

SHORT STORY AMERICA

THE MARRIAGE BLUNDER

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

I HAVE never been able to understand the peculiar significance of the old and often-quoted maxim that matches are made in heaven, as if Providence had more to do with our marriages, and we ourselves less, than with the other enterprises and acts of our lives. The truth is that nothing we do is transacted with more deliberation than our matrimonial engagements. The talk about rashness, precipitancy, and blindness in the parties between whom the union is formed is all cant, and cant of the most ancient and stale kind. I wonder it is not exploded in an age when old theories and long-established opinions are thrown aside with as little ceremony or remorse as a grave-digger shovels up the bones and dust of past generations.

In almost every marriage that takes place, the bridegroom has passed by many a fair face before he has made his final selection, and the bride refused many a wooer. The parties are united after a courtship generally of months; the fair one defers the day of the nuptials from mere maiden coyness, and the lover must have time to provide her a habitation. Religious ceremonies, the forms of law, the preparations for the festivity of the occasion, all interpose their numerous delays. Even where the parties have nothing to do with the matter themselves, it is managed with great reflection and contrivance, with negotiations warily opened and skilfully conducted on the part of their relations. Why, the very making of these matches, which the proverb so flippantly affirms to be made without our agency constitutes nearly half the occupation of civilized society. For this the youth applies himself diligently to the making of his fortune; for this the maiden studies the graces and accomplishments of her sex. I have known persons who for years never thought of any other subject. I have known mothers who for years made it the business of their lives to settle their daughters. The premeditation of matrimony influences all the fashions, amusements, and employments of mankind. What a multitude of balls and parties and calls and visits and journeys are owing to this fruitful cause! What managing and manoeuvring, what dressing and dancing, what patching and painting, how much poetry and, eke, how much prose, what quantities of music and conversation and criticism and scandal and civility that otherwise would never have had an existence!

The result justifies the supposition of deliberation, and most marriages are accordingly made with sufficient wisdom. Talk of the risk undertaken by the candidate for the happiness of conjugal life! The man who marries is not so often cheated as the man who buys a horse, even when the bargain is driven for him by the most knowing jockey. Few are unfortunate in a wife. Marriages are comfortable and respectable things the world over, with a few exceptions. Ill-natured people torment each other, it is true, but if they were not married they would torment somebody else, unless they retired to a hermitage; while, on the other hand, good tempers are improved by the domestic affections which the married state calls forth. If marriage happened to a man without his knowledge or consent; if it came upon one unexpectedly, like a broken leg, or a fever, or a legacy from a rich relation, or a loss by a broken bank; if young men and young women were to lay their heads on their pillows in celibacy and wake the next morning in wedlock; if one were to have no voice in the selection of a wife, but were obliged to content himself with one chosen for him by lot – there would, I grant, be some propriety in the maxim I have mentioned. But in a matter which is the subject of so much discussion and deliberation as marriage, not only on the part of the youth and damsel but of all friends and acquaintances, and which is hedged round with so many forms and ceremonies, it is nonsense to talk of any particular fatality.

I recollect but two instances of people being coupled together not only without their knowledge or consent, but without even that of their friends. The marriages took place on the same day, in the same church, and from the misery in which the parties lived it might be inferred that the matches were made anywhere else but in heaven. I will relate the story, as it is rather a curious one, though, I admit, not at all romantic. I would make it more so, if in my power, for the gratification of certain persons whose fair hands will turn these pages, but I have no skill in embellishing plain matters of fact.

Some years since, when I was at Natchitoches, on the banks of the Red River, I became acquainted with a French cotton planter of the name of La Ruche, whose house stood at a little distance from the village. He was a lively, shrivelled old gentle-man, dried almost to a mummy by seventy hot Louisiana summers, with a head as white as snow but a step as light as that of the deer he hunted. He loved to tell of old times, of the adventures of his youth, and of the history of his contemporaries and the country. The novelty of these subjects stimulated my curiosity and kindled my imagination, and it may readily be supposed that he found me a most willing listener. For this quality of mine he took a vehement liking to me and used to invite me to his plantation, where he would keep me, in spite of all my excuses, for days together.

La Ruche was the descendant of one of the early settlers of Louisiana, the younger son of an ancient Gascon family who came out with La Harpe in the early part of the eighteenth century and [was] made one of the colony which he led to the banks of the Red River. The father of my friend, a wealthy planter, had sent him in his youth to be educated at Paris. After an absence of six years, in which he acquired a competent share of the graces and intelligence of that polished capital, he returned to complete his education in a different school, and one better suited to the

state of the country at that period. He exchanged his silk breeches for leathern ones and learned to navigate the immense rivers of this region, to traffic and hold talk with the Indians, to breed and train packs of hounds, to manage the spirited horses of the country, to pursue and kill the deer in the merry and noisy hunt by torchlight, and to bring down the fiercer bear and panther. Once he had penetrated overland to Mexico. Three times he had guided a skiff through the difficult channels of the Great Raft, as it is called, of the Red River, thirty leagues to the north of Natchitoches, where for eighty miles in length it drains an immense extent of country, overlaying it with huge trunks of trees, above which wave the dwarf willows and gaudy March flowers, and around and under which creep sluggishly the innumerable and intricate currents.

My friend loved to make me ride out with him, and I believe he did it partly from a motive of vanity, that I might see how much better a horseman he was than I. We were commonly mounted on two fine mares of the Andalusian breed, fleet, spirited, with prominent veins and eyes that shot fire like those of an Andalusian lady. Such rides as we had in the charming month of October! – for charming it is in every region of North America. We crossed the blood-colored stream of the Red River and visited the noble prairies between it and the Washita. Let no man talk to me of the beautiful rural scenery of the Old World; I have seen it; it is beauty on a small scale, in miniature, in little spots and situations; but if he would see beauty in its magnificence and vastness – beauty approaching to sublimity, yet not losing but rather heightening its own peculiar character – let him visit the prairies of our southwestern country; let him contemplate the long, sweeping curve of primeval forest with which they are bordered, where the huge, straight, columnar trunks are wound with gigantic, blossoming vines and upheave to an immense grassy ocean spread before him; on the innumerable gorgeous flowers that glow like gems among the verdure; on the clumps of towering trees planted over them at pleasant distances, as if for bowers of refreshments; and the immense rivers draining territories large enough for empires, by which they are often bounded at one extremity. Here the features of the earth are in unison with those of heaven; with the sky of tenderest blue, the edge of whose vast circle comes down seemingly into the very grass; with the wind that bends all those multitudes of flowers in one soft but mighty respiration, and with the great sun that steps the whole in his glory.

