John J. Audubon

AUDUBON

BY

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THE following Biographical Sketch of Audubon was originally read before the Quarante Club, a leading literary society of New Orleans. It is now offered in printed form to a larger circle of readers at the suggestion of some of the relatives and admirers of the famous Louisianian, in the hope that it may create such an interest in its subject as will ultimately lead to the result long ardently desired by the writer—the erection of a suitable monument in the Crescent City in memory of our great ornithologist. The *raison d'être* of this unpretending brochure being explained, the author begs for it the kindly indulgence of a generous public, and a hearty coöperation in the work, of which it is hoped this modest effort may prove the corner-stone.

Our country is at last rapidly refuting the traditional charge of the ingratitude of Republics to their noblest sons and though she has as yet no Pantheon nor Westminster Abbey,

statues and monuments throughout the land perpetuate the memory and deeds of her patriots, scholars and heroes. We of the far South must not be behindhand in this great movement. Undismayed by difficulties and discouragements, we must earnestly strive to do like honor to our illustrious dead, and ennoble and beautify our parks and public places with lasting memorials in bronze and marble—grand object lessons of their lives and deeds.

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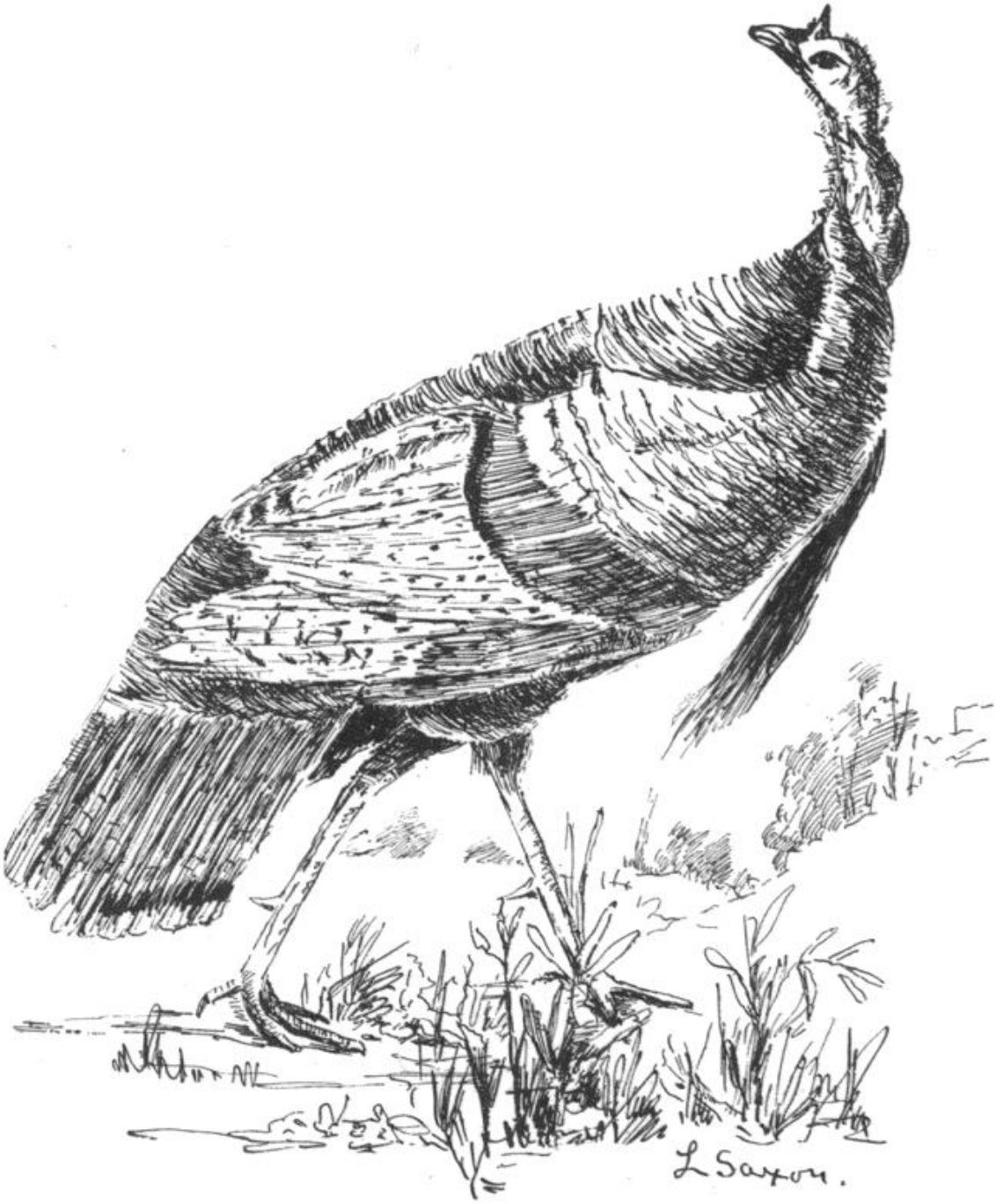
The entire proceeds from the sale of this book will be contributed to the Audubon Monument Fund.

AUDUBON.

WHILE it gives me great pleasure to have been selected to present to you this brief record of the life, labors and achievements of John James Audubon, the great naturalist of America, I do so with extreme diffidence; and, disclaiming for myself any originality, learning or eloquence, will rely for the success of my efforts solely upon your own warm interest in the man himself, and in the personal details of his remarkable career, "more instructive than a sermon, more romantic than a romance."

The name and fame of Audubon are world-wide, yet nowhere should they be more highly honored and cherished than here among us—here in the very State where his ardent spirit first saw the light. To me, especially, is there a charm in the very name of Audubon, interwoven as it is with the earliest and dearest recollections of my childhood and of my old

home in the Felicianas, where, I love to reflect, he was in the olden time a frequent and ever welcome guest. As a child, I listened eagerly when any of the incidents connected with these visits were recalled, and I early developed for the great naturalist a most devoted hero-worship. More fascinating than a fairy tale to my youthful imagination was the account of his long struggle with adversity and his ultimate triumph. I heard with delighted curiosity of the strange stuffed birds, and curious impaled insects that filled his room in artistic disorder. And more especially I took immense pride in the thought that the familiar portraits which looked down upon me from the walls were painted by his hand; and I gloried in the knowledge from the lips of my own dear mother, that "once upon a time" she had been a pupil of his lovely and gifted wife. But above all else I cherished the family tradition that upon our plantation near Bayou Sara, the great artist captured the magnificent wild turkey from which he painted then and there his celebrated master-piece.


L Saxon.

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And so perfect was the picture it is furthermore said, so life-like in pose and appearance that when finished and set to dry upon the piazza, it attracted and deceived a flock of domestic turkeys that came strutting upon the scene, noisily gobbling and quarreling, and actually tried to attack and drive out the lordly forest intruder. The tribute paid to the old Greek painter Zeuxis by the birds that flew at his bunch of grapes and pecked at them upon his canvas, sank into insignificance compared with this triumph of art in our unclassic age. The woods, the fields, the streams, were invested with new beauty and romantic interest, when I learned how he, the famous Audubon, then poor and unknown, had spent days and nights roaming among them, with only his dog and gun to bear him company. My childish heart overflowed with sympathy for the lonely wanderer. Enthusiast and dreamer, all pronounced him to be in those very practical days: all, save the faithful wife who believed in her husband's genius, and for his sake became the

patient bread-winner of the family by teaching music, French, drawing and other accomplishments among the most aristocratic country families. Reared among such influences, and with these early memories still clinging to me, the reader will easily understand that it gives me a peculiar pleasure to think and write of Audubon—and that the labor of compiling from various fragmentary and some private sources of information, and arranging in a more condensed form the story of his life, has been to me truly a labor of love.

