father's mad passions.

Growing more and more certain of his opinion, he accosts the fair fugitive, yet

a delicate and beautiful lady, with chivalrous respect. Confused at the recognition, she yet confesses that he is right; and upon his promise to preserve her secret, she tells him a wild, adventurous story; how her half-crazy husband, the Czarowitz, had so vilely abused her, that, as the only effectual escape from him, she had pretended death, been actually entombed, and freed from her grave a few hours afterwards, had fled in poverty and obscurity, she scarcely knew whither, from the splendid terrors of her frightful princess-ship.

Beautiful she was; accomplished and good, D'Aubant knew or believed her to be, and his sincere and ardent courtship very speedily prevailed upon her to marry him. He afterwards held various commands in the province, during one of which, at Fort Toulouse, near the present town of Wetumpka, she long occupied a little cabin near the fort, where she used to pass many hours in sporting with the Indian children. She was an attached and faithful wife, and following her husband in his wandering military life to France, and then to the Isle of Bourbon, in the Indian Ocean, where he died, she returned to Paris with a little daughter, and in 1771 ended, in deep poverty, a long and mysteriously eventful life.

In the same town of Mobile, where the disguised princess landed, there died, in 1757, by unjust and barbarous torture, another person, whose character, prowess, adventures and fate, were yet more characteristic of the French colonial régime.

There was a French woodsman and solitary hunter named Beaudrot, a man of giantly size, of tremendous and athletic strength and endurance, of great renown for skill and bravery, and an especial favourite with the Indians. He was also much beloved by Bienville, the famous French governor, and often employed by him upon secret and dangerous missions of importance amongst the Creeks

and other tribes, many of whose dialects, and all whose customs, he perfectly understood. Endowed with the genuine kindness of heart which so often characterizes men of great physical strength, he had repeatedly used his peculiar advantages in the interest of captives amongst the savages; saving more lives than one, even if the ransom cost him all the profits of his rude traffic.

Beaudrot was one night returning alone through the forest upon what was called the Chattahouchie trail, from Fort Toulouse, to the commandant at which post he had carried a letter from Governor Bienville. The night comes down upon him far within the forest, for, indeed, the journey is of many days. The wary and hardy wanderer, not kindling any fire for fear of discovery by Indians, according to his custom when alone, ensconces himself close beneath a huge pine-log, and sleeps with the light sleep of the Indian hunter, upon the dry pine-leaves, his head upon his knapsack. Light steps awaken him; listening motionlessly, his quick ears distinguish the guttural sounds of a low conversation between Indians, not so distant but that he can judge of their numbers and discern their purpose and circumstances. They kindle a fire of lightwood; the hidden giant is within the circle of its brilliant glare; and but for the shelter of his log, had surely been discovered. Stealthily peering from his concealment, he sees three stout warriors eating their supper; but his kind and brave heart beats quick at the sight of a white man, their prisoner, bound, and so tied to a tree as to be obliged to stand upright.

The Indians complete their frugal meal, with small care for the appetite of their prize; and leaving him to stand in sleepless weariness all night, they fall asleep. Beaudrot has recognised the prisoner, a Frenchman, owning a small plantation on the Tensas River; and waiting impatiently until the warriors are snoring in secure slumber, he noise-

lessly approaches. His first impulse is to discover himself, loose the captive, give him a pistol, and with him to attack the sleepers. But the poor frightened fellow would cry out at sight of him; and the risk forbids that scheme. So, creeping along, he manages to place himself in such a position that his heavily charged carbine covers two of the warriors, lying close together. He fires; both of them are killed; the third, leaping instinctively from sleep to the attack, forgetting his gun, and armed only with his hatchet. Beaudrot fires a pistol into his stomach. The Creek whoops and falls dead.

Beaudrot now hastens to untie his bewildered fellow-countryman, who, however, informs him that the three warriors were only a detached party; and that ten others, returning from a further expedition against the settlements, are doubtless not far off upon the trail. Beaudrot, hereupon, makes straight for the Alabama River with the rescued prisoner; builds a raft, and after floating some distance down the stream, pulls the frail vehicle in pieces, sets the fragments adrift, and the two fugitives plunge deep into a dreary swamp on the further bank. It is daylight; and quite secured against pursuit by these prompt, multiplied, and cunning precautions, they call a halt, and the intrepid woodsman revives his friend and himself, from his slender stores of bread and dried venison, and by the judicious administration of some small draughts from a certain little bottle of brandy. Thus refreshed, and with a few hours' rest, they set out again, and Beaudrot's skill supports them on game, until, after a tedious march through the forest, they arrive in safety at Mobile.