But the scene of my story lies on the western side of the Red River, and I have no excuse for lingering thus between that stream and the Washita, save the surpassing amenity of these gardens of God, for such they are, laid out and planted and beautified.

One day I rode out with my ancient host toward the Rio Hondo, a small river wandering through dark forests in a deep channel, up to which the Spanish government formerly claimed when they extended their pretensions to the west of the Sabine. “There,” said Ruche, pointing to a placid sheet of water over whose borders hung the peach-leaved willows of the country, “there is the Spanish Lake, and in a little time we shall be in the old Spanish town of Adayes, about ten miles distant from Natchitoches. This country is the ancient debatable ground on which the two rival colonies of France and Spain met and planted their first settlement by the side of each other.” A little farther on my companion gave a wave of his hand. “There,” said he, “is Adayes.

The inhabitants are a good sort of people – simple, hospitable, bigoted, and ignorant – but look well to that pretty silver-mounted riding whip of yours, or you may chance not to carry it back with you.” I looked, and saw a cluster of tall, clumsy houses, plastered on the outside with mud, which, peeling off in many places, showed the logs of which they were built.

We entered the town at a round pace, and then, checking our horses, passed slowly through it. The inhabitants were sitting at their doors or loitering about in the highway, for the weather had that soft, golden, autumnal serenity which makes one impatient of being anywhere but in the open air. We entered into conversation with them; they spoke nothing but Spanish, but when I looked in their faces and remarked the strong aboriginal cast of features and the wild blackness of the eye in many of them, I expected every moment to be saluted in Cherokee or Choctaw. La Ruche directed my attention to their place of worship, which stood in the centre of the village. “Look at that little church,” said he, “built far back in the last century. It has four bells, two or three of which are cracked, and on the religious festivals they express the public joy in the most horrid jangle you ever heard. The walls of the interior are adorned with several frightful daubs of renowned saints which assist the devotions of the worshippers. Note it well, I beg of you, for you are to hear a story about it to-day at dinner.”

We left the village and the lazy people that loitered about its old dwellings. On our way to Natchitoches we passed a fine cotton plantation, to which my friend called my particular attention. The mansion of the proprietor, with three sharp, parallel roofs and a piazza in front, stood embowered in shade, its stuccoed walls of a yellowish color gleaming through the deep-green leaves of the catalpa and the shivering foliage of the China-tree. Back of it stood, in a cluster, the comfortable-looking cottages of the negroes, built of cypress timber, before which the young, woolly-headed imps of the plantation were gambolling and whooping in the sun. Still farther back lay a confused assemblage of pens, from some of which were heard the cries and snuffing of swine; and around them all was a great enclosure for the reception of cattle, in which I saw goats walking and bleating, and geese gabbling to each other and hissing at two or three dogs that moved surlily among them. My companion stopped his horse and called my notice to a couple of fine trees of the buttonwood species, or sycamore, as they are called in the western country, planted near each other before the principal door of the house. They had not yet attained their full size, and swelled with a lustiness and luxuriance of growth that bespoke the majesty and loftiness they were yet destined to attain. My friend gave me to understand that there was some romantic association connected with these trees. “*Ce sont les monumens d’un pour et tendre amour du bon vieux temps,*” said he, laying his hand on his heart and looking as pathetically as a Frenchman can do – but you shall hear more about it, as well as about the little old church when we are more at leisure.”

That day my venerable friend dined with more conviviality than usual. He made me taste his Chateau Margaux, his Medoc, his Lafitte, etc. – for these planters keep a good stock of old wines in their cellars – and insisted on my doing him reason in a glass of champagne. I had never seen him in such fine spirits. He told me anecdotes of the French court at the close of the reign of Louis

XVI and the beginning of that of his successor, and sang two or three vaudevilles in a voice that was but slightly cracked and with a sharp monotony of note. His eyes sparkled from beneath his gray eyebrows, to speak fancifully, like a bright fountain from under frost-work, and I thought I could detect a faint tinge of red coming out upon his parchment cheek like the bloom of a second youth. Suddenly he became grave. "My friend," said he, solemnly, rising and reaching forward his glass and touching the brim to mine, as is the custom of the country.

I rose also, involuntarily, awed by the earnest gravity of his manner.

"My friend, let us pledge the memory of a most excellent man, now no more, the late worthy curate of Adayes and my ancient friend, Baltazar Polo!" I did as I was requested.

"Sit down, Mr. Herbert," said the old man when he had emptied his glass; "sit down, I pray you," said he with an air which instantly showed me that he had recovered his vivacity, "and I will tell you a pleasant story about that same Baltazar Polo. I have been keeping it for you all day.

"Baltazar Polo was a native of Valencia, in old Spain, and I have heard him boast that old Gil Polo, who wrote the *Diana Enamorada*, was of the family of his ancestors. He was educated at the university of Saragossa. Some unfortunate love affair in early life having given him a distaste for the vanities of the world, he entered into holy orders, quitted the country of his ancestors, came to New Mexico, and wandered to the remote and solitary little settlement of Adayes, where he sat himself down to take care of the souls and bodies of the simple inhabitants. He was their curate, doctor, and school-master. He taught the children their *aves* and, if willing, their alphabet, said mass, helped the old nurses to cure the bilious fever, proposed riddles to the young people, and played with them at forfeits and blind-man's-buff. There his portrait hangs just before you – look at it, Herbert – a good-looking man, was he not?"

"It is a round, honest, jolly face," said I, and not devoid of expression. There is a becoming clerical stoop in the shoulders, and his eyes are so prominent that my friend Spurzheim would set him down for a great proficient in the languages. But there is a blemish in the left eye, if I am not mistaken."

"It was put out by a blow from an angry Castilian, whom he had accidentally jostled in the streets of Madrid and whom he was coaxing to be quiet. He was the gentlest and most kindly officious of human beings, full of good intentions, and ever attempting good works, though not always successfully. He was very absent, and so near-sighted with the only eye he had that his sphere of vision was actually, I believe, limited to the circle of a few inches. These defects kept him continually playing at a game of cross-purposes; and, if the tranquil and sleepy lives of the people of Adayes had ever been disturbed by any tendency to waggery, they might have extracted infinite amusement from his continual blunders. I have known him to address a negro with an exhortation intended for his master, recommending courtesy to his inferiors, and good treatment and indulgence to his slaves, enlarging upon the duty of allowing them wholesome food and comfortable clothing, and of letting them go at large during the holidays. I doubt whether this black rogue was much the better for this good counsel. The next moment, perhaps, he would accost the lazy proprietor himself with a homily on the duty of obedience and alacrity in labor. He

would expostulate feelingly with some pretty natural coquette of the village (whose only pride was in her own graceful shape, lustrous eyes, and crimson petticoat, and whose only ambition was to win the heart of some young beau from Natchitoches) on the folly of staking her last rag at a gaming-table; and I once heard of his lecturing an unshaven, barefooted, shirtless old Spaniard in a poncho and tattered pair of breeches, the only ones he had in the world, on the wickedness of placing his affections on the vanities of dress.