The name of Audubon is of French extraction and found only among the ancestors of the naturalist, who were humble fisher-folk, distinguished for sturdy honesty and manly courage. His grandsire, John Audubon, was a native of Sables d'Olonne on the coast of La Vendée. With a laudable ambition, it would seem, to populate the New World as well as the Old, he reared to maturity a family of twenty-one children. Of this extraordinary number the father of our Audubon was the

twentieth son; and he, at the age of twelve set out to seek his fortune, with the slender equipment of one shirt, a suit of clothes, a cane and the paternal blessing. He went before the mast, sailing in a vessel bound for America. The career of this young sailor was a most remarkable one, but after uncommon vicissitudes he finally rose to position and wealth. He served in the army of Lafayette and Rochambeau, was the personal friend of Washington, and later on became naval officer in the service of France. It is interesting to trace the influences of heredity on the character of the famous descendant of this daring and impetuous Frenchman. Audubon doubtless inherited from him that adventurous spirit and tremendous will-power, as well as the quick, stormy temper which he describes as "rising like the blast of a hurricane, and as suddenly calmed."

In the course of his many voyages the successful naval officer acquired valuable properties in San Domingo and large possessions in

the United States. During one of his visits to Louisiana he married a beautiful and wealthy Spanish Creole, and there, on his plantation not far distant from New Orleans, most probably at Mandeville,* his youngest son, John James Audubon, was born, either in 1780 or 1781, for strangely enough the exact date of his birth is unknown. But he was fortunate in the place of his birth, for surely in all the earth there could not be found a more auspicious spot for the nativity of the future naturalist than this fair land of Louisiana, so rich in its sources of scientific interest and poetic inspiration. His earliest recollections are of lying among the fragrant blossoms under the orange trees, watching the movements of the mocking-bird and listening to its music.

When very young Audubon accompanied his mother to San Domingo, where she perished, a victim of the insurrection of 1791. He was afterward sent to France, where his father remarried and settled at Nantes. His step-mother, without children of her own, became passion-

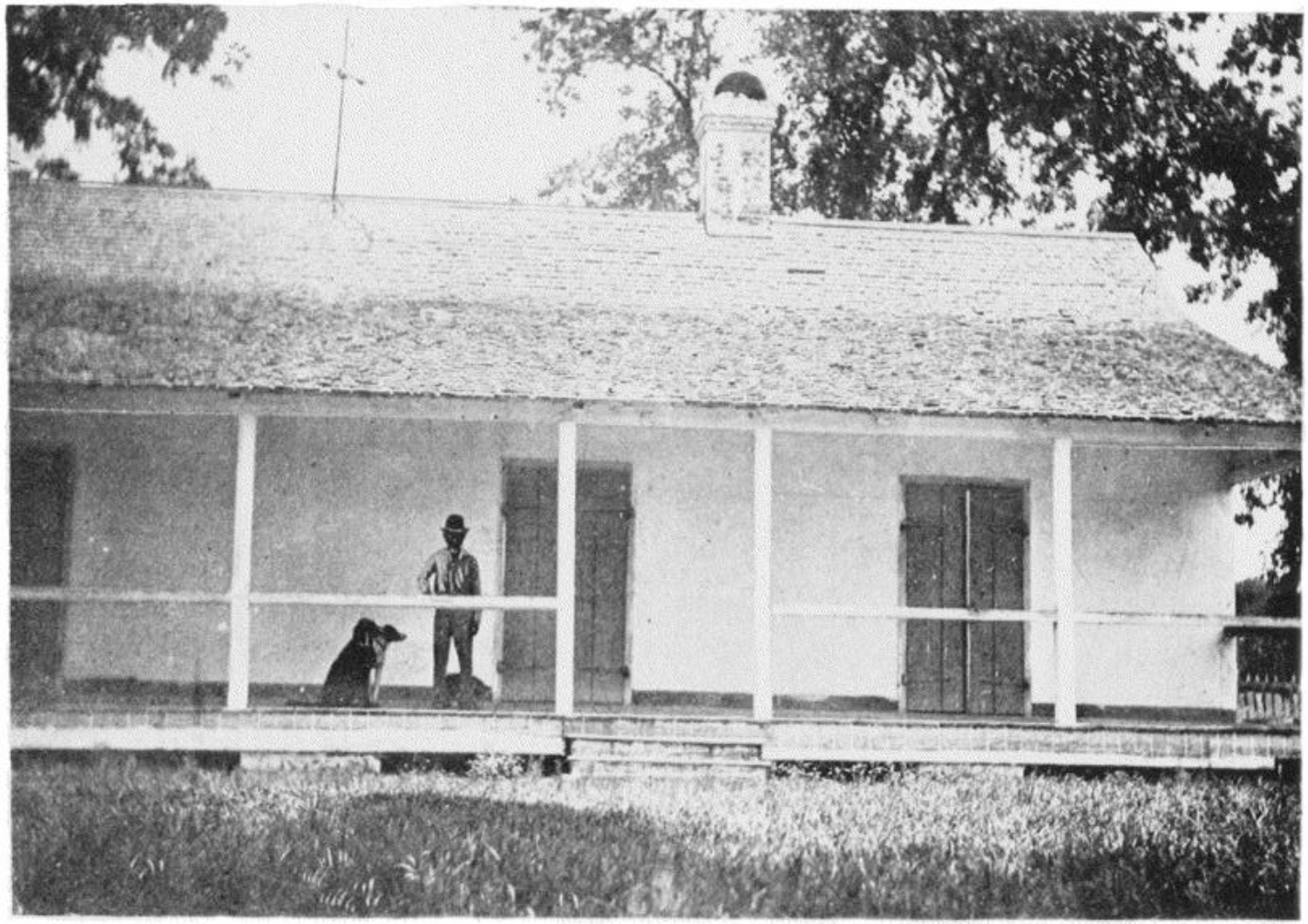
*See addenda, p. 75.

ately attached to her youthful charge, who returned her devotion most ardently, and, years afterward, speaks of her as "chère maman," "adorable maman." "Her kindness," he says, was "overwhelming." She indulged him in every whim and extravagance, being determined that "he should live and die a gentleman." She boasted in his presence that "he was the handsomest boy in France," and supplied him lavishly with pocket money and fine clothes. To this overindulgence and injudicious praise may perhaps be attributed the vanity and love of dress of which Audubon was sometimes, and not unjustly, accused. His life at Nantes was free and joyous, and the embryo naturalist fairly reveled in a *carte-blanche* on all the confectionery and cake shops in the town, untroubled by any presentiment of the hardship he was one day to endure in the depths of American forests. An intense love of natural scenery and animated nature marked his earliest years to a degree that "bordered on frenzy," he tells us. And when a mere child he began draw-

ing the birds he saw around him, and would "gaze with ecstacy upon their pearly and shining eggs as they lay imbedded in the soft down of their tiny nests."

