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IX. La Fille de Couleur

I

NOTHING else in the picturesque life of the French colonies of the Occident impresses the traveller on his first arrival more than the costumes of the women of color. They surprise the aesthetic sense agreeably;—they are local and special: you will see nothing resembling them among the populations of the British West Indies; they belong to Martinique, Guadeloupe, Désirade, Marie-Galante, and Cayenne,—in each place differing sufficiently to make the difference interesting, especially in regard to the head-dress. That of Martinique is quite Oriental;—more attractive, although less fantastic than the Cayenne coiffure, or the pretty drooping mouchoir of Guadeloupe.

These costumes are gradually disappearing, for various reasons,—the chief reason being of course the changes in the social condition of the colonies during the last forty years. Probably the question of health had also something to do with the almost universal abandonment in Martinique of the primitive slave-dress,—*chemise* and *jupe*,—which exposed its wearer to serious risks of pneumonia; for as far as economical reasons are concerned, there was no fault to find with it: six francs could purchase it when money was worth more than it is now. The *douillette*, a long trailing dress, one piece from neck to feet, has taken its place. But there was a luxurious variety of the *jupe* costume which is disappearing because of its cost; there is no money in the colonies now for such display:—I refer to the celebrated attire of the pet slaves and *belles affranchies* of the old colonial days. A full costume,—including violet or crimson “petticoat” of silk or satin; *chemise* with half-sleeves, and much embroidery and lace; “trembling-pins” of gold (*zépingue tremblant*) to attach the folds of the brilliant Madras turban; the great necklace of three or four strings of gold beads bigger than peas (*collier-choux*); the ear-rings, immense but light as egg-shells (*zanneaux-à-clous* or *zanneaux-chenilles*); the bracelets (*portes-bonheur*); the studs (*boutons-à-clous*); the brooches, not only for the turban, but for the *chemise*, below the folds of the showy silken foulard or shoulder-scarf,—would



The Martinique Turban, or “Madras Calendé”

sometimes represent over five thousand francs expenditure. This gorgeous attire is becoming less visible every year: it is now rarely worn except on very solemn occasions,—weddings, baptisms, first communions, confirmations. The *da* (nurse) or “*porteuse-de-baptême*” who bears the baby to church, holds it at the baptismal font, and afterwards carries it from house to house in order that all the friends of the family may kiss it, is thus attired; but nowadays, unless she be a professional (for there are professional *das*, hired only for such occasions), she usually borrows the jewellery. If tall, young, graceful, with a rich gold tone of skin, the effect of her costume is dazzling as that of a Byzantine Virgin. I saw one young *da* who, thus garbed, scarcely seemed of the earth and earthly;—there was an Oriental something in her appearance difficult to

describe,—something that made you think of the Queen of Sheba going to visit Solomon. She had brought a merchant's baby, just christened, to receive the caresses of the family at whose house I was visiting; and when it came to my turn to kiss it, I confess I could not notice the child. I saw only the beautiful dark face, coiffed with orange and purple, bending over it, in an illumination of antique gold... What a *da*!... She represented really the type of that *belle affranchie* of other days, against whose fascination special sumptuary laws were made: romantically she imaged for me the supernatural godmothers and Cinderellas of the creole fairy-tales. For these become transformed in the West Indian folklore,—adapted to the environment, and to local idealism. Cinderella, for example, is changed to a beautiful métisse wearing a quadruple *collier-choux*, *zéphingues tremblants*, and all the ornaments of a *da*.² Recalling the impression of that dazzling *da*, I can even now feel the picturesque justice of the fabulist's description of Cinderella's creole costume: *Ça té ka baille ou mal ziè!*—(it would have given you a pain in your eyes to look at her!)

Even the every-day Martinique costume is slowly changing. Year by year the “calendeuses”—the women who paint and fold the turbans—have less work to do;—the colors of the *douillette* are becoming less vivid;—while more and more young colored girls are being *élevées en chapeau* (“brought up in a hat”)—i.e., dressed and educated like the daughters of the whites. These, it must be confessed, look far less attractive in the latest Paris fashion, unless white as the whites themselves: on the other hand, few white girls could look well in *douillette* and *mouchoir*;—not merely because of color contrast, but because they have not that amplitude of limb and particular cambering of the torso peculiar to the half-breed race, with its large bulk and stature. Attractive as certain coolie women are, I observed that all who have adopted the Martinique costume look badly in it: they are too slender of body to wear it to advantage.

Slavery introduced these costumes, even though it probably did not invent them; and they were necessarily doomed to pass away with the peculiar social conditions to which they belonged. If the population clings still to its *douillettes*, *mouchoirs*, and *foulards*, the fact is largely due to the cheapness of such attire. A girl can dress very showily indeed for about twenty francs,—shoes excepted;—and thousands never wear shoes. But the fashion will no doubt have become cheaper and uglier within another decade.