“But, alas! there were no wags in that primitive little village, and there was no wit. The boys never stuffed with gunpowder the segars which the worthy Valencian used to smoke after dinner, nor did the men, to make him drunk, substitute brandy for the wholesome *vino tinto* of which, from mere absence of mind, he would sometimes, in the company of his friends, partake rather too genially. They never thought of making any man’s natural oddities of manner or peculiarities of temper the subject of merriment, any more than the cut of his face. If ever they laughed, it was at what would excite the laughter of children – at palpable, rustic jokes and broad effrontery at the Punchinello, as the Spaniards call Punch, from Mexico, and at the man from New Orleans who pulled so many yards of ribbon from his mouth. On the contrary, they had as high an opinion of the Reverend Father Polo’s sagacity as they justly had of his goodness. Whenever there was anything in his conduct which puzzled them, as was often the case, they ascribed it to some reason too deep for scrutiny, and only became the more confirmed in their notion of his unfathomable wisdom. Far from comprehending any ridicule on the subject of his mistakes, they would look grave, shake their solemn Spanish heads, and say they would warrant Father Polo knew very well what he was about. This confidence in his superior understanding, fortunately, served to counteract in a good degree the effects of his continual mistakes. But it was not only among the people of Adayes that he was loved and respected. The neighboring French planters found in him an agreeable and instructive companion and were glad of a pretext to detain him a day or two at their houses; nor was his reputation confined to this neighborhood alone, for I remember to have heard my friend Antonio de Sedilla, the venerable bishop of Louisiana, speak of him as a man of great learning and piety, and once in my presence the benevolent Polydras took occasion to extol his humanity.

“At the time of which I am speaking, the prettiest maiden of Adayes was Teresa Paccard, the daughter of a Frenchman who had taken a wife of Spanish extraction and settled in the village. Teresa inherited much of the vivacity of our nation and was likewise somewhat accomplished, for her father had made her learn a tolerable stock of phrases in his native language and often took her to visit the families of the French planters; and the good Baltazar had taught her to read. At the age of sixteen she was an orphan, without fortune, and, but for the hospitality of her neighbors, without a home.

“Not far from the village lived a young Frenchman who had emigrated thither from the broad, airy plains of the Ayoyelles, some hundred miles down the Red River, where he had followed the occupation of a herdsman. He had grown weary of watching the immense droves of cattle and horses belonging to others, and having collected a little money, emigrated to the parish of

Natchitoches, bought a few acres, and established himself in the more dignified condition of a proprietor, with his old father, in a rude cabin swarming with a family of healthy brothers and sisters. Richard Lemoine, then in his twentieth year, was one of the handsomest men of the province, notwithstanding his leathern doublet and small-clothes, the dress of the prairies. He was of Norman extraction, fair-haired, blue-eyed, ruddy in spite of the climate, broad-shouldered, large-limbed, with a pair of heavy Teutonic wrists, of a free port and frank speech, and such a horseman is seldom seen. He saw Teresa – ”

“And fell in love, of course,” said I, interrupting my host.

“And fell in love, of course,” resumed he; “and Teresa was not averse to his addresses. They first agreed to be married, and then the young lady consulted Baltazar Polo.

“ ‘Yes, my daughter,’ said he, ‘with all my heart. The young man is not rich, to be sure – and you are poor; but you are both industrious and virtuous; you love each other, I suppose, and I ought not to prevent you from being happy.’

“About the same time another courtship, not quite so tender, perhaps, but more prudent and well considered, was going on between a couple of maturer age and more easy circumstances. You cannot have forgotten the thrifty-looking plantation I showed you this morning, and the neat mansion with the two young sycamores before its door. There lived at the period of my story, and there had lived for eighteen years before, Madame Labedoyere, the widow of a rich planter, childless, and just on the verge of forty. She was a country-woman of yours, an Anglo-American lady, whom Labedoyere found in one of your Atlantic cities – poor, proud, and pretty – and transplanted to the banks of the Red River to bear rule over himself and his household, while he contented himself with ruling his field negroes. The honest man, I believe, found her a little more inclined to govern than he had expected, but after a short struggle for his independence, in which he discovered that her temper was best when she was suffered to take her own way, he submitted, with that grace so characteristic of our nation, to what he could not remedy, endured the married state with becoming resignation, and showed himself a most obedient and exemplary husband.

“Ten years passed away in wedlock, at the end of which my friend Labedoyere regained his liberty by departing for another world, where I trust he received the reward of his patience. Eight years longer his lady dwelt in solitary widow-hood as the sole inheritor of Labedoyere’s large estates; and the features of the demure maiden had settled into that of the imperious matron – a full, square face, dark, strong eyebrows, and steady, bold, black eyes, while her once sylph-like figure had rounded into a dignified and comfortable corpulency, and her light, youthful step been exchanged for the stately and swimming gate of a duchess.

“This lady had contrived to receive the addresses of a rich old Frenchman, who lived two or three miles distant from her home, and still farther from the spot where the young Richard Lemoine had established himself with his old parents and their numerous progeny. Monsieur Du Lac was a little old gentle-man of sixty years of age, an inveterate hypochondriac, and the most fretful and irritable being imaginable, with a bilious, withered face, an under-lip projecting so as

to be the most conspicuous feature of his countenance, and the corners of his mouth drawn down with a perpetual grimace of discontent. No subject could be more unpromising for a woman of the disposition of Madame Labedovere, but she was weary of having nobody but a servant to govern; besides, she was a lady of spirit, and felt herself moved by a noble ambition of taming so intractable a creature as Monsieur Du Lac. She therefore began to treat him with extreme civility and deference, inquired with the tenderest interest the state of his health, sent him prescriptions for his maladies and good things from her well-stored pantry, and whenever they met, accosted him with her mildest words and softest accents and chastised the usual terrors of her eyes into a cat-like sleepiness and languor of look. The plan succeeded: the old gentleman's heart was taken by surprise; he reflected how invaluable would be the attentions, the skill, and the sympathy of so kind a friend and so accomplished a nurse as Madame Labedovere in the midst of his increasing infirmities. He studied a few phrases of gallantry, and offered her his hand, which, after a proper show of coyness, hesitation, and deliberation on a step so important to the lady's happiness, was accepted.