During his father's absence at sea he was allowed the utmost latitude in the indulgence of his tastes, to the utter neglect of his education. "I usually made for the fields, where I spent the day, instead of going to school, where I should have been," he tells us, "my little basket with me well supplied with good provisions; and when I returned, either in winter or summer, it was replenished with what I called curiosities, such as birds' eggs, birds' nests, curious lichens, flowers, and even pebbles."

When the father of the young student of nature returned from his cruise he was astonished at the extent and variety of the boy's collection, but none the less mortified by his deficiencies of education of the ordinary kind. He determined that his son should be educated, and placed him at school to study either as an



SUPPOSED BIRTHPLACE OF AUDUBON AT MANDEVILLE, LA.

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engineer or a naval cadet, to further which end he had him carefully instructed in drawing and mathematics. Young Audubon found mathematics dull work, but acquired great proficiency in drawing, as well as in dancing, fencing and music. For the latter he evinced considerable talent, and learned to play skilfully upon the violin, flute and flageolet. How much he owed to these accomplishments in after years we shall presently see. For seven years he had the advantage of the best drawing masters in France; and in Paris studied under David, the famous classic painter of the revolutionary period (1748-1825). However, the genius of Audubon could not be restricted by the rules of books and teachers, and he still sought the woods and fields for his inspirations, "taking the keenest delight in the examination of the nests, eggs, young, and parents of any species of bird."

The star of Napoleon was now in the ascendant, the two elder brothers of Audubon were already in the French army, and his father was

ambitious that he, too, should win fame and glory by following the victorious eagles of France. But the soul of the boy naturalist soared aloft to the eaglets of the sky, and a soldier's life had for him no charm. So at the age of 17 he was sent out to America to look after the family interests in Pennsylvania.

Arriving in New York he was seized with yellow fever and nursed back to health by some kind Quaker ladies of Morristown. Soon afterward he was put in possession of his father's beautiful farm, Mill Grove. It was romantically situated on the Schuylkill river, not far from Philadelphia, and it became a haven of rest to the young wanderer, "a blessed spot," he calls it, "where cares he knew not." His life here, indeed, was ideally happy. The natural scenery around him offered pleasing subjects for the young artist's pencil, and he pursued his favorite studies with as little concern about the future as though the whole world belonged to him. He rose at "daybreak to begin his rambles, and returned at nightfall,

wet with dew, but happy if he bore a feathered prize." His studio was a cave, and his room soon became a museum of natural curiosities.

Being regarded as a young gentleman of rank and expectations, Audubon had the advantage of the best social intercourse; and having unlimited leisure he indulged freely in all the sports and pleasures natural to his age, such as fishing, hunting and skating. He confesses that he was "gay, pleasure-loving, extravagant;" and though in America, cut as many foolish pranks as any dandy in Bond Street or on Piccadilly, going hunting in black satin knee-breeches and pumps, and wearing

the finest ruffled shirts he could obtain from France.

But the young lover of Nature was soon to feel a rival passion to whose subtle influence he quickly succumbed. Adjoining Mill Grove was the estate of Fatland Ford, owned by Mr. Bakewell, an English gentleman and a descendant of the historic "Peveril of the Peak." Audubon learned that his neighbor had several handsome daughters, and also some fine pointer dogs, but his French prejudices against everything English caused him to remain utterly indifferent to both attractions, usually so irresistible to the young masculine fancy, and only accident, or perhaps Providence, brought about his acquaintance with the family with which he afterward became so closely united. It happened one day when the ground was covered with snow and he was hunting grouse that he met Mr. Bakewell similarly engaged, and accepted an invitation to visit his home.

Audubon's impressions of the visit are best told in his own language. "Well do I remem-

ber," he says, "and please God, I will never forget, the morning when for the first time I entered the Bakewell household. I was shown into the parlor, where only one young lady was snugly seated at work by the fire. It was *she*, my dear Lucy Bakewell, who afterward became my wife and the mother of my children. When she arose from her seat her form seemed radiant with beauty, and my heart and eyes followed her every step. At parting, I felt, I knew not why, that I was at least not indifferent to her." The two young people thus mutually attracted met frequently after this introduction and a devoted attachment sprung up between them. Their love tale is a charming one, for she was a "maiden fair," and he an ardent lover. The gentle Lucy taught him English, once so heartily despised, and he gave her drawing lessons in return, while each was learning from the other the richest lore of all the ages, the depth and purity and strength of love of which the human heart is capable.

But the happy course of his wooing was

soon rudely interrupted by the discovery of the treachery of his father's agent, Da Costa, who opposed his matrimonial plans, and attempted to limit his finances. Audubon resolved to demand a letter of credit and then to seek his father. With characteristic energy he walked to New York in midwinter, but only to find there was no money for him there; and that Da Costa was actually planning to have him seized and sent to China. Furious at his wrongs, he borrowed money and set sail for Nantes.

After encountering a heavy gale and other vexatious delays he arrived in France, and was soon in the arms of his parents. They joyfully welcomed him and sympathized in his grievances, his father removing his unworthy steward and consenting to his marriage. Audubon spent one happy year with them in their beautiful villa on the Loire, passing his time as usual in rambling and drawing; and with marvelous industry finished about two hundred sketches of French birds. Though crude in

execution there is "life in them," and they give evidence of the wonderful gift of the future ornithologist. His success in after life may doubtless be attributed to the high ideal to which he consecrated himself in extreme youth. In his biography he tells us of his early passion for birds and flowers; of his grief and disappointment when, in attempting to copy them, his pencil gave birth to "a family of cripples so maimed they resembled the mangled corpses on a field of battle compared with the integrity of living men." The worse his drawings were, the more beautiful he found the originals—and never, for a moment, did he abandon the all-absorbing desire of reproducing nature fresh and life-like, as though just from the hand of its Maker.

France was now about to engage in one of her colossal struggles with hostile Europe, and to avoid conscription, Audubon entered the French marine service,—made one short cruise and then obtained passports for America. The perils and adventures which seemed ever to

beset him were not lacking on this voyage. His vessel, though floating "the Stars and Stripes," was seized by an English privateer, the "Rattlesnake," overhauled and robbed. Audubon, however, saved his gold by hiding it under the cable in the ship's bows. Once more he landed in New York and was soon at Mill Grove, of which he was now the owner. He returned to the woods of the New World with fresh ardor and began a series of illustrations which afterward formed part of his great work, "The Birds of America," pronounced by Cuvier "the most gigantic enterprise of the kind ever executed by a single man." It is likely, too, that about this time he began to formulate in his own mind the idea of his Ornithological Biography.

Ornithology, the branch of natural history that Audubon specially loved and studied, is a very ancient science. Birds are mentioned in the earliest written records of man, and of all the divisions of the animal creation they are the most interwoven with the traditions and mythologies of the human race.

The very oldest picture in the world is said by Egyptologists to be a fragment of a fresco taken from a tomb, and now preserved in a museum at Boulak. It dates back three thousand years B. C., nearly five thousand years ago, and reproduces with wonderful

fidelity to nature in form and coloring, the figures of six geese.

