
New Orleans As I Found It

Durell Edward Henry

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NEW ORLEANS

AS I FOUND IT.

BY H. DELMUS.

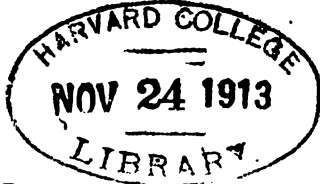
"Dieser sahe die welt wie sie wirklich war."—SCHILLER.

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C. E. PERKINS MEMORIAL

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DEDICATION.

TO M—R—E.

MY DEAREST FRIEND:

With great pleasure I dedicate to you these sketches of some of the incidents of my first visit to New Orleans, in the winter of 1835-36.

In a "Second Part" I shall add other compartments to an unfinished picture of the most remarkable city of our country. But when I again appear before you, you must not expect to find in the New Orleans of "to-day" an exact counterpart of "the New Orleans of 1836." A few years tell much in its story; and herein consists the difficulty of my subject. The city's rapid growth in population, in business, and in wealth—causes which will continue to operate for centuries to come—the frequent change of actors upon its scenes—owing, in part, to the periodical visitation of its great scourge, but mostly to the annual influx of new men from northern climes, with northern habits and northern thought—render it impossible to draw a portrait which will be equally recognised from every point of time.

H. D.

The Hook, N. H., 1835.

NEW ORLEANS AS I FOUND IT.

PART I.

"Taking the age as it now stands, and with reference to contemporary matters, we have already said that we consider the judgment of the public, which presumes some foundation, in fact, for every current statement, to be in the majority of cases a just one. Fiction, though still powerful and active, is in a minority—on the whole, in a declining minority. In her old, time-honoured castles, she does indeed preserve unshaken authority; but her new conquests, if not difficult to be made, are at least difficult to be maintained."
—*Westminster Review*.

DAY THE FIRST.

"The divisions of a work, whether they be styled parts, or books, or chapters, or sections, or whatsoever else the fancy of the writer may devise, are a happy invention—they are breathing points for the mind."
—DR. WILLIAMS.

CHAPTER I.

"We entered into this citie, and observed its make and people."—HACKLUYT, *Voyages*

ARGUMENT.

The Reader introduced to the Scene of Action.—The Levee.—Flat-Boats.—A Flat-Boatman.—An Acquaintance made.

By whatever route the traveller approaches New Orleans—whether by the river, the sea, or the lake—the feature which first attracts his attention is its *Levee*; and I could not have chosen a better starting-point from which to commence my observations upon this "world in miniature"—where one may meet with the products and the people of every country in any way connected with commerce—than its upper or most southern extremity.

The traveller loses the points of the compass at New Orleans, and knowing that the general course of the river is from north to south, is surprised to learn that the city lies west of the Mississippi, which here flows due north—that the American or upper part of the city, as it is called, is really its most southern extremity; and that the frosty Yankee has actually taken up his habitation south of the sunny descendants of France, Spain, and Italy! This exchange of geographical position is to be attributed to the northerner's superior judgment and foresight; and is here referred to, that the reader may fully comprehend the *locale* of the theatre I am about to describe, and observe its action without being disturbed by the discovery that the sun is rising in the west!

Levee is a French word, of primary importance within the State of Louisiana: it pervades its statute-book, and is daily heard within its halls of justice. "There is little or no land," says Judge Porter, "on the banks of the river, within this state, if we except an inconsiderable quantity in the neighbourhood of, and above Baton Rouge, which would not be covered with the waters of the Mississippi

in the spring months, were it not for the artificial embankment which the industry of man has raised to exclude them." Thus the Dutch are not the only people who have won their domain from the watery element. The State of Louisiana, when we consider its recent existence, the paucity of its population, and that population sparsely scattered over a large extent of country, has done more than Holland: yet we overlook the wonder which lies at our own door, to lose ourselves in admiration of the not greater wonder three thousand miles off.

The traveller from the north, as he touches the region of the orange and cane, of smiling plantations, bounded in the background by dense forests, and stretching onward to a seemingly illimitable extent towards the south, and looks down upon the planter's mansion, the cluster of white cottages hard by,* the slave at his daily task, and the mounted overseer, as one would look down from a balcony upon the busy street below, appears first to be made conscious that the Mississippi, the father of waters, the receiver of so many mighty rivers, is here, near the close of its course, where its stream is most rapid, controlled by the puny hand of man—that the ocean-stream upon whose bosom he is floating, here restricted, hemmed in, and directed, sweeps down to the sea over an artificial ridge, and that he is passing through a huge aqueduct, which raises the dweller upon water above the dweller upon land! Here the waves do indeed bound beneath him as a steed that knows his rider; yet the traveller sees, admires, and forgets. But if he forgets *the whole*, he cannot forget *the part*: when once seen, once remarked, he cannot forget *the Levee* of New Orleans—the storehouse of the great Val-

* The northerner, accustomed to extravagant portraiture of the slave's deprivations, is agreeably surprised to find the servant sheltered by a roof often equal with, and sometimes superior to, that which protects the master.