The Guadeloupe Head-dress

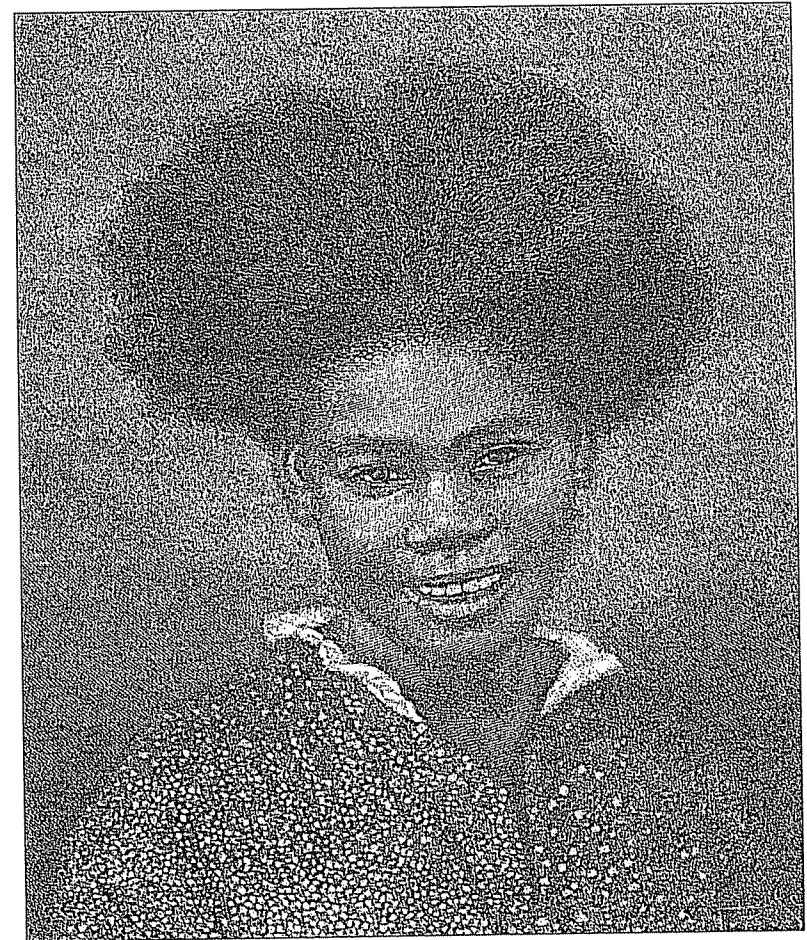
At the present time, however, the stranger might be sufficiently impressed by the oddity and brilliancy of these dresses to ask about their origin,—in which case it is not likely that he will obtain any satisfactory answer. After long research I found myself obliged to give up all hope of being able to outline the history of Martinique costume,—partly because books and histories are scanty or defective, and partly because such an undertaking would require a knowledge possible only to a specialist. I found good reason, nevertheless, to suppose that these costumes were in the beginning adopted from certain fashions of provincial France,—that the respective fashions of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Cayenne were patterned after modes still worn in parts of the mother-country. The old-time garb of the *affranchie*—that still worn by the *da*—somewhat recalls dresses worn by the women of Southern France, more particularly about Montpellier. Perhaps a specialist might also trace back the evolution of the various creole coiffures to old forms of head-dresses which still survive among the French country fashions of the south and south-west provinces;—but local taste has so much modified the original style as to leave it unrecognizable to those who have never studied the subject. The Martinique fashion of folding and tying the Madras, and of calendering it, are probably local; and I am assured that the designs of the curious semi-barbaric jewellery were all invented in the colony, where the *collier-choux* is still manufactured by local goldsmiths. Purchasers buy one, two, or three *grains*, or beads, at a time, and string them only on obtaining the requisite number... This is the sum of all that I was able to learn on the matter; but in the course of searching various West Indian authors and historians for information, I found something far more important than the origin of the *douillette* or the *collier-choux*: the facts of that strange struggle between nature and interest, between love and law, between prejudice and passion, which forms the evolutionary history of the mixed race.

II

CONSIDERING only the French peasant colonist and the West African slave as the original factors of that physical evolution visible in the modern *fille-de-couleur*, it would seem incredible;—for the intercrossing alone could not adequately explain all the physical results.

To understand them fully, it will be necessary to bear in mind that both of the original races became modified in their lineage to a surprising degree by conditions of climate and environment.

The precise time of the first introduction of slaves into Martinique is not now possible to ascertain,—no record exists on the subject; but it is probable that the establishment of slavery was coincident with the settlement of the island. Most likely the first hundred colonists from St. Christophe, who landed, in 1635, near the bay whereon the city of St. Pierre is now situated, either brought slaves with them, or else were furnished with negroes very soon after their arrival. In the time of Père Dutertre (who visited the colonies in 1640, and printed his history of