By such deeds is the valiant Beaudrot endeared to the men of Mobile and thereabouts. But, at last, upon some unjust pretext, during the administration of Governor Kerlerrec, some years after, we find him imprisoned at a frontier French post on Cat Island, by the tyran-

nical command of a monster, named Duroux, who had long exercised the most degrading oppression over the helpless privates of his command. He forced his soldiers to cultivate his gardens, to burn coal, to make lime; and he sold the produce of their labour for his own profit. Those who refused the unsoldierly duty he would have tied naked to the trees, to endure the poisonous stings of the bloodthirsty insects of the swamp. Some of those thus tortured fled to New Orleans with their complaints; but apparently from some fancied necessity—such as often governs military discipline—of maintaining authority, however abused, Kerlerrec sends them back to their duty unsatisfied. Duroux now increases his abuses, and deprives them of all food except spoiled bread. The wretched men, furious at their misery, conspire against their tyrant, slay him, strip the corpse, and cast it out unburied into the sea; and then rifling the stores at the little fort, for once they enjoy sumptuous fare.

But after such mutiny they can no longer remain in the French colony; so they release Beaudrot from prison, and compel him to act as their guide towards the English in Georgia. Doubtless, he was not much grieved at the opportunity; and so he leads them in good faith through distant and circuitous routes to the Indian town of Coweta on the Chattahoochie, and there receiving from them a formal certificate that he was not concerned in the death of Duroux, and had acted by compulsion in assisting their flight, they dismiss him, and he returns quietly to his home near Mobile.

Months afterward he is suddenly imprisoned by the commandant there; and in the dungeon he finds three of the soldiers whom he had assisted to escape. Lingered unwisely amongst the hospitable Indians about Coweta, and the circumstances coming to the knowledge of the authorities, a detachment from Fort Toulouse had arrested the poor

fellows, and after due examination and communication, the order for Beaudrot's arrest had been sent from New Orleans to Mobile in a sealed package by the hands of two of his own sons, who were thus the ignorant means of their father's death. He was condemned by a court-martial, in spite of his certificate and other testimony; and amid the sympathy and horror-struck grief of the people of Mobile, was broken on the wheel—that is, bound naked to a cart-wheel erected for the purpose upon a post through its axis, his limbs broken one after another by blows from an iron bar, and so left to die. A fate even more frightful awaited the wretched soldiers. They were privates of the Swiss regiment of Hallwyl; and, according to an ancient traditional barbarous usage extant amongst those troops, having been brought forth upon the esplanade before Fort Condé, they were each nailed down in a tight wooden coffin, and sawed asunder, man, box and all, with a cross-cut saw, by two sergeants. These unrelenting and hideous punishments strongly exhibit the terrific and unscrupulous rigour with which military discipline was maintained in those distant regions, as well as the obedient and timid character of a population who could patiently acquiesce in them.

Bossu, a captain of marines, published, in 1771, his *Travels in Louisiana*, which contain many amusing accounts of his experiences while stationed there in the days of which we are speaking. Upon one occasion, having conducted a detachment to Fort Toulouse, he learned a characteristic incident illustrative of the Jesuits and of their relations to the French military officers. Montberaut, commanding the fort, a man possessed, like so many others of his nation, both of the attainments and manners of a polished and courtly gentleman, and of the seemingly incongruous qualifications which led him into a sort of sworn brotherhood and great influence with the tribes, despised

the Jesuits who were stationed at the fort, and was always at enmity with them. Father Le Roy, a Jesuit, wrote to the governor, abusing Montberaut without stint, and advising his removal. The messenger showed the letter to the commandant, who quietly pocketed it. Meeting the priest next morning, the reverend gentleman, as Bossu slyly says, "according to the political principles of these good fathers," was excessively civil; whereupon Montberaut took occasion incidentally to ask him if he had written anything unfavourable to him. The Jesuit swore he had not; whereupon Montberaut called him a cheat and an impostor, and nailed up his letter at the gate of the fort; after which time, according to Bossu, there were no Jesuits to be found among the Creeks and Alabamas.