“Thus matters were arranged between the mature and between the youthful lovers: they were to be married and to be happy, and honest Baltazar Polo, the favorite of both young and old for leagues around, was to perform the marriage ceremony. The courtship of both couples had been in autumn, and now the chilly and frosty month of January was over and the rains of February had set in, flooding the roads and swelling the streams to such a degree that nobody could think of a wedding until finer weather. The weary rains of February passed away also, and the sun of March looked out in the heavens. March is a fine month in our climate, whatever it may be in yours, Mr. Herbert. It brings bright, pleasant days and soft airs – now and then, it is true, a startling thunder-shower, but, then, such a magnificence of young vegetation, such a glory of flowers, over all the woods and the earth! You have not yet seen the spring in Louisiana, Mr. Herbert, and I assure you it is a sight worth a year's residence in the country.

“March, as I told you, had set in; the planters began to intrust to the ground the seeds of cotton and maize; fire-flies were seen to twinkle in the evening, and the dog-wood to spread its large, white blossoms, and the crimson tufts of the red-bud to burst their winter sheaths, and the azalea and yellow jasmine and a thousand other brilliant flowers – which you shall see if you stay with us till spring – flaunted by the borders of the streams and filled the forests with intense fragrance, and the prairies were purple with their earliest blossoms. Spring is the season of new plans and new hopes – the time for men and birds to build new habitations and marry – the time for those who are declining to the grave with sickness and old age to form plans for long years to come. I myself, amid the freshness and youthfulness of nature and the elasticity of the air at this season, white as my hair is, sometimes forget that I am old and almost think I shall live forever. Monsieur Du Lac grew tenderer as the sun mounted higher, the air blew softer, and the forest looked greener; he became impatient for the marriage-day, and entreated the widow to defer their mutual happiness no longer.

“ ‘Ah, my dear madame!’ said the withered old gentle-man in a quaking falsetto voice, ‘let us gather the flowers of existence before they are faded; let us enjoy the spring of life!’ It was impossible for the gentle widow to resist such ardent solicitation, and she consented that the nuptial rights should be delayed no longer.

“Nearly at the same time that this tender scene was passing, Richard Lemoine also, in phrases less select but by no means less impassioned, pressed the lovely Teresa, and not in vain, to a speedy union. But it was already near the close of the carnival, and but two or three days intervened before the commencement of Lent – that long, melancholy fast in which, for the space of forty days, the Catholic Church forbids the happy ceremony of marriage. I have often thought that, if the observances of our Church had been regulated with a particular view to the climate of Louisiana, the fast of Lent would have been put a month or two earlier in the calendar, but I am no divine, and do not presume to give my profane opinion upon this delicate and sacred subject. Neither did the four lovers; but it was agreed by them all that they could not possibly wait until Lent was over, and the only alternative was to be married before it began.

“In the mean time, it seemed as if all the inhabitants of the parish of Natchitoches who had the misfortune to be single had formed the resolution of entering into the state of wedlock before the carnival ended. They came flocking in couples – of various nations, ages, and complexions – to the church of Adayes to be married by the good Baltazar Polo; and that year was long afterward remembered in the parish of Natchitoches under the name of *l’an des noces* – ‘the year of weddings.’

“ ‘Do you know, Richard,’ said Teresa to her lover, on his proposing that the wedding ceremony should take place the next day, ‘do you know that Father Polo has promised, on the day after to-morrow, which is the last day of the carnival, to begin at four o’clock in the morning and to marry at the same mass all who shall present themselves at the church of Mayes? It is so awkward to be married with everybody staring at one, but if we are married in company with a dozen others, they cannot laugh at us, you know. Let it, therefore, be the day after to-morrow, dear Richard, and as early in the morning as you please, for the earlier we go to the church, the darker it will be, and I should like, of all things, to be married in the dark.’ Richard could not but assent to so reasonable a proposal, and departed to make his little arrangements at home for the reception of his bride.

“It is somewhat remarkable that Madame Labedoyere, notwithstanding she was as little liable to the charge of excessive timidity and superfluous coyness as any of her sex, should also have insisted on being married on the morning of the last day of the carnival. Her gallant and venerable suitor contended most tenderly and perseveringly against this proposal, urging the propriety of their being united in broad daylight with the decorum and ceremonies proper to the occasion, but he was forced to yield the point at last, as the lady declared that, unless the marriage took place at the time she proposed, it must be delayed until after Lent, and to this alternative Monsieur Du Lac was too gallant and impatient a lover to agree. I believe that Madame was sensible of the queer figure her withered, weak-legged, and sour-visaged Adonis

would make as principal in a marriage ceremony, and was willing he should escape observation among the crowd of bridegrooms whom she expected the last day of the carnival would bring to the church of Adayes.

“At length the day arrived. At half-past three in the morning the sexton threw open the doors of the little log church and awoke the village with a most furious and discordant peal on the cracked bells. The good Baltazar Polo appeared at the appointed hour, and the building began to fill with the candidates for matrimony and their relatives. Couple came flocking in after couple. Here you might see, by the light of the lanterns which the negroes stood holding at the door, a young fellow in a short cloak and broad-brimmed palmetto hat and feathers, with a face in which were mingled the features of Spain with those of the aborigines, walking with an indifferent and listless air and supporting a young woman whose rounder and more placid, though not less dark, countenance was half covered by the manto or thick Spanish veil, which, however, was not drawn so closely over her forehead as to hide the cluster of natural blossoms she had gathered that morning and placed there. There you might see a simpering fair one, with a complexion somewhat too rosy for our climate, and a wreath of artificial flowers in her hand, stepping briskly into the church on pointed toe, leaning on the arm of her betrothed, whose liveliness of look and air needed not the help of his cocked hat and powdered locks and long-skirted coat of sky-blue to tell he was a Frenchman. In others, you might remark a whimsical blending of costume, and a perplexing amalgamation of the features of different races that denoted their mixed origin. Nearly all came protected with ample clothing against the inclemency of the weather, which, lately mild and serene, had changed during the course of the night to cold and damp, with a strong wind driving across the sky vast masses of vapor of a shadowy and indistinct outline.