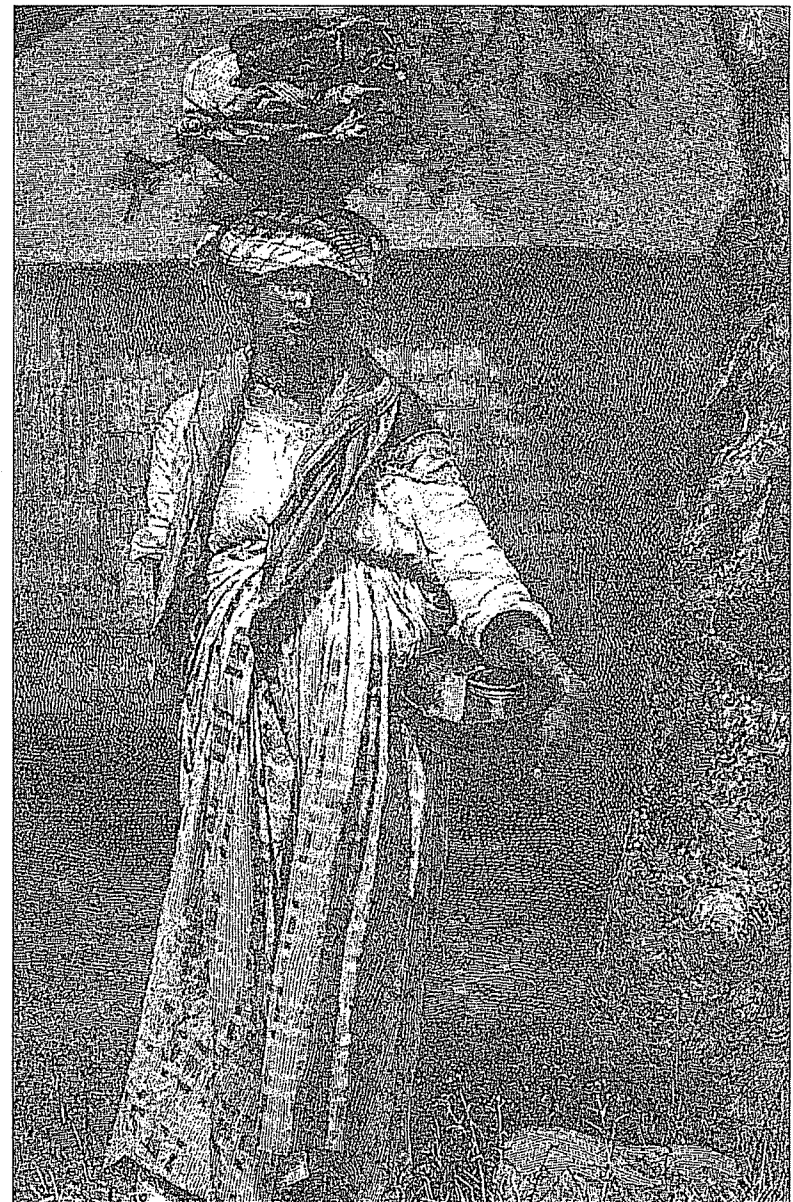


Young Mulatress

the French Antilles at Paris in 1667) slavery was already a flourishing institution,—the foundation of the whole social structure. According to the Dominican missionary, the Africans then in the colony were decidedly repulsive; he describes the women as “hideous” (*hideuses*). There is no good reason to charge Dutertre with prejudice in his pictures of them. No writer of the century was more keenly sensitive to natural beauty than the author of that “Voyage aux Antilles” which inspired Chateaubriand, and which still, after two hundred and fifty years, delights even those perfectly familiar with the nature of the places and things spoken of. No other writer and traveller of the period possessed to a more marked degree that sense of generous pity which makes the unfortunate appear to us in an illusive, almost ideal aspect. Nevertheless, he asserts that the negresses were, as a general rule, revoltingly ugly,—and, although he had seen many strange sides of human nature (having been a soldier before becoming a monk), was astonished to find that miscegenation had already begun. Doubtless the first black women thus favored, or afflicted, as the case might be, were of the finer types of negresses; for he notes remarkable differences among the slaves procured from different coasts and various tribes. Still, these were rather differences of ugliness than aught else: they were all repulsive;—only some were more repulsive than others.³ Granting that the first mothers of mulattoes in the colony were the superior rather than the inferior physical types,—which would be a perfectly natural supposition,—still we find their offspring worthy in his eyes of no higher sentiment than pity. He writes in his chapter entitled “*De la naissance honteuse des mulâtres*”:—

—“They have something of their Father and something of their Mother,—in the same wise that Mules partake of the qualities of the creatures that engendered them: for they are neither all white, like the French; nor all black, like the Negroes, but have a livid tint, which comes of both.”...

Today, however, the traveller would look in vain for a *livid* tint among the descendants of those thus described: in less than two centuries and a half the physical characteristics of the race have been totally changed. What most surprises is the rapidity of the transformation. After the time of Père Labat, Europeans never could “have mistaken little negro children for monkeys.” Nature had begun to remodel the white, the black, and half-breed according to environment and climate: the descendant, of the early colonists ceased to resemble



Plantation Coolie Woman in Martinique Costume



Coolie Half-breed

his fathers; the creole negro improved upon his progenitors,⁴ the mulatto began to give evidence of those qualities of physical and mental power which were afterwards to render him dangerous to the integrity of the colony itself. In a temperate climate such a change would have been so gradual as to escape observation for a long period; — in the tropics it was effected with a quickness that astounds by its revelation of the natural forces at work.