Aristotle is the first known writer on ornithology, though even he, writing three hundred and twenty-six years before the Christian era, speaks of the works of his predecessors. To Linnæus, the great Swedish

naturalist of the last century, we are indebted for the scientific classification of birds and other animals. Contemporary with him and in more recent times we meet with a long array of brilliant natural scientists, such as Buffon, Cuvier and Agassiz. But in Audubon alone we find combined the scientist, the artist and the writer. Notwithstanding his high aspirations and elevated tastes, "the gay young Frenchman," as he was called, entered *con amore* into all the social pleasures of the neighborhood and was specially fond of music and dancing. But though pleasure-loving, no vice tainted the purity of his character. He was a vegetarian in diet and so singularly temperate that he had never tasted spirits until his wedding day. As a natural consequence he was "as rosy as a girl and as strong and agile as a young buck," to use his own words. To this mode of living he also attributed his iron constitution and enormous powers of physical endurance.

Audubon had the gift of personal beauty in

an eminent degree, and judging from a pen-and-ink sketch of himself he was not unconscious of his attractions. He naïvely describes himself at this time as "measuring 5 feet 10 1-2 inches; of fair mien, and quite a handsome figure; large, dark and rather sunken eyes; light-colored eyebrows; aquiline nose; a fine set of teeth; hair fine of texture and luxuriant, divided and passing down behind each ear in luxuriant ringlets as far as the shoulders."

The young master of Mill Grove seems to have been regarded as a veritable Admirable Crichton, and aside from his literary and artistic talents he was a capital marksman, an expert swimmer, a fearless rider, a skilful musician and graceful dancer, besides being an adept in the art of stuffing birds and training dogs. He was as strong and active as an ancient athlete, and once swam across the Schuylkill with young Bakewell on his back. But alas! Mr. Bakewell *père*, a gentleman of prudence as well as learning, could not see in

these varied accomplishments any means of substantial support for the young couple, and therefore insisted that his son-in-law elect should learn something of commercial pursuits before his marriage. He obtained for him a position in a counting house in New York, but there our poor naturalist pined like an imprisoned bird within the city's walls, and sought relaxation and pleasure in preparing specimens of stuffed birds. This made him obnoxious to his neighbors, who strongly objected to the odor of the drying skins, and demanded, through the medium of a constable, an immediate cessation of "the nuisance." During the entire course of his mercantile education Audubon demonstrated his utter unfitness for practical affairs, and succeeded only in losing several hundred pounds by a bad speculation in indigo.

He relates of himself that he once posted and neglected to seal, a letter containing eight thousand dollars!

After a most unsatisfactory probation he gladly returned to Mill Grove.

The great West was then opening up as a sort of Eldorado for adventurous spirits, and thither Audubon resolved to go and invest the proceeds of his farm, which he sold for that purpose. In the spring of 1808 he was married to Lucy Bakewell, a union that proved most fortunate. Audubon ever cherished the most devoted and romantic affection for the noble wife, to whose tender sympathy and unselfish devotion he owed so much of his subsequent happiness and success.

Their wedding journey to the "Land of promise" was not without accident, the coach in which they traveled to Pittsburg being upset and the young bride seriously hurt.

They floated down the Ohio river on a flatboat for twelve days, finally arriving at Louisville, where Audubon and his partner, Rosier, opened a store. Fancy our elegant young "glass of fashion" and devotee of nature selling pork, flour and lard! However, he seems to have paid but slight attention to business, for he confesses "Birds were birds, then as

now, and my thoughts were ever turning to them as the objects of my greatest delight. I shot, I drew, I looked on nature, and my days were happy beyond human conception."

The young couple soon gathered around them a large circle of friends, Audubon's per-

River Scene

sonal magnetism, attractive physique and bright, lovable nature rendering him extremely popular. He gratefully records in his faithfully kept journal, the generous hospitality of the Kentucky planters and their kind reception of his young wife, whose "talents were above par, and who was considered a gem." "The

simplicity and whole-heartedness of those days," he continues, "I can not describe. The people around us loved us, and we loved them in return."

At this period he was visited by Alexander Wilson, of Paisley, who called to solicit subscriptions for his work on American Ornithology, little dreaming that he had a formidable rival in the Louisville merchant, who had even then a collection superior to his own. Audubon did not subscribe, but he showed the Scotch naturalist his own portfolio, and offered to give him his drawings to publish if he would give the name of their author. Wilson seemed astonished at the collection, but did not accept Audubon's proposition. Audubon honestly admired Wilson's talents and enthusiasm, and showed him great kindness, presenting him to his friends, hunting with him, and assisting him to obtain new specimens. But Wilson could not overcome his own jealousy, and never mentioned Audubon in his writings; and of Louisville wrote that neither "art nor literature had a friend in the place."

The pen of Audubon is as picturesque as his pencil—we find in his journal most graphic accounts of the years spent in Kentucky and the West. The record is one of financial failure and artistic success—of lively narrative and tender pathos—of thrilling adventures and hairbreadth escapes—of sharp contrasts of poverty and ease—of buoyant hope and bitter disappointment—of happy home-life and lonely wanderings.

Through it all we see the man himself, dominated by *one* idea; his character and genius developing into noble perfection by the trials and misfortunes which assailed him. Audubon seems to have had that indifference to money-getting and that recklessness in regard to the future, inseparable from the true artistic temperament. He hated traffic as much as he enjoyed intensely the long journeys to the East "through the dear, the darling forests of Kentucky, Ohio and Pennsylvania," and relates that upon one occasion he lost sight entirely of the pack-horses with their goods and

cash, to watch the movements of a woodland warbler.

Audubon's affairs did not prosper in Louisville and he moved his family to Henderson, from whence he made an excursion to St. Genevieve in Missouri. His account of this journey is a most realistic series of pen pictures of frontier life.

The party started in a snow-storm and their boat becoming wedged in among huge masses of ice, they were obliged to leave it and go into winter quarters on shore. A band of Indians camped by them, and Audubon was delighted with the opportunity of studying the aborigines in such close proximity. They remained thus over a month snow-bound and ice-bound. Their provisions failing them, they lived on pecan-soup, bear meat and opossum ; ate the breast of wild turkey for bread and bear-grease for butter. Audubon gives a most amusing account of his partner's discomfort, and his own enjoyment of the situation, twenty miles from any settlement. He says " the bones we threw

around our camp attracted many wolves, and we had much sport in hunting them. Here I passed six weeks pleasantly, investigating the habits of deer, bears, cougars, raccoons and wild turkeys and other animals; and I drew much, by the side of our great camp fire, and

no one can have an idea what a good fire is who has never seen one in the woods of America. The Indians wove their baskets of cane; Mr. Pope played on the violin; I accompanied him with the flute; the men danced to the tunes; the squaws looked on and laughed, while the hunters smoked their pipes with such serenity as only Indians can; and I never regretted one day spent there."

When the ice at length broke they resumed their perilous journey. Near Cape Girardeau Audubon saw for the first time the great bald eagle, which he calls "the bird of Washington" and paints so gloriously with brush and pen.