“Fourteen couples at length took their place in the nave of the church in two opposite rows, with a sufficient space between them for the priest to pass in performing the marriage ceremony. Back of these rows stood the friends and relations of the parties, waiting for the moment when the rites should be concluded, to conduct the brides to the homes of the bridegrooms. The interior of the church was dimly lighted by two wax tapers that stood on the altar. A storm was evidently rising without: the sky seemed to grow darker every moment as the day advanced, the wind swept in gusts round the building and rushed in eddies through the open door, waving the flame of the tapers to and fro. As the flickering light played over the walls, it showed on one side of the altar a picture of our Lady of Grief, La Virgen de los Dolores, the very caricature of sorrow, and on the other a representation of the holy St. Anthony tempted by evil spirits, in which the painter’s ingenuity had been exerted so successfully as to puzzle the most sagacious spectator to tell which was the ugliest, the saint or the devils – or, indeed, to distinguish the devils from the saint. Farther off were one or two other pictures, whose grim and shadowy faces, in the imperfect and unsteady glare of the tapers, seemed to frown suddenly on the walls, and then as suddenly shrink into the shade. The horses which the company rode – and which stood about the door, held by negroes or fastened to posts and saplings – pawed and neighed, and champed their huge Spanish bits, as if to give their riders notice of the approaching tempest.

Father Polo saw, or rather was informed by the friends of the parties, that there was no time to be lost if he intended that the brides should reach their new habitations that morning in comfort and safety. He therefore passed between the rows of the betrothed, performing the ceremony rapidly as he went, and handing over each of the ladies, as he put the wedding-ring on her finger, to the friends of her husband, who conducted her out of the church. Close together stood Monsieur Du Lac and Richard Lemoine, and opposite them, Madame Labedoyere and Teresa Paccard. The latter were both in cloaks, a circumstance sufficient in itself to cause them to be mistaken for each other by a person so absent and near-sighted as Baltazar Polo. He put the ring of Monsieur Du Lac on the hand of Teresa Paccard, and that of Richard Lemoine on the hand of Madame Labedoyere, and as they drew their cloaks over their faces, preparing to face the wind without, handed them to those whom he supposed to be the friends of their respective spouses. Madame Labedoyere was given in charge to the relatives of Lemoine. They placed her on a fleet horse, brought by the young man from the Avoyelles, and went off at a quick pace, attended by two or three of his brothers and sisters. Teresa was seated on a soft-footed, ambling nag, bought by Du Lac expressly for the use of his widow, and departed in company with an old planter, a cousin of Du Lac, a negro who rode after them on horseback, and three or four more who trotted on foot behind them.

“In consequence of the high wind, the roaring of the woods, and the haste made to escape the storm, there was little conversation between the brides and their attendants, and nothing occurred to make them suspect the mistake until they reached the habitations of the bridegrooms.

“Teresa arrived with her escort at the place of her supposed destination just as the clouds had settled into a solid mass all over the sky, and were shedding down the first drops of rain. By the imperfect light – although the sun was rising, the thickness of the gathering storm still maintained a sort of twilight in the atmosphere – she could distinguish a sort of vastness in the walls of the building she was approaching that did not agree with her ideas of the cabin of Richard: the shrubs and trees about it, waving low and sighing heavily in the violent wind, betokened the seat of an ancient dwelling. She had, however, no time to speculate upon the matter, and the temporary misgivings which these appearances forced upon her were forgotten in her eagerness to obtain a shelter. Her ancient attendant, with more briskness than the stiff formality of his figure would have warranted her to expect, alighted, and assisted her from her pony; the negro had flung himself from his horse and opened the door, and Teresa in an instant was within the house. Here she was met by half a dozen domestic negroes with shining, jetty faces, grinning and welcoming their new mistress with bows and courtesies. One took her cloak, another ushered her into a spacious apartment, a third sprang before her and placed a chair, and a fourth presented a looking-glass, by which to adjust her hair, disordered in the haste of her ride.

She threw a hurried glance at her own image, but the furniture of the room, so different from what she expected to see, more strongly attracted her attention, and she quickly handed back the mirror. She saw that she was sitting in an arm-chair, with a seat and fringe of crimson silk and the back and legs ornamented with a profusion of heavy carving and tarnished gilding. Several

others of the same description were scattered around, and a large, comfortable-looking sofa, covered with faded damask, stood under a huge looking-glass, carved and gilt after the same fashion with the chairs but unluckily cracked in its voyage from France. The glass leaned majestically forward into the room, so as to reflect every inch of a floor smoothly paved with French bricks, the fashion of the day. On another side of the wall hung two family portraits in big wigs and bright armor. This magnificence was curiously contrasted with the stout cedar table in the middle of the room, with half a dozen coarse wooden chairs scattered about, and a clumsy chest of drawers, the work of some rude artificer of the country. The table, however, presented a most sumptuous *déjeûner a la fourchette* – coffee, claret, the delicate bar-fish, trout, duck-pies, the favorite dishes of the country, with others which I will leave you who know something of French cookery to imagine to yourself served up on massy old plate.

“ ‘Ah!’ said Teresa to herself, ‘this surely cannot be Richard’s house, or is it possible that he has been amusing himself with my simplicity and that he is a rich man after all?’

“Her doubts were of short duration. The door opened, and a vinegar-faced old gentle-man, with an olive complexion, shrunken legs, and attenuated figure, presented himself. The solemn gentle-man who had hitherto attended Teresa arose, and with infinite solemnity announced Monsieur Du Lac, the bridegroom, to Madame Du Lac, the bride. The poor girl turned red, and then pale, and seemed ready to sink into the earth with embarrassment and anxiety. The old gentle-man himself stood for a moment motionless with surprise, then, appearing to recollect himself, he advanced and took the hand of Teresa, who felt almost afraid to withdraw it from a gentle-man so aged that he reminded her of her grandfather.

“ ‘Ah, madame,’ said he, coughing, ‘forgive my awkwardness – but I was so surprised! How much you are changed since I saw you last evening! You are more than twice as young, and ten times more beautiful.’

“ ‘Indeed, sir,’ interrupted Teresa, eagerly, ‘there is no change, I can assure you – I am the same that I ever was – there is some error here – something very extraordinary.’

“ ‘Extraordinary, my princess? Well may you call it so; it is one of the most extraordinary things I ever witnessed in the course of my life, and I have seen fifty years.’ Here the old gentle-man told the truth, though by no means the whole truth. ‘Nothing less than a miracle could have produced – and yet it may be a miracle, my dear madame, the saints are so good!’

“ ‘Ah, sir,’ said the poor girl, ‘do not mock me, I pray you. I perceive here has been a sad mistake – let me go to my Richard, I entreat you, let me go to my Richard.’