— “Under the sun of the tropics,” writes Dr. Rufz, of Martinique, “the African race, as well as the European, becomes greatly modified in its reproduction. Either race gives birth to a totally new being. The Creole African came into existence as did the Creole white. And just as the offspring of Europeans who emigrated to the tropics from different parts of France displayed characteristics so identical that it was impossible to divine the original race-source,—so likewise the Creole negro — whether brought into being by the heavy thick-set Congo or the long slender black of Senegambia, or the suppler and more active Mandingo,—appeared so remodelled, homogeneous, and adapted in such wise to his environment that it was utterly impossible to discern in his features anything of his parentage, his original kindred, his original source. The transformation is absolute. All that can be asserted is: ‘This is a white Creole; this is a black creole; this is a black Creole’;—or, ‘this is a European white; this is an African black’;—and furthermore, after a certain number of years passed in the tropics, the enervated and discolored aspect of the European may create uncertainty as to his origin. But with very few exceptions the primitive African, or, as he is termed here, the “Coast-black” (*le noir de la Côte*), can be recognized at once...

...“The Creole negro is gracefully shaped, finely proportioned: his limbs are lithe, his neck long;—his features are more delicate, his lips less thick, his nose less flattened, than those of the African;—he has the Carib’s large and melancholy eye, better adapted to express the emotions... Rarely can you discover in him the sombre fury of the

African, rarely a surly and savage mien: he is brave, chatty, boastful. His skin has not the same tint as his father’s,—it has become more satiny; his hair remains woolly, but it is a finer wool;... all his outlines are more rounded;—one may perceive that the cellular tissue predominates, as in cultivated plants, of which the ligneous and savage fibre has become transformed.”...⁵

This new and comelier black race naturally won from its masters a more sympathetic attention than could have been vouchsafed to its progenitors; and the consequences in Martinique and elsewhere seemed to have evoked the curious Article 9 of the *Code Noir* of 1665,—enacting, first, that free men who should have one or two children by slave women, as well as the slave-owners permitting the same, should be each condemned to pay two thousand pounds of sugar; secondly, that if the violator of the ordinance should be himself the owner of the mother and father of her children, the mother and the children should be confiscated for the profit of the Hospital, and deprived for their lives of the right to enfranchisement. An exception, however, was made to the effect that if the father were unmarried at the period of his concubinage, he could escape the provisions of the penalty by marrying, “according to the rites of Church,” the female slave, who would thereby be enfranchised, and her children “rendered free and legitimate.” Probably the legislators did not imagine that the first portion of the article could prove inefficacious, or that any violator of the ordinance would seek to escape the penalty by those means offered in the provision. The facts, however, proved the reverse. Miscegenation continued; and Labat notices two cases of marriage between whites and blacks,—describing the offspring of one union as “very handsome little mulattoes.” These legitimate unions were certainly exceptional,—one of them was dissolved by the ridicule cast upon the father;—but illegitimate unions would seem to have become common within a very brief time after the passage of the law. At a later day they were to become customary. The Article 9



Country-girl — Pure Negro Race

was evidently at fault; and in March, 1724, the Black Code was reinforced by a new ordinance, of which the sixth provision prohibited marriage as well as concubinage between the races.

It appears to have had no more effect than the previous law, even in Martinique, where the state of public morals was better than in Santo Domingo. The slave race had begun to exercise an influence never anticipated by legislators. Scarcely a century had elapsed since the colonization of the island; but in that time climate and civilization had transfigured the black woman. "After one or two generations," writes the historian Rufz, "the *Africaine* reformed, refined, beautified in her descendants, transformed into the creole negress, commenced to exert a fascination irresistible, capable of winning anything (*capable de tout obtenir*)."⁶ Travellers of the eighteenth century were confounded by the luxury of dress and of jewellery displayed by swarthy beauties in St. Pierre. It was a public scandal to European eyes. But the creole negress or mulattress, beginning to understand her power, sought for higher favors and privileges than silken robes and necklaces of gold beads: she sought to obtain, not merely liberty for herself, but for her parents, brothers, sisters,—even friends. What successes she achieved in this regard may be imagined from the serious statement of creole historians that if human nature had been left untrammelled to follow its better impulses, slavery would have ceased to exist a century before the actual period of emancipation! By 1738, when the white population had reached its maximum (15,000),⁷ and colonial luxury had arrived at its greatest height, the question of voluntary enfranchisement was becoming very grave. So omnipotent the charm of half-breed beauty that masters were becoming the slaves of their slaves. It was not only the creole *negress* who had appeared to play a part in this strange drama which was the triumph of nature over interest and judgment: her daughters, far more beautiful, had grown up to aid her, and to form a special class. These women, whose tints of skin rivalled the colors of ripe fruit, and whose gracefulness—peculiar, exotic, and irresistible—made them formidable rivals to the daughters of the dominant race, were no doubt physically superior to the modern *filles-de-couleur*. They were results of a natural selection which could have taken place in no community otherwise constituted;—the offspring of the union between the finer types of both races. But that which only slavery could have rendered possible began to endanger the integrity of slavery itself: the institutions upon which the whole social structure rested were

being steadily sapped by the influence of half-breed girls. Some new, severe, extreme policy was evidently necessary to avert the already visible peril. Special laws were passed by the Home-Government to check enfranchisement, to limit its reasons or motives; and the power of the slave woman was so well comprehended by the Métropole that an extraordinary enactment was made against it. It was decreed that whosoever should free a woman of color would have to pay to the Government *three times her value as a slave!*