The outlook at St. Genevieve was not promising and Audubon returned to Henderson by land, encountering *en route* the memorable earthquake of 1812, and narrowly escaping assassination in a settler's cabin. He seemed ever to bear a charmed life. Audubon remained about seven years at Henderson; bought land and slaves, and was supremely happy in his cabin home, his ready rifle amply supplying his table with forest luxuries.

Prosperity seemed, for a time, to smile upon him. He had all the elements of a pioneer, and he readily adopted the wild life and rough dress of a woodsman of those primitive days. He mentions in his journal the pleasure he took in the society of that Prince of Hunters, Daniel Boone. While living here he was vis-

ited by Rafinesque, an eccentric old naturalist, grotesquely dressed, and bearing a bunch of weeds upon his shoulders. Audubon presented his learned guest to his family and put him into a state bordering on ecstacy, by showing him a new species of plant. He jumped and danced and fairly hugged his kindly host, exclaiming that it was not only a new species but a new genus. That night Audubon, hearing a frightful noise in the stranger's apartment, rushed to the rescue and found Rafinesque running around like a madman with the handle of our artist's favorite violin, his valued Cremona, the body of which the excited scientist had completely shattered in trying to kill some bats which, he declared, were "a new species."

Audubon became more and more absorbed in the study of Natural History, accomplishing wonders by his patient, tireless industry. It was in Kentucky that he laid the corner-stone of his future greatness. There, too, his two sons were born, and there his two infant daughters were buried. He made many long

and tedious journeys, undismayed by danger and hardship. Once he traveled one hundred and sixty-five miles on foot; at another time he rode a wild horse through Tennessee and Georgia, and once he went down the Mississippi river to New Orleans in a skiff.

While living in Henderson he was the victim of a calamity that would have crushed a less undaunted spirit. During a protracted absence he placed for security in the warehouse of a friend, a wooden box containing over two hundred drawings. When he returned and examined his treasures, he found, to use his own words, "that a pair of Norway rats had reared a young family among the bits of paper that a few months ago represented over a thousand inhabitants of the air." The poor artist was overwhelmed at the greatness of the disaster, and days of fever, almost of madness, followed. Then, as he tells us, he took up his gun, his sketch-book and pencil, and sallied forth in the wilderness as gayly as if nothing had happened, consoling himself with the

thought of making better drawings than those he had lost, and in three years had refilled his portfolio. Surely, if Audubon "was not always a hero, he was always a man," nobly illustrating in his checkered life the admirable precepts of James Freeman Clarke: "Take thy self-denial cheerfully, and let the sunshine of thy gladness fall on dark things and light alike—like the smile of the Almighty."

On the death of his father, Commodore Audubon, our artist found himself possessed of an estate in France. This he generously surrendered to his sister Rosa, reserving for himself seventeen thousand dollars in money, which was placed in the hands of a merchant in Richmond, Va., who became insolvent before our unlucky legatee could collect a sou.

Misfortunes now crowded upon him thick and fast. The firm in New Orleans of Audubon & Co., in which all his capital was embarked, failed entirely, and all his enterprises proved disastrous. Bills fell due, creditors were clamorous, and poor Audubon was a

bankrupt. He gave up all he possessed, and with his sick wife, his dog, his gun and his precious drawings he returned to Louisville. "Cast down, but not in despair" his courage mounted to the height of his necessities. Determined, he said, "not to let his wife and children suffer in the abundant land of Kentucky, he began taking portraits in crayon, and acquired some reputation but little money, earning by his art the bare means of subsistence, scarcely more than the wages of a common day laborer. Later he accepted an engagement to stuff birds for the museum in Cincinnati. He spent six months in this labor only to find the college authorities "good promisers, but poor paymasters." In these days of poverty and disappointment he thus writes of his wife: "Her courage never forsook her; her brave, cheerful spirit accepted all, and from her beloved lips no reproach ever wounded my heart. With her was I not always rich?"

Audubon was of a poetic and deeply religious

nature. Though he cared not for creeds he never in his darkest hour lost faith in the wisdom and protection of an overruling Providence. He sought Nature, and found God. To the mind of Hugh Miller the rocks gave testimony of their Great Creator; so to the eye of the naturalist every leaf and flower and bird bore the impress of Divinity.

Audubon's journal gives a pathetic account of his hard struggles, but he never complains. He recalls a day when, traveling on foot with his sons, they stopped at noon to take their scanty meal of bread and apples. "My heart," he says, "was sorely heavy, for I had scarcely enough to keep my dear ones alive; yet through all those dark days I was being led to the development of the talent I loved. One of the most extraordinary things amid all these adverse circumstances was that I never for a day gave up listening to the song of birds, or delineating them—nay, during my deepest troubles I would frequently retire to some secluded spot of the forest, and at the sound of

the song-thrush's melodies have I fallen on my knees and prayed earnestly to Almighty God. This never failed to give me the greatest comfort, and it was often necessary for me to compel myself to return to my fellow-beings."

Audubon now determined upon a lengthened tour throughout the Southern States. Leaving his family in the West he came down the Mississippi river as far as Natchez. Here he took his first lessons in oil painting, and his necessities being great he painted in return for two pairs of boots for himself and an equally needy friend, the portraits of the shoemaker and his wife.

In the summer of 1820 Audubon landed at New Orleans poor and friendless. Here he began as usual, taking portraits that he might live and paint birds. He made many friends, though he was too poor to buy a book to write his journal in. His fortunes varied greatly—one day he was dining with the Governor of the State, the next patiently earning a pittance.

He explored the State, finding in Dr. Trudeau, himself an accomplished ornithologist, a most congenial companion. Together they traversed the forests, the swamps, the islands and bayous,

Audubon using an air-gun in the capture of his smaller birds, as he wished to draw as much as possible from living models; otherwise he placed the bird in position as soon after death as possible before the muscles had relaxed or

the plumage had lost its gloss and brilliancy. He drew and painted with the greatest rapidity, using oils, water colors, pastel and crayon in happy combination, and producing an illuminated effect. To this unique method of painting from "animated nature" he owed the marvelous life-like appearance and position of his birds. They never looked like portraits and were always represented in their native element, engaged in their natural pursuits and surrounded with the foliage, blossoms and fruits peculiar to their haunts. He paid the greatest attention to details, measuring head and bill, eye, tongue and claw of the smallest bird with the utmost accuracy.

At this time, probably, Audubon painted the fine portrait of Dr. Trudeau, which was exhibited at the New Orleans Exposition of 1885. It is taken in a richly embroidered hunting costume of white buckskin presented to the doctor by the Osage Indians. In the background may be seen a burning prairie with the buffaloes retreating from the flames. The

portrait and coloring are both admirable and impart great value to the picture. There are still in existence in New Orleans numerous relics of Audubon, especially among the surviving relatives of his wife, and in the Howard Memorial Library there is a very spirited original drawing of a stag's head. The State Library also boasts of a copy of his greatest ornithological work.

The life of Audubon in Louisiana is of special interest to us, and we take a pardonable pride in the fact that here he obtained the means of accomplishing his ambitious dreams.

After a separation of fourteen months his family rejoined him at his home in Dauphine street, New Orleans, from which they shortly afterward moved to Bayou Sara, where Mrs. Audubon opened a school.

Audubon was greatly delighted with the wild, beautiful scenery around him, in such sudden contrast to the tropical aspect of the lower and alluvial portions of the State. The stately magnolia grandiflora with its fragrant

ASPHODEL, EARLY HOME OF THE AUTHOR, VISITED BY AUDUBON.