“As she spoke, she arose, and made an effort to withdraw her hand, of which, however, the ancient swain retained obstinate possession. Much as he was struck with her beauty at first sight, he grew more charmed with it as he gazed upon her round, youthful figure, her polished forehead, her finely moulded cheeks, now flushed with an unusual crimson, and her full black eyes, in each of which a tear was gathering. He determined not to give up so fine a creature without an effort to retain her.

“ ‘May I take the liberty of inquiring,’ said he, ‘whom you call your Richard?’

“ ‘It is Richard Lemoine,’ answered the young woman, ‘who lives down by the Poplars. I married him this morning.’

“ ‘I beg ten thousand pardons, madame, but you married me this morning, and here is my ring on your finger – my grandmother’s wedding ring, with the finest diamonds in the colony, and the pretty motto, *Jusqu’ a la mort*, which I hope is a great way off; at least, I am sure it is if I can get rid of this troublesome cough. Ah, my adorable princess, we may both imagine that there is a mistake in this affair, and yet it may be all right – indeed, I am confident it is. The kind heavens have destined us for each other. I certainly expected to marry a different person, but Providence has willed it otherwise, and I am most happy to submit to its dispensations. I hope you will have as little reason to complain of them as I. We are united, I trust, for a long and happy life, and the marriage-knot, you know, is indissoluble; marriage is too solemn a thing, madame, to be trifled with, as I presume you are sensible – ’

“Here Monsieur Du Lac was obliged by a violent fit of coughing, to break off his discourse. But Teresa had sunk back into the chair, and covering her face with her handkerchief, was sobbing violently. The old man tried every method he could think of to reconcile her to what he called her destiny, in which he was zealously seconded by his friend the old planter. He made her presents of necklaces and jewels, and various other fineries which he had intended as nuptial gifts to the fair widow; he enlarged on the comforts of his mansion, the extent of his plantation, the ease and opulence she would enjoy; vowed that his existence should be devoted to her service, and that her slightest wish should be the law of his conduct; and finally hinted that Richard doubtless knew very well what he was about in the affair; that he had probably intrigued with the widow, and that the perfidious beings were now in some snug corner, congratulating themselves on the success of their wicked stratagem. Monsieur Du Lac’s grave old cousin reinforced this last argument by declaring his solemn belief that it was true, and it affected what none of the others could. How could Teresa refuse to believe two such old and apparently honest men? The offended beauty dried her tears, consented to look on the rich adornments for her person presented by her venerable lover, and finally suffered herself to be led to her seat at the head of the breakfast-table.

“The widow, in the mean time, was more rapidly conveyed to her place of destination on the fine, fleet animal which Richard brought from the Avoyelles, a gentle but spirited creature, broken by him for the use of his sisters. They rode so rapidly that they seemed to leave the huge, low-hung clouds behind them, and although Richard’s habitation was at a considerably greater distance from the church than that of Monsieur Du Lac, they reached home quite as soon. What was the surprise of the lady on entering the house: the room into which she was ushered was floored with loose planks; a huge naked chimney yawned in the midst, where two or three cypress-logs were smouldering; the naked rafters of the ceiling were stained with smoke; and a few old chests, a dozen joint-stools, and two clumsy arm-chairs were the only furniture of the apartment. A flaxen-haired girl assisted her to take off her cloak, and as she stood in the majesty of her rustling silk and glittering jewels, an elderly couple – a white-bearded man of sixty, in a

leathern doublet, and a thin matron of ten years younger, in a coarse white-cotton cap and blue-cotton short-gown and petticoat – who had risen upon her entrance, began to bow and courtesy with an involuntary and profound respect.

“ ‘What a fine lady she is!’ said the old woman to her husband.

“ ‘What an old wife Richard has got!’ whispered to one of her brothers the flaxen-haired girl who had helped her off with her cloak.

“In the mean time, the stern lady stood regarding the group with a look of unutterable disdain. Her bold, black eyes flashed fire as she pushed aside the big arm-chair that was offered her. ‘Where am I?’ she exclaimed. ‘Why am I brought to this place? I am sure this is not my husband’s house; take me thither instantly.’

“ ‘Where is my wife?’ said Richard, who just then entered the door. ‘Who is that lady?’

“ ‘That is your wife,’ answered one of the boys; that is the lady the minister handed us.’

“ ‘And a fine lady she is,’ added Richard’s mother; ‘I warrant, the whole country can not show a finer.’

“ ‘But I am not your wife,’ said Madame Labedoyere, fixing her resolute eyes on Richard. ‘I demand to be taken back to my husband. I will not remain another moment in this miserable hut.’

“ ‘You say true,’ replied Richard, ‘you are not my wife. I married a younger and, thank heaven, a prettier woman. But you must consent to play the hostage here, madame, till I get her. There is some cursed blunder in the business. You claim your husband, I claim my bride – my Teresa. I declare that you shall not stir from this house until she is restored to me.’

“ ‘Ah, I see how it is, my son,’ interrupted Richard’s mother; ‘the good one-eyed Baltazar has made a mistake and given you the wrong lady.’

“ ‘Then the good one-eyed Baltazar must give me the right one!’ retorted Richard. ‘What right had the old blunderer to rob me of my pretty Teresa? What business had he to give her to another man, and fob me off with a fine lady, as you call her, who is old enough to be my mother? But I will go after him and force him to make restitution – if I do not, I wish I may never mount a horse again. Brothers, look well to that lady with her silks and jewels, and do not let her leave the house till I come back.’

“So saying, Richard flung out at the door, though the rain drove in heavy torrents against the windows, and his mother screamed out to him that he would certainly catch his death by venturing forth in such a storm. He sprang upon his horse and was soon at the curate’s, where he was admitted to an instant conference with Baltazar Polo. The good man tried at first to convince him that it was impossible for any mistake to have been committed, as he was very confident that he had put every particular ring upon the hand of the lady for whom it was intended and accurately handed the brides to their respective bridegrooms. This, however, only served to work up into fury the exasperation of Richard, who asked him if he supposed everybody was as near-sighted as himself, and whether he thought he could not tell a woman of forty from a girl of eighteen. The clergyman then inquired of the young man if he knew the name of the person

whom the lady he had left at home intended to have married, as it was possible that Teresa might have been carried to his house by mistake. On this point Richard was wholly ignorant, having neglected to inform himself before he set out, nor did he even know the name of the lady. He saw, however, that there was a good deal of reason in Baltazar's suggestion, and departed with a determination to make the necessary inquiries of the unknown matron.