Thus heavily weighted, emancipation advanced much more slowly than before, but it still continued to a considerable extent. The poorer creole planter or merchant might find it impossible to obey the impulse of his conscience or of his affection, but among the richer classes pecuniary considerations could scarcely affect enfranchisement. The country had grown wealthy; and although the acquisition of wealth may not evoke generosity in particular natures, the enrichment of a whole class develops pre-existing tendencies to kindness, and opens new ways for its exercise. Later in the eighteenth century, when hospitality had been cultivated as a gentleman's duty to fantastical extremes,—when liberality was the rule throughout society,—when a notary summoned to draw up a deed, or a priest invited to celebrate a marriage, might receive for fee five thousand francs in gold,—there were certainly many emancipations... "Even though interest and public opinion in the colonies," says a historian,⁸ "were adverse to enfranchisement, the private feeling of each man combated that opinion;—Nature resumed her sway in the secret places of hearts;—and as local custom permitted a sort of polygamy, the rich man naturally felt himself bound in honor to secure the freedom of his own blood... It was not a rare thing to see legitimate wives taking care of the natural children of their husbands,—becoming their godmothers (*s'en faire les marraines*)."... Nature seemed to laugh all these laws to scorn, and the prejudices of race! In vain did the wisdom of legislators attempt to render the condition of the enfranchised more humble,—enacting extravagant penalties for the blow by which a mulatto might avenge the insult of a white,—prohibiting the freed from wearing the same dress as their former masters or mistresses wore;—"the *belles affranchies* found, in a costume whereof the negligence seemed a very inspiration of voluptuousness, means of evading that social inferiority which the law sought to impose upon them:—they began to inspire the most violent jealousies."⁹

III

WHAT the legislators of 1685 and 1724 endeavored to correct did not greatly improve with the abolition of slavery, nor yet with those political troubles which socially deranged colonial life. The *fille-de-couleur*, inheriting the charm of the *belle affranchie*, continued to exert a similar influence, and to fulfil an almost similar destiny. The latitude of morals persisted,—though with less ostentation: it has latterly contracted under the pressure of necessity rather than through any other influences. Certain ethical principles thought essential to social integrity elsewhere have always been largely relaxed in the tropics; and—excepting, perhaps, Santo Domingo—the moral standard in Martinique was not higher than in the other French colonies. Outward decorum might be to some degree maintained; but there was no great restraint of any sort upon private lives: it was not uncommon for a rich man to have many “natural” families; and almost every individual of means had children of color. The superficial character of race prejudices was everywhere manifested by unions, which although never mentioned in polite converse, were none the less universally known; and the “irresistible fascination” of the half-breed gave the open lie to pretended hate. Nature, in the guise of the *belle affranchie*, had mocked at slave codes;—in the *fille-de-couleur* she still laughed at race pretensions, and ridiculed the fable of physical degradation. Today the situation has not greatly changed; and with such examples on the part of the cultivated race, what could be expected from the other? Marriages are rare;—it has been officially stated that the illegitimate births are sixty per cent; but seventy-five to eighty per cent would probably be nearer the truth. It is very common to see in the local papers such announcements as: *Enfants légitimes*, I (one birth announced); *enfants naturels*, 25.

In speaking of the *fille-de-couleur* it is necessary also to speak of the extraordinary social stratification of the community to which she belongs. The official statement of 20,000 “colored” to the total population of between 173,000 and 174,000 (in which the number of pure whites is said to have fallen as low as 5,000) does not at all indicate the real proportion of mixed blood. Only a small element of unmixed African descent really exists; yet when a white creole speaks of the *gens-de-couleur* he certainly means nothing darker than a mulatto skin. Race classifications have been locally made by sentiments of

political origin: at least four or five shades of visible color are classed as negro. There is, however, some natural truth at the bottom of this classification: where African blood predominates, the sympathies are likely to be African; and the turning-point is reached only in the true mulatto, where, allowing the proportions of mixed blood to be nearly equal, the white would have the dominant influence in situations more natural than existing politics. And in speaking of the *filles-de-couleur*, the local reference is always to women in whom the predominant element is white: a white creole, as a general rule, deigns only thus to distinguish those who are nearly white,—more usually he refers to the whole class as mulattresses. Those women whom wealth and education have placed in social position parallel with that of the daughters of creole whites are in some cases allowed to pass for white,—or at the very worst, are only referred to in a whisper as being *de couleur*. (Needless to say, these are totally beyond the range of the present considerations: there is nothing to be further said of them except that they can be classed with the most attractive and refined women of the entire tropical world.) As there is an almost infinite gradation from the true black up to the brightest *sang-mêlé*, it is impossible to establish any color-classification recognizable by the eye alone; and whatever line of demarcation can be drawn between castes must be social rather than ethnical. In this sense we may accept the local Creole definition of *fille-de-couleur* as signifying, not so much a daughter of the race of visible color, as the half-breed girl destined from her birth to a career like that of the *belle affranchie* of the old régime;—for the moral cruelties of slavery have survived emancipation.