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blossoms, the tall yellow poplar, the holly, the beech, the hilly ground, and even the red clay excited his admiration. In his biography he pays a most glowing tribute to the State of his birth, calling it "a favored land where the bounties of nature are in the greatest profusion;" and he speaks of sending to the Zoölogical Garden of London "living animals and plants from the natural gardens of this magnificent Louisiana."

Here he found some of his very finest specimens and his favorite songsters, the wood-thrush and the mocking-bird, both of which he has portrayed in such unfading beauty. Truly it may be said

> "No bird that cleaves the air
> But his revealing thought has made more fair."

After settling in Bayou Sara Audubon determined to devote himself exclusively to his ornithological works. His friends did not hesitate to call him "lunatic," "fool," his wife alone encouraged him.

In 1824 he went to Philadelphia to exhibit

his drawings, which he hoped to publish. He there met Charles Lucien Bonaparte, Prince of Canino and nephew of Napoleon, who was likewise engaged upon a volume of American birds. The prince accorded Audubon most generous praise, but advised him to go abroad for substantial patronage. He also made the acquaintance of Rembrandt Peale, the artist, and of Sully, the great portrait painter, from whom he had some lessons. He was the object of much social attention and admiration, but neither in the Quaker City nor New York did he find the aid or encouragement necessary for the prosecution of his work. "Not only cold water, but *ice* water," he says, "was thrown upon my undertaking." The cost was too great and the drawings were pronounced "too soft" to engrave. Full of despair, he looked to Europe as his only hope. "Cloudy and depressed," he says, "strange to all but the *birds* of America," he started on his homeward journey by way of the Great Lakes. On this journey he saw Niagara for the first time,

was overwhelmed by its grandeur, but refused to "caricature it with his pencil," for he said, "Niagara never has been and never can be painted." Here our poor artist was in great straits, unable even to pay the trifling toll over the bridge to Goat Island. He lived mostly on bread and milk, took deck passage on boats and finally arrived at Bayou Sara "with rent clothes, uncut hair, and altogether looking like a wandering Jew."

He found his wife in receipt of an income of about three thousand dollars a year, which she generously gave her husband to assist him in the publication of his work, and to swell the sum he gave dancing lessons to a large class in Woodville, Miss. A venerable lady of this city was a member of this class and spoke to me only the other day of her fondness for her gentle teacher, and how well she remembered his affectionate admonition when she made a misstep, "De udder foot, my darling." Audubon realized about two thousand dollars from the dancing enterprise and joyfully started

for the Old World in April, 1826, sailing from New Orleans and bearing letters from Henry Clay, Vincent Nolte and other prominent people.

He was well received in Liverpool and Manchester, where he exhibited his drawings, realizing about one hundred pounds sterling. He next proceeded to Edinburgh hoping to find a publisher, and was cordially welcomed as a brother by the scientists and literati of the Scotch metropolis. "All mankind loves a lover" and the warm, earnest enthusiasm of the American artist soon excited a kindred sentiment; writing to his wife he says: "My success in Edinburgh borders on the miraculous." He seems to have received special kindness and attention from Sir Walter Scott, Sir William Jardine and Professor Wilson, the clever and genial "Christopher North." The latter in one of his charming "Noctes Ambrosianæ" speaks of "my friend Audubon's 'Exhibition of Birds' painted to life. Almost the whole American ornithology, true to nature, as if the creatures

were in their native haunts in the forest or by the sea shore—not stiff and staring like stuffed specimens, but in every imaginable characteristic attitude—perched, wading, or a-wing, with not a feather ruffled out of its place; every song, chirp, chatter, or cry made audible by the power of genius. For twelve years the enthusiastic Audubon lived in the remotest woods, journeying to and fro on foot thousands of miles, or sailing on great rivers, great as any seas, with his unerring rifle, slaughtering only to embalm his prey by an art of his own, in form and hue unchangeable; and now for the sum of one shilling may anybody behold the image of the gorgeous and splendid birds of that continent."

"The man is just what you would expect from his works, full of fine enthusiasm and intelligence; most interesting in looks and manner; a perfect gentleman, and esteemed by all who know him for the simplicity and frankness of his nature."

Audubon had at length found an engraver,

but was of necessity his own publisher. He was earning about five pounds sterling daily by the exhibition of his pictures, which the same gifted and generous writer from whom I have just quoted called "a wild and poetic vision of the heart of the New World."

He painted a life-size picture of the wild turkey, and donated it to the Royal Institution of Edinburgh, and another, the size of his thumb nail, which a lady had engraved upon a seal and presented to the artist.

Our naturalist seems to have kept very exalted company. He writes to his wife of visiting the Earl of Merton and the Duke of Northumberland, and tells her "I have taken to dressing twice a day, wear silk stockings and pumps; I wear my hair long as usual. It does as much for me as my paintings. I am féted, feasted, elected honorary member of societies, and am making money by my paintings and exhibitions. It is Mr. Audubon here, Mr. Audubon there, and I can only hope that Mr. Audubon will not be made a conceited fool at last."

Amid all these social and artistic triumphs he was ever mindful of the faithful one across the broad Atlantic, and speaks with touching sentiment of wandering over the hills and gathering flowers where she had played as a child.

In 1827 Audubon issued the prospectus of his grand work, "The Birds of America," and with all the audacity of genius entered upon this colossal undertaking which was to cost one hundred thousand dollars and occupy a period of eight years without the means of paying for the first number, in a strange country and without a single subscriber. In size the work was to be double elephant folio—the figures, life-size, exquisitely colored and engraved on the finest paper. It was to be published in ninety numbers of five plates each, the whole to be included in five volumes. The price of subscription was two hundred pounds sterling, one hundred subscribers were required to cover the expense of publication. The plates numbered four hundred and forty-eight and contained over a thousand life-sized figures.

The best friends of Audubon thought the enterprise hopeless, but he was not to be deterred by obstacles. His heart, he said, was nerved, and his reliance upon that Power on whom all must depend brought bright anticipations of success. The indomitable naturalist now set forth upon a provincial tour seeking subscribers, and canvassed with great success among the aristocracy. He decided to establish himself in London, where he could publish his work more quickly and cheaply, and through the kindness of Sir Thomas Lawrence, president of the Royal Academy, he was enabled to sell his paintings. Thus he obtained the means to pay his engravers, and so passed the Rubicon. In the meantime he had been elected a member of the Royal Society, in alluding to which honor he thus apostrophizes—"So, poor Audubon, if not rich, thou wilt at least be honored and held in esteem among men!"