"It occurred to him, however, that he would not leave the village of Adayes, in which Father Polo resided, without first calling at the late home of Teresa to see if its inmates could tell what had become of her. They could give him no information. They had neither seen nor heard anything of her since she left them that morning at an early hour, dressed for the marriage ceremony. He then ran to the church, which he entered with a vague hope that he might yet find her within it. Nobody was there but the sexton, and the grim, bearded, unsympathizing saints on the walls, who seemed to stare in the most unfeeling manner on his anguish. There, too, was the Virgin de los Dolores, still occupied only with her own ancient griefs, regardless of his newer and keener distress. He felt as if he could have torn them from the walls where they hung. Leaving the church, he put his horse to its full speed and came home, wet to the skin, amid a cloud of vapor arising from the perspiration of the animal.

"Madame Labedoyere, in the mean time, had borne her detention at Richard's house more patiently on account of the storm which was raging without, and which infallibly would have spoiled, or at least sadly disordered, her wedding-dress had she ventured to encounter it. Richard found her, on his return, seated somewhat sullenly in the arm-chair which she had accepted on his departure, and his mother and sisters busied in their usual occupations, though somewhat more silent than wont, for they were awed by the strange lady's imperious manner and that splendor of costume which had never before been seen within those walls. The lady's reflections, in the mean time, however, had not been much to Richard's disadvantage. If he recovered Teresa, she was sure to have Monsieur Du Lac restored to her, but if otherwise, it struck her that the young fellow's manly frame and blooming face were no inadequate compensation for the loss of the old gentle-man's possessions. He was poor, it is true, but she was, in fact, rich enough for both, and she began to think that, after all, she might not be so very wretched in his society.

"Immediately on entering, Richard inquired of the lady her name and that of the gentle-man whom she went to the church to marry; and a family council was held to consider what should be done, at which the stately widow graciously condescended to assist. It was finally settled that Richard should proceed with his father to the house of Monsieur Du Lac, to induce him to restore the young bride, who had doubtless been conducted thither by mistake; and, in case of the success of the embassy, Madame Labedoyere received an assurance that she should be duly conveyed to the mansion of her venerable lover. Some time elapsed in making these arrangements, but at length the old gentle-man and his son set off together. The father was a slow rider, and Richard often found himself far before him on the road and heard himself called to slacken his pace. Du Lac's house lay in a direction from the church of Adayes exactly opposite to that of Richard's, and consequently at a considerable distance from the latter. In vain the

young man represented to old Lemoine that, at the rate they were travelling, it would be impossible to reach the place before nightfall.

“ ‘No matter, Richard,’ replied the old man; ‘if you get there before bedtime, it will be time enough, I take it. You know, I have never ridden any faster these ten years, and I hope you would not have your father turn jockey and break his neck in his old age. Rein in your horse, can’t you, and stop kicking him in the side, and keep back along with me.’

“Oh, what a long journey that was for poor Richard! They arrived at Du Lac’s house, however, while the twilight was yet in the western sky. The rain was over, and the thin, vapory clouds were crimson with the latest of those hues which foretell a fair day on the morrow. They knocked at Du Lac’s door, and it was opened by a negro who told them that his master was just gone to bed with his new wife.

“ ‘And who is his wife?’ asked Richard, quickly.

“ ‘A very handsome and very young woman,’ said the negro in his Creole-French, ‘whom master brought home with him to-day.’

“Richard’s heart sank within him when he heard this answer, nor had he the voice or the courage to ask any more questions, but his father pursued the inquiry. The black informed them that the bride was a beautiful creature about eighteen years of age, that his master was married to her that very morning, that he understood her name was Teresa, that she was from the Spanish village of Adayes, that she wept very much when she first came to the house, but that before night she seemed very happy and contented.

“Richard, in the mean time, listened with feelings that are indescribable. ‘Let us go home,’ said he to his father. ‘I see how it is; the girl has tricked me.’ The old gentleman commanded him to stay, and turning to the servant, said, ‘I must speak with your master.’

“ ‘You cannot,’ answered the negro; ‘he gave strict orders not to be disturbed.’

“ ‘Don’t tell me I cannot, you black rascal!’ said the old Louisianian, in a terrible voice, his blood beginning to warm in behalf of his son. ‘Go and tell your master that I must speak with him immediately!’

“The black went, and soon returned with a civil message from Monsieur Du Lac, giving the Messieurs Lemoine to understand that this was his wedding-night, that he had retired to rest, and begged not to be disturbed; but that on the next morning he would be exceedingly happy to wait upon the gentlemen and execute any commands with which they might please to honor him.

“The ancient herdsman, while this message was delivering, drew himself up to his full height, which exceeded six feet, and presented a figure of weather-beaten strength such as we have few examples of at the present day – tall, bony, grim, and broad-shouldered. ‘Go,’ said he, in a voice which thundered through the half-open door and resounded along the passages of the dwelling, ‘tell your master I will speak to him, or I will batter down his house about his ears!’ The domestic again disappeared, and in a moment afterward an upper window opened, a head covered with a woollen night-cap was thrust out, and a sharp-keyed, infirm voice demanded what they wanted at that time of night.

“Old Lemoine answered that he thought it a very proper time of night and proceeded to state the nature of his errand; [he] spoke of the mistake that had occurred and the desire of his son to rectify it, said that Richard had come with him to claim his betrothed bride, and that he stood ready to restore to Monsieur Du Lac the lady whom he had intended to marry.

“ ‘There is no mistake whatever in the matter,’ answered Du Lac from the window; ‘I am well satisfied with the match as it is, and I can answer for the young lady that she makes no objections. She is my wife, regularly married to me at the church, and wears my ring on her finger at this moment. As for the widow Labedoyere, I am sure the young man is perfectly welcome to her, and I wish them a great deal of happiness.’

“ ‘But he does not want the widow, and is come for the young lady.’

“ ‘Oh, he wants my wife, does he? He is come to steal her from my bed on the wedding-night? Young gentle-man, you have set out upon this errand a little too soon. It is not the custom for gallants like you to run away with other people’s wives until the lady has lived with her husband a few days at least. And you, Monsieur Lemoine, as I think you call yourself, I wonder you are not ashamed of abetting your son in such a wicked business. No, no, gentle-men, my wife is my wife, and I shall keep her. I have the honor to wish you a very good-night.’ Saying this, he shut the window, and the negro at the same instant fastened and bolted the door below.