Physically, the typical *fille-de-couleur* may certainly be classed, as white creole writers have not hesitated to class her, with the “most beautiful women of the human race.”¹⁰ She has inherited not only the finer bodily characteristics of either parent race, but a something else belonging originally to neither, and created by special climatic and physical conditions,—a grace, a suppleness of form, a delicacy of extremities (so that all the lines described by the bending of limbs or fingers are parts of clean curves), a satiny smoothness and fruit-tint of skin,—solely West Indian... Morally, of course, it is much more difficult to describe her; and whatever may safely be said refers rather to the *fille-de-couleur* of the past than of the present half-century. The race is now in a period of transition: public education and political changes are modifying the type, and it is impossible to guess the ultimate

consequence, because it is impossible to safely predict what new influences may yet be brought to affect its social development. Before the present era of colonial decadence, the character of the fille-de-couleur was not what it is now. Even when totally uneducated, she had a peculiar charm,—that charm of childishness which has power to win sympathy from the rudest natures. One could not but feel attracted towards this *naïf* being, docile as an infant, and as easily pleased or as easily pained,—artless in her goodnnesses as in her faults, to all outward appearance;—willing to give her youth, her beauty, her caresses to some one in exchange for the promise to love her,—perhaps also to care for a mother, or a younger brother. Her astonishing capacity for being delighted with trifles, her pretty vanities and pretty follies, her sudden veerings of mood from laughter to tears,—like the sudden rainbursts and sunbursts of her own passionate climate: these touched, drew, won, and tyrannized. Yet such easily created joys and pains did not really indicate any deep reserve of feeling: rather a superficial sensitiveness only,—like the *zhèbe-m'amisé*, or *zhèbe-manmzelle*, whose leaves close at the touch of a hair. Such human manifestations, nevertheless, are apt to attract more in proportion as they are more visible,—in proportion as the soul-current, being less profound, flows more audibly. But no hasty observation could have revealed the whole character of the fille-de-couleur to the stranger, equally charmed and surprised: the creole comprehended her better, and probably treated her with even more real kindness. The truth was that centuries of deprivation of natural rights and hopes had given to her race—itsself fathered by passion unrestrained and mothered by subjection unlimited—an inherent scepticism in the duration of love, and a marvellous capacity for accepting the destiny of abandonment as one accepts the natural and the inevitable. And that desire to please — which in the fille-de-couleur seemed to prevail above all other motives of action (maternal affection excepted) — could have appeared absolutely natural only to those who never reflected that even sentiment had been artificially cultivated by slavery.

She asked for so little,—accepted a gift with such childish pleasure,—submitted so unresistingly to the will of the man who promised to love her. She bore him children—such beautiful children!—whom he rarely acknowledged, and was never asked to legitimize;—and she did not ask perpetual affection notwithstanding, — regarded the relation as a necessarily temporary one, to be sooner or later dissolved by the marriage of her children's father. If deceived in all

things,—if absolutely ill-treated and left destitute, she did not lose faith in human nature: she seemed a born optimist, believing most men good;—she would make a home for another and serve him better than any slave... "*Née de l'amour*," says a creole writer, "*la fille-de-couleur vit d'amour, de rires, et d'oubli*."¹¹



Capresse

Then came the general colonial crash!... You cannot see its results without feeling touched by them. Everywhere the weird beauty, the immense melancholy of tropic ruin. Magnificent terraces, once golden with cane, now abandoned to weeds and serpents;—deserted plantation-homes, with trees rooted in the apartments and pushing up through the place of the roofs;—grass-grown alleys ravined by rains;—fruit-trees strangled by lianas;—here and there the stem of some splendid palmiste, brutally decapitated, naked as a mast;—petty frail growths of banana-trees or of bamboo slowly taking the place of century-old forest giants destroyed to make charcoal. But beauty enough remains to tell what the sensual paradise of the old days must have been, when sugar was selling at 52.

And the fille-de-couleur has also changed. She is much less humble and submissive,—somewhat more exacting: she comprehends better the moral injustice of her position. The almost extreme physical refinement and delicacy, bequeathed to her by the freedwomen of the old régime, are passing away: like a conservatory plant deprived of its shelter, she is returning to a more primitive condition,—hardening and growing perhaps less comely as well as less helpless. She perceives also in a vague way the peril of her race: the creole white, her lover and protector, is emigrating;—the domination of the black becomes more and more probable. Furthermore, with the continual increase of the difficulty of living, and the growing pressure of population, social cruelties and hatreds have been developed such as her ancestors never knew. She is still loved; but it is alleged that she rarely loves the white, no matter how large the sacrifices made for her sake, and she no longer enjoys that reputation of fidelity accorded to her class in other years. Probably the truth is that the fille-de-couleur never had at any time capacity to bestow that quality of affection imagined or exacted as a right. Her moral side is still half savage: her feelings are still those of a child. If she does not love the white man according to his unreasonable desire, it is certain at least that she loves him as well as he deserves. Her alleged demoralization is more apparent than real;—she is changing from an artificial to a very natural being, and revealing more and more in her sufferings the true character of the luxurious social condition that brought her into existence. As a general rule, even while questioning her fidelity, the creole freely confesses her kindness of heart, and grants her capable of extreme generosity and devotedness to strangers or to children whom she has an opportunity to care for.