It was a joyful day when his first number appeared, and later he enthusiastically writes

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"The King!" "My Dear Book!" "Had my work presented to His Majesty, who was pleased to call it fine, and became a subscriber on the usual terms, not as kings generally do, but as a gentleman"

Audubon, however, was destined to pass long years of alternate hope and despair, and ceaseless effort before his heart's desire was realized. During the first four years he lost fifty-six subscribers, representing the sum of fifty-six thousand dollars; and others, like Baron Rothschild, refused to pay. So to advance his fortunes Audubon went to Paris. A wave of home-sickness swept over him as he watched the pigeons in the gardens of the Tuilleries. "Alas!" he cried, "I wish I were in the woods and hard at it. What precious time I am losing in this Europe! When shall I go home?" And now behold the "American Backwoodsman" exhibiting his portfolio in the Academy of Sciences, and listening to the eulogistic report upon his work of the illustrious Baron Cuvier, who pronounced it "the most

magnificent monument which has yet been erected to ornithology;" and said, "when it is completed we shall be obliged to acknowledge that America in magnificence of execution has far surpassed the Old World." The great painter Gerard called him "the King of Ornithological Painters," and said, "we are all children in France. Who could have expected such things from the woods of America?"

Audubon now numbered among his subscribers the King of France and other royal and titled personages. The Czar of Russia presented him a snuff-box set with diamonds as a mark of his imperial appreciation. Leaving his work in the hands of his agents, in 1829, Audubon rejoined his wife in Louisiana after three years' absence; and in the course of a few months returned with her to England.

In 1836 we find Audubon and his family established in London. At this period the Rev. A. Gordon Bakewell, the well-known and well-beloved divine of this city (New Orleans)

was an inmate of the Audubon household; a nephew of Mrs. Audubon, he lived on terms of great intimacy and friendship with his distinguished relatives, and his personal recollections are most interesting. Through him we learn that Audubon was still engaged upon "The Birds of America," assisted by his two sons, and that the work was never remunerative on account of the great expense of its publication. At their house all the celebrities of the day were gathered, attracted by the genius and interesting character of its master, whom Mr. Bakewell describes as remarkably handsome and fascinating in appearance and manner and benevolent in nature. Though Audubon never lost his strong French accent, he both spoke and wrote English with purity and fluency, as may be seen in the "Letter Press" or "Ornithological Biography" which accompanied his great work.

Through the kindness of Mr. Bakewell I am indebted to Miss Eliza M. Audubon, of New York, for several original and unpublished

letters of her grandparents, but these are of so domestic and tender a character that I will extract from them only sparingly. One letter from Mrs. Audubon, dated London, 1836, to her sons at Marseilles, is full of motherly solicitude about "the severe weather and Johnney's flannels." She says their "father is still hard at work, though she has never known him better under so great sedentary employment, and that he had secured the subscriptions, she hopes, of the Duke of Northumberland and the Dublin University. In conclusion, she urges them to take care of themselves in a new and strange country, and commends them to the care of that Being who has hitherto so well protected them, and remains their loving and devoted mother, Lucy Bakewell."

The other letter is one from Audubon to his wife, written 1829, during his first visit to England. In this he relapses into the tender "thee" and "thou" of his sweet mother tongue, and an occasional French idiom. He

addresses her as "My Dearest Friend," and says: "I wrote to thee yesterday by the Mars, bound direct to New Orleans, a long letter, and one also to Victor. Do not think, my sweet wife, that my letter was wrote to thee with any wish to discomfort thee—it may seem to thee of angry tone, but if so, believe me, it is only the constant want of thee I am in; God bless thee—as well as thou—I mean well and sincerely wish thy happiness, so by no means feel hurt if any of the expressions seem harsh."

Audubon goes on to describe his provincial tour, expressed his admiration of the "Minster at York," and his satisfaction in having secured forty-nine subscribers. He gives full details of what he calls "this great work of mine" and his struggles to keep "the machine going." "You may think this is difficult and hazardous as I do," he continues, "but I will act cautiously and rely upon my industry, sobriety and activity, and do thou pray for me. Thou art quite comfortable in Louisiana, I know, therefore wait there with a little

patience. I hope the end of this year will see me under headway sufficient to have thee with me in comfort here, and I need not tell thee I long for thee every hour I am absent from thee. If I fail, America will still be my country, and thou, I will still feel, my friend. I will return to both and forget forever the troubles and expenses I have had when walking together arm in arm, we can see our sons before us and listen to the mellow sounding thrush so plentiful in our woods of magnolia. Be thou happy and well. God bless thee. Thine forever,

Audubon was now absorbed, heart and soul, in the preparation of "the Biography," which established his reputation as a writer of poetic prose. It was complete in five volumes

and involved immense labor. Mrs. Audubon copied it entirely, so as to secure the copyright in the United States.

Not content with dry nomenclature and artificial classification, the author has made his pages fairly glow with eloquent description, thrilling adventure and quaint humor. An able critic pronounces his style "more varied than Irving, more richly colored than Cooper."

A poet no less than an artist, Audubon has the rare gift of investing the most commonplace objects and incidents with romantic interest. Hence, to his rich fancy "the eagle is born sublime, the symbol of courage and grandeur." The mocking-bird is "the king of song;" the blue heron, "the lady of the waters," and the ruby-throated humming-bird "a glittering fragment of rainbow."

He also possessed in a marked degree the faculty that Emerson calls "putting daylight" into his writings, and we seem actually to follow him everywhere—in the solitude of the

forest—across the boundless prairie—and along the rushing waters, from the rock-bound coasts of Labrador to the coral reefs of Florida. We feel the sweep of the winds and hear the surging of the sea; we scent the odor of the grass and flowers; we bask in the golden sunshine and dread the fury of the storm. We see him in the great pine swamp and in his lonely camp, lying on his bear-skin couch, and we envy him his dreamless slumber.

Aububon was the true child of nature. He clasped close the breast of the great mother, heard its mighty throbbings and learned to understand its secrets. "The birds nestled in his heart and sang;" and he heard in his soul the music of their wonderful melodies.

Audubon returned several times to his native land in search of new material. He traveled everywhere under governmental protection, not only of the United States but of England.

A prophet not "without honor in his own country," he was everywhere received with distinguished attention. Honors and diplomas


Audubon Park

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were showered upon him. President Jackson invited him to dine *en famille* at the White House, and he enjoyed the cordial friendship of such men as Washington Irving and Daniel Webster.

In 1839 Audubon left England for the last time. After twelve anxious years his great work was finished and everywhere admired and appreciated, though it did not altogether escape the attacks of the critics, some of whom said savagely that "the American drew a long bow," while others contended that he was more of "a woodsman than a scientist." However, "it is easier," as Disraeli says, "to be critical than to be correct," and time has only increased the value and popularity of "The Birds of America," while its critics are forgotten.

He settled in New York and immediately commenced upon a smaller and cheaper edition of his work, so as to place it within the reach of every lover of nature and science. It was an exact copy of his English publication

with the figures reduced and lithographed, and was complete in seven volumes octavo. It proved remunerative, and with the proceeds he bought a lovely home on the Hudson, at Washington Heights, which he called Minniesland for his wife, whose pet name was Minnie. Here, within the bosom of his family, surrounded by faithful friends, in the full enjoyment of his labors and the rich fruition of his hopes, he was able to say "I lift my grateful eyes to the Supreme Being and feel that I am happy."

But his active spirit could not remain idle and he devoted himself with his usual energy to increasing and improving his drawings of the "Quadrupeds of America," a work he had long projected in connection with Dr. Bachman, of Charleston, South Carolina.

This work, he felt, would be his last, and was not finished till after his death, by his sons. It is considered by some superior to his "Birds." With this new enterprise in view, he labored incessantly, rising at day-

break and painting till dark for days while the fit was on him; then, if dissatisfied with his work, he would impatiently throw aside easel, brush, and paints, and rush into the woods.