“ ‘What was to be done! Old Lemoine was in a great rage, and talked of bursting open the door and penetrating into Du Lac’s chamber, to ascertain from the young woman herself the truth of his story. Richard was inclined to abandon all further pursuits of one who had proved herself fickle, ungrateful, and worthless. As a sort of middle course, it was finally agreed to go to Baltazar Polo, to rate him soundly for what he had done, and see if he had any counsel to offer. The good pastor received them with his usual benignity, and listened mildly to their complaints. ‘My friends,’ said he, ‘I should the more regret the error I have committed did I not see in it a particular and benevolent providence. I cannot alter what Heaven has done; Madame Labedoyere is your wife, and Teresa is united to Monsieur Du Lac. But come to me to-morrow morning; I will send for the other couple, and will endeavor to adjust the matter to your satisfaction.’

“ ‘The next morning early, the four newly married people were at the house of Baltazar Polo. You know, perhaps, Mr. Herbert, that, by the marital law of Louisiana, neither the husband has any title to the real or personal property of the wife, nor the wife to that of the husband; and therefore, although both Monsieur Du Lac and Madame Labedoyere were rich, yet if they had died the next day, or after ten years of matrimony, both their young spouses would have been left as poor as they were before the marriage.

“ ‘We have made a great blunder,’ said the curate, ‘by, which the original intentions of all parties have been frustrated. You,’ said he, addressing himself to the old people, ‘have been the gainers by this accident, and these young folks have been the losers; you must therefore make them a compensation. Let Monsieur Du Lac settle half his large estates on his young wife here, and you, madame, half yours on your young husband, and on this condition the marriages shall remain as they are.’

“None of the party seemed at first exactly pleased with this arrangement, but the curate was peremptory. Du Lac could not think of giving up Teresa; and Madame Labedoyere, when she saw the handsome Richard by the side of his withered and crooked competitor, could not help congratulating herself fervently on the exchange; a notary, therefore, was sent for, the instruments of settlement were executed on the spot, and the parties withdrew – Teresa with Du Lac, and Richard with Madame Labedoyere, now become Madame Lemoine, in whose house he was to establish himself.

“That very evening both the young persons had a sample of the disposition and temper of their spouses.. You know something of the custom of *charivari*, which prevails in all the French colonies of North America. It is a way we have of celebrating odd, unequal, unsuitable matches. It was hardly dark when the tumult of the *charivari* was heard from a distance by the inmates of Madame Lemoine’s dwelling. Horns winded, whistles blown, tin kettles beaten with sticks, a jangle of bells, and a medley of discordant voices was heard on the wind, and when the crowd came in sight, torches were seen flaming and smoking over their heads. As the procession drew near, it was observed to be headed by two grotesque masked figures – the one representing a fat, staring, bold-faced old woman, and the other a lubberly, foolish-looking young bumpkin – who at intervals kissed and embraced each other lovingly and with abundance of awkward gesticulations. A broad-chested fellow, marching after them, thundered out a halting ballad with a chorus in which the names of Richard and his spouse were duly commemorated. That fearless lady, however, took her measures with her usual spirit: she posted her negroes at the windows, gave them their orders, and was fully prepared for the arrival of the party. The procession at length reached the house and came to a halt before the door, when immediately, one dressed in a fantastic garb much like that of a clown at a theatre and who acted as marshal of the ceremonies stepped forward, and with a wand which he carried in his hand, gave a most furious rap on the door. That was the signal for the besieged to ply their weapons of defence; the windows were suddenly opened, vessels of dirty water were emptied into the faces of the procession; sticks, rotten eggs, and other missiles were thrown at them; and a couple of fowling-pieces were discharged over their heads. They fled precipitately, leaving on the field their instruments of music, which the servants afterward picked up and brought in as trophies of the victory they had gained.

“Whether it was by the same party or not, I cannot say; but the wedding of Monsieur Du Lac was celebrated with similar honors, and under more lucky auspices for those by whom they were rendered. The old gentle-man submitted to the custom with so bad a grace that they were encouraged to take greater liberties: the serenaders entered his house, deafened his ears with their horrid music, drank gallons of his best wine, and one of them, a strapping young fellow, had even the impudence to snatch a kiss from the bride. It was one o’clock in the morning before these rude wassailers left the house, and then the vexation of old Du Lac, which had been so long restrained by their presence, broke forth into fury. He stormed at his negroes, cursed the neighborhood, railed at everybody whose name was mentioned or who came into his presence;

nor did he even spare his wife; he told her he wished he had married Madame Labedoyere, and then none of all this trouble could have happened.

“Teresa was never destined to see him in good-humor again, He had broken, on that evening, through that reserve of first acquaintance which produces civility even in the peevish and morose, and ever afterward he treated her as he did the other inmates of the family – with an intolerable and perpetual ill-humor. In three years he fretted himself into his grave, notwithstanding all the pains which the gentle Teresa took to keep him alive, leaving her the owner of half his possessions and the mother of two children, who inherited the other half.

“As for the matron with whom Richard was paired so much against his inclination, she could never reduce the young man to that state of obedience which she esteemed the proper relation of a husband to the wife of his bosom. Richard insisted firmly on maintaining his parents in comfort and educating his sisters, and she insisted as strongly that he should not. He carried his intentions into effect, at the expense of a daily quarrel with his wife. This vain contest for the supremacy preyed upon her spirits and impaired her health, her portly figure wasted visibly, she went into a deep decline, and died at the end of five years from the time of her marriage, having also borne two children to her husband.

“And now, Mr. Herbert, you anticipate the conclusion of my story. You are right; Richard and Teresa were united at last, and the marriage ceremony was performed in the little old church of Adayes by the benevolent curate, my right worthy friend, Baltazar Polo; and never did those cracked bells ring a merrier peal than at that wedding. It was performed with more than usual precaution, for the good minister declared that no second mistake should be committed if it was possible to guard against it by human means. It took place at broad noon, on a clear, bright day, and the curate wore a new pair of concave spectacles, which he had procured from New Orleans expressly for the occasion.

“The worthy couple are now like myself – grown old. They live on the fertile plantation which formerly belonged to Madame Labedoyere, where I showed you the two fine young button-wood trees before the mansion. The children of the first marriage are provided for on the ample estates of the deceased parents, and Lemoine and his wife live surrounded by their mutual offspring in the serene old age of a quiet and well-acted life. Some years since, a French botanist, travelling in this country, claimed the hospitality of their roof. He showed them, among other matters connected with his science, how the leaf of the button-wood hides in its footstalk the bud of the next year’s leaf. Richard told his wife that this was an emblem of their first unfortunate marriage, which, however, contrary to their expectations, contained within itself the germ of their present happy union and their present opulence. They adopted the tree as their favorite among all the growths of the forest, and caused two of them, of equal size and similar shape, to be planted before their door.”