Indeed, her natural kindness is so strikingly in contrast with the harder and subtler character of the men of color that one might almost feel tempted to doubt if she belong to the same race. Said a creole once, in my hearing:—"The gens-de-couleur are just like the *tourlouroux*:¹² one must pick out the females and leave the males alone." Although perhaps capable of a double meaning, his words were not lightly uttered;—he referred to the curious but indubitable fact that character of the colored woman appears in many respects far superior to that of the colored man. In order to understand this, one must bear in mind the difference in the colonial history of both sexes; and a citation from General Romanet,¹³ who visited Martinique at the end of the last century, offers a clue to the mystery. Speaking of the tax upon enfranchisement, he writes:—

—"The governor appointed by the sovereign delivers the certificates of liberty,—on payment by the master of a sum usually equivalent to the value of the subject. Public interest frequently justifies him in making the price of the slave proportionate to the desire or the interest manifested by the master. It can be readily understood that the tax upon the liberty of the women ought to be higher than that of the men: the latter unfortunates having no greater advantage than that of being useful;—the former know how to please: they have those rights and privileges which the whole world allows to their sex; they know how to make even the fetters of slavery serve them for adornments. They may be seen placing upon their proud tyrants the same chains worn by themselves, and making them kiss the marks left thereby: the master becomes the slave, and purchases another's liberty only to lose his own."

Long before the time of General Romanet, the colored male slave might win liberty as the guerdon of bravery in fighting against foreign invasion, or might purchase it by extraordinary economy, while working as a mechanic on extra time for his own account (he always refused to labor with negroes); but in either case his success depended upon the possession and exercise of qualities the reverse of amiable. On the other hand, the bondwoman won manumission chiefly through her power to excite affection. In the survival and perpetuation of the fittest of both sexes these widely different characteristics would obtain more and more definition with successive generations.

I find in the "Bulletin des Actes Administratifs de la Martinique" for 1831 (No. 41) a list of slaves to whom liberty was accorded *pour services rendus à leurs maîtres*. Out of sixty-nine enfranchisements

recorded under this head, there are only two names of male adults to be found,—one an old man of sixty;—the other, called Laurencin, the betrayer of a conspiracy. The rest are young girls, or young mothers and children;—plenty of those singular and pretty names in vogue among the creole population,—Acélie, Avrilette, Mélie, Robertine, Célianne, Francillette, Adée, Catharinette, Sidollie, Céline, Coraline;—and the ages given are from sixteen to twenty-one, with few exceptions. Yet these liberties were asked for and granted at a time when Louis Philippe had abolished the tax on manumissions... The same "Bulletin" contains a list of liberties granted to colored men, *pour service accompli dans la milice*, only!

Most of the French West Indian writers whose works I was able to obtain and examine speak severely of the *hommes-de-couleur* as a class,—in some instances the historian writes with a very violence of hatred. As far back as the commencement of the eighteenth century, Labat, who, with all his personal oddities, was undoubtedly a fine judge of men, declared:—"The mulattoes are as general rule well made, of good stature, vigorous, strong, adroit, industrious, and daring (*hardis*) beyond all conception. They have much vivacity, but are given to their pleasures, fickle, proud, deceitful (*cachés*), wicked and capable of the greatest crimes." A San Domingo historian, far more prejudiced than Père Labat, speaks of them "as physically superior, though morally inferior to the whites": he wrote at a time when the race had given to the world the two best swordsmen it has yet perhaps seen,—Saint-Georges and Jean-Louis.

Commenting on the judgement of Père Labat, the historian Borde observes:—"The wickedness spoken of by Père Labat doubtless relates to their political passions only; for the women of color are, beyond any question, the best and sweetest persons in the world—*à coup sûr, les meilleures et les plus douces personnes qu'il y ait au monde*"—"Histoire de l'île de la Trinidad," par M. Pierre Gustave Louis Borde, vol. i., p.222.) The same author, speaking of their goodness of heart, generosity to strangers and the sick, says "they are born Sisters of Charity";—and he is not the only historian who has expressed such admiration of their moral qualities. What I myself saw during the epidemic of 1887-88 at Martinique convinced me that these eulogies of the women of color are not extravagant. On the other hand, the existing creole opinion of the men of color is much less favorable than even that expressed by Père Labat. Political events and passions have, perhaps, rendered a just estimate of their qualities difficult. The history of the *hommes-de-couleur*

in all the French colonies has been the same;—distrusted by the whites, who feared their aspirations to social equality, distrusted even more by the blacks (who still hate them secretly, although ruled by them), the mulattoes became an Ishmaelish clan, inimical to both races, and dreaded of both. In Martinique it was attempted, with some success, to manage them by according freedom to all who would serve in the militia for a certain period with credit. At no time was it found possible to compel them to work with blacks; and they formed the whole class of skilled city workmen and mechanics for a century prior to emancipation.

...Today it cannot be truly said of the *fille-de-couleur* that her existence is made up of "love, laughter, and forgettings." She has aims in life,—the bettering of her condition, the higher education of her children, whom she hopes to free from the curse of prejudice. She still clings to the white, because through him she may hope to improve her position. Under other conditions she might even hope to effect some sort of reconciliation between the races. But the gulf has become so much widened within the last forty years, that no *rapprochement* now appears possible; and it is perhaps too late even to restore the lost prosperity of the colony by any legislative or commercial reforms. The universal creole belief is summed up in the daily-repeated cry: "*C'est un pays perdu!*" Yearly the number of failures increase; and more whites emigrate;—and with every bankruptcy or departure some *fille-de-couleur* is left almost destitute, to begin life over again. Many a one has been rich and poor several times in succession;—one day her property is seized for debt;—perhaps on the morrow she finds some one able and willing to give her a home again... Whatever comes, she does not die for grief, this daughter of the sun: she pours out her pain in song, like a bird. Here is one of her little improvisations,—a song very popular in both Martinique and Guadeloupe, though originally composed in the latter colony:—

— "Good-bye Madras!
Good-bye foulard!
Good-bye pretty calicoes!
Good-bye collier-choux!
That ship
Which is there on the buoy,
It is taking
My doudoux away

— "Adiéu Madras!
Adiéu foulard!
Adiéu dézinde!
Adiéu collier-choux!
Batiment-là
Qui sou labouè-là,
Li ka mennein
Doudoux-à-moin allé.