The country inhabited by those tribes, Bossu found exceedingly lovely and fertile, and thickly peopled by hospitable and happy savages. A. J. Pickett, from whose exceedingly valuable and entertaining *History of Alabama* we have obtained many of the facts here narrated, referring to the wild beauty of that delicious region, unaffectedly and quaintly thus laments over the so-called "improvements" of late introduced:—

"But now the whole scene is changed. The country is no longer half so beautiful; the waters of Alabama begin to be discoloured; the forests have been cut down; steamers have destroyed the finny race; deer bound not over the plain; the sluggish bear has ceased to wind through the swamps; the bloody panther does not spring upon his prey; wolves have ceased to howl upon the hills; birds cannot be seen in the branches of the trees; graceful warriors guide no longer their well-shaped canoes, and beautiful squaws loiter not upon the plain, nor pick the delicious berries. Now, vast fields of cotton, noisy steamers, huge rafts of lumber, towns reared for business, disagreeable corporation laws,

harassing courts of justice, mills, factories, and everything else that is calculated to destroy the beauty of a country, and rob man of his quiet and native independence, present themselves to our view."

While Bossu was at the Fort, advices were brought that the Emperor of Coweta—for the early writers distributed imperial and kingly honours on every hand amongst the petty forest patriarchs with wondrous profuseness—was about to honour the French with a visit. Bossu walked forth to meet this mighty potentate; and as he took him by the hand, the guard who accompanied him discharged their muskets, and a salute was also fired from the fort, to the excessive gratification of the emperor, who, like many distinguished men now living, found great glory in a noise and a bad smell. As he alighted from his horse, and advanced with deliberate and majestic pace toward the fort, the Europeans walking behind him enjoyed an excellent opportunity of observing his costume; which consisted of a heavy plume of black feathers in his top-knot, a scarlet uniform coat, most gorgeously bedizened with tinsel lace, a white linen shirt modestly flowing from beneath it, and two bare, copper-coloured legs. They found some difficulty, according to Bossu, in preserving the gravity proper for the occasion; although they might possibly have been puzzled to establish the logical relation between true grandeur and a pair of breeches.

Sitting down to a state feast prepared for him by D'Aubant, the husband of the fugitive princess, and then the successor of Montberaut, in command of the post, the young emperor (a youth of eighteen) was much gravelled at the unaccustomed knife and fork; but a wise old chief, who accompanied him as a kind of Mentor, cut the knot by coolly dismembering a turkey with his fingers, gravely remarking that "Master of life made fingers before the making of forks."

A savage, who waited behind the emperor's chair, observing the Frenchmen sedulous in seasoning their boiled beef with mustard, asked Beaudin, an officer who had lived forty years amongst the Creeks, what it was that they relished so much?

Beaudin quickly replied that the French were by no means covetous even of the best of their possessions; and to demonstrate the liberality he boasted, he handed the Indian henchman a generous spoonful of the fiery condiment with ostentatious gravity. The savage unhesitatingly swallowed it; but found himself quite unable, with all his Indian fortitude, to hide the tingling agony. He made divers fearful grimaces, and extraordinary contortions of body, and uttered a number of whoops indicative of his feelings, all to the unbounded merriment of the company. But at last he imagined himself poisoned, and the polite commandant was fain to appease his anger and his pain together by the unfailing panacea of a good glass of brandy.

On another of Bossu's expeditions through the woods, having gone quietly to sleep near the river's bank, rolled up in a corner of the tent-cloth, in his bear skin, and with a nice string of fish for breakfast stowed by his side, he was startlingly awakened to find himself rapidly propelled by some invisible power through the darkness, towards the river. He roared lustily for help; but, bestirring himself smartly, only managed, before help could come, to free himself and his bear-skin, just in season to see his tent-cloth and his fish go under water, in the jaws of an immense alligator. The horrible monster, smelling the fish, and not very particular what else he took, had carelessly seized the tent-cloth, and was trundling off commander, tent-bed, and all, along with his luncheon; quite unintentionally, but with reprehensible carelessness.