It is difficult to realize this contrast in the nature of the man who has been known to lie patiently on his back, the moss serving for his only pillow, every day for three weeks watching two little birds build their nests!

Audubon gathered about him a number of wild animals, bears, deer, wolves, and others less attractive. Luckily, his devotion to science seems to have paralyzed his sense of smell, for he endured without flinching, while he painted them, the terrible odor of the American polecat and a turkey-buzzard in the last stages of decomposition; but such models banished for a time the female portion of his family. He was greatly assisted in his "Quadrupeds" by his two sons John and Victor, both of whom were excellent artists, and the constant companions of their father's later wanderings.

In 1843 Audubon started upon his last and grandest journey, hoping to realize his long cherished dream of exploring the great plains and mountains of the "Far West," and seeing with his own eyes the buffaloes and other animals whose habits had never been described. He was absent about eight months and penetrated as far as the Yellowstone river. Then feeling the infirmities of age stealing upon him, he was induced to return when almost in sight of the Rockies. They were his Carcassonne! He never saw them,—never knew that one of their loftiest peaks, Mount Audubon, would forever rear its snow-crowned summit in the light of heaven—an everlasting monument from Nature to Genius.

For three years after Audubon's return from the West he lived a life of tranquil happiness. He had attained "the heights where lies repose," though he still pursued the work he loved, drawing and painting at intervals every day. It is pleasant to picture our artist in the mellow sunset of his life, within the charmed

circle of his home singing to his grandchildren the gay little French songs of his youth, or wandering among his picturesque grounds by the river side, where the deer and elk roamed

free, unstartled at his approach, and listening to the music of his beloved birds.

Many friends and admirers came to pay him homage at Minniesland, among them Agassiz, and Parke Godwin, who thus describes the master: "A tall, thin man with high arched forehead and serene brow and bright penetrating

gray eyes. His white locks fell upon his shoulders, but were the only sign of age, as his form was as erect and his step as light as a deer. The expression of his face was sharp and commanding, and there was something in it that made you think of the imperial eagle." Another visitor, "impressed," as he says, "with the unconscious greatness of the man; his childlike tenderness and enthusiasm, and the sweet unity that existed between him and his wife," reverently said to him at parting: "I have seen Audubon and I am very thankful." "You have seen only a poor old man," was the reply. Audubon was not then seventy, but a life like his can not be measured by years.

A great sorrow came upon him in the failure of his sight, and when the once brilliant eyes, even with the aid of glasses, could no longer find a focus on the canvas, his heart seemed broken. From that time his wife never left him; she read to him, walked with him, and toward the last she fed him. Then, too, his health declined and mental darkness fell upon

him. For many months he groped in a sort of twilight obscurity until the night of death came, January 29, 1851. At the last hour his dying eyes took on their old lustre and looked recognition at the dear ones around him as he peacefully passed away.

> "Oh, tired heart, thou hast the best
> That Heaven itself could give thee, rest."

The life of Audubon is best known through the touching and admirable memoir written by his widow. With a truthful and sympathetic pen she well interprets the personal and artistic nature of the man.

His works live after him, and are now extremely valuable and rare owing to the original plates having been destroyed by fire. At a recent sale in London a copy of his life-size illustrations sold for $2500.

Nowhere has Audubon been more appreciated than in his own country. Many of his original drawings have been mounted, and are now in possession of the New York Historical Society. In April, 1893, a splendid

monument in honor of the great ornithologist was unveiled in the city of New York in the presence of his granddaughters and a large number of prominent people. The monument is in the form of a runic cross, it is twenty feet high and stands in Trinity Church Cemetery over the spot where Audubon and his sons lie buried, and within sight of his old home on the Hudson.

Here in New Orleans we have as yet only our beautiful Audubon Park to perpetuate his name; but, we trust, the day is not far distant when among its grand old live oaks and near the mighty river he loved, patriotic hands will place a noble statue in bronze of the Great Naturalist of Louisiana, a familiar figure, as he was in life, in hunter's dress with dog and gun by his side. Let it be the pride of the women of New Orleans, with whom "to will is to do," both to undertake and to accomplish this long-delayed tribute to the memory and genius of Audubon.

ADDENDA.

Mandeville, mentioned in the early part of this work as the probable birth place of Audubon, is an ancient and picturesque village on Lake Pontchartrain, within easy distance of New Orleans. Popular tradition there locates the house still standing, where the naturalist was born, and claims that it once formed a portion of the historic residence where Louis Philippe was entertained with such magnificent hospitality by Mandeville de Marigny, a wealthy and aristocratic creole, and which was called "Fontainebleau" by the royal exile in memory of his beloved France.

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DESIGN SUGGESTED FOR STATUE TO BE ERECTED IN AUDUBON PARK.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL.

I have thought it well to add a few notes on the printed works of Audubon.

His "Birds of America" occupies a unique position among the valuable books of natural history. Originally published in eighty-seven parts, each containing five plates, it was later put into the final form of four volumes, elephant folio, in a solid binding with red morocco back. The workmanship of printer and binder are both worthy of the subject, and the value of the book steadily increases. The finest complete set of the plates in existence is unbound, and was sold by Sotheran, the celebrated bookseller, in London, in 1893, for the sum of four thousand dollars. The bound copies, according to condition, are now worth from $1500 to $2500 a set.

The text to this edition, entitled "Ornithological Biography," was published separately

between the years 1831 and 1839 by the firm of A. & C. Black in Edinburg in five volumes, large octavo.

In this work Audubon with scientific exactness, though in simple and at times naïve language, recounts the history of the capture of the specimens which were the models of his pictures. He gives also in some of the chapters most entertaining descriptions of the many curious episodes of his wandering life on the then frontiers of civilization, thus preserving and handing down to us the memories of the pioneers and backwoodsmen of North America, together with the modes and customs which have passed away with them.

A selection of 140 plates of the birds of smaller folio size reproduced in colored lithographs was published by his sons in 1861.

The first edition of the "Quadrupeds of America," of the same size as the "Birds" (elephant folio), was published in co-operation with J. Bachman, between 1845 and 1854, in three volumes—usually bound in two. It contains 150 plates.

The original octavo edition of the "Birds" was published in 1840. In it the plates are reduced in size and increased to 500 in number by the separation of a few species which in the larger work appeared on the same plate.

It is extremely desirable for both private and public libraries to possess the ten volumes royal octavo of "Birds" and "Quadrupeds," the latter of which was published in 1849. They are now worth from $150 to $250.

Chronological Conspectus.

Birds of America, original elephant folio, 4 vols., 1827–39.

Quadrupeds, original folio, 3 vols., folio, 1845–51.

Ornithological Biography, 5 vols, 8vo., 1831–39.

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Birds of America, 140 plates, 1 vol., fo., 1819, with 4 vols. text.

Synopsis of the Birds of North America, 1 vol., 8vo., 1839.

Birds of America, orig. 8vo., 7 vols., 1840-44.

Quadrupeds of America, 8vo., 3 vols., with 500 plates, 1849-54.

Birds of America, later editions in 8vo., in 7 vols., 1856, 1861, 1893; in 8 vols., 1865, 1871.