— "Very good-day,
Monsieur the Consignee.
I come
To make one little petition.
My doudoux
Is going away.
Alas! I pray you
Delay his going."

— "Bien le-bonjou'
Missié le Consignataire.
Moin ka vini
Fai yon ti petition;
Doudoux-à-moin
Y ka pati, —
T'enprie, hélas!
Rétadé li."

[He answers kindly in French: the *békés* are always kind to these gentle children.]

— "My dear child,
It is too late.
The bills of lading
Are already signed;
The ship
Is already on the buoy.
In an hour from now
They will be getting her under way."

— "Ma chère enfant
Il est trop tard,
Les connaissements
Sont déjà signés,
Le bâtiment
Est déjà sur la bouée
Dans une heure d'ici
Ils vont appareiller."

— "When the foulards came...
I always had some;
When the Madras-kerchiefs came,
I always had some;
When the printed calicoes came,
I always had some.
...That second officer
Is such a kind man!

— "Foulard rivé,
Moin té toujou tini;
Madras rivé
Moin té toujou tini.
Dézindes rivé,
Moin té toujou tini.
— Capitaine sougonde
C'est yon bon gâçon!

— "Everybody has
Somebody to love;
Everybody has
Somebody to pet;
Everybody has
A sweetheart of her own.
I am the only one
Who cannot have that, — I!"

"Toult mouné tini
Yon mouné yo aimé;
Toult mouné tini
Yon mouné yo chéri;
Toult mouné tini
Yon doudoux à yo.
Jusse moin tou sèl
Pa tini ça, — moin!"

On the eve of the *Fête Dieu*, or Corpus Christi festival, in all these Catholic countries, the city streets are hung with banners and decorated with festoons and with palm branches; and great altars are erected at various points along the route of the procession, to serve as resting-places for the Host. These are called *reposoirs*; in creole patois, "*reposouè Bon-Dié*." Each wealthy man lends something to help to make them attractive, — rich plate, dainty crystal, bronzes, paintings, beautiful models of ships or steamers, curiosities from remote parts of the world... The procession over, the altar is stripped, the valuables are returned to their owners: all the splendor disappears... And the spectacle of that evanescent magnificence, repeated year by year, suggested to this proverb-loving people a similitude for the unstable fortune of the fille-de-couleur:—*Fortune milatresse c'est reposouè Bon-Dié*. (The luck of the mulatress is the resting-place of the Good-God).

NOTES

1. The brightly colored douillettes are classified by the people according to the designs of the printed calico:—*robe-à-bambou*,—*robe-à-bouquet*,—*robe-arc-en-ciel*,—*robe-à-carreau*,—etc., according as the pattern is in stripes, flower-designs, "rainbow" bands of different tints, or plaidings. *Ronde-en-ronde* means a stuff printed with disk-patterns, or link-patterns of different colors,—each joined with the other. A robe of one color only is called a *robe-uni*.

The general laws of contrasts observed in the costume require the silk foulard, or shoulder-kerchief, to make a sharp relief with color of the robe, thus:—

<i>Robe</i>	<i>Foulard</i>
Yellow	Blue
Dark blue	Yellow
Pink	Green
Violet	Bright red
Red	Violet
Chocolate (cocoa)	Pale blue
Sky blue	Pale rose

These refer, of course, to dominant or ground colors, as there are usually several tints in the foulard as well as the robe. The painted Madras should always be bright yellow. According to popular ideas of good dressing, the different tints of skin should be relieved by special choice of color in the robe, as follows:—

<i>Capresse</i> (a clear red skin) should wear	Pale yellow
<i>Mulatresse</i> (according to shade)	Rose, blue, green
<i>Nègresse</i>	White, scarlet, or any violent color

2. ... "Vouèla Cendrillon avec yon bel ròbe velou grande lakhè. ... Ça té ka bail ou mal ziè. Li té tini bel zanneau dans zòreill li, quate-tou-chou, bouoche, bracelet, tremblant,—toutt sòte bel baggaie conm ça." ... [Conte Cendrillon, — d'après Turiault.] — "There was Cendrillon with a beautiful long trailing robe of velvet on her!... It was enough to hurt one's eyes to look at her! She had beautiful rings in her ears, and a collier-choux of four rows, brooches, *tremblants*, bracelets,—everything fine of that sort." [Story of Cinderella in Turiault's Creole Grammar]

3. It is quite possible, however, that the slaves of Dutertre's time belonged for the most part to the uglier African tribes; and that later supplies may have been procured from other parts of the slave coast. Writing half a century later, Père Labat declares having seen freshly disembarked blacks handsome enough to inspire an artist:—"J'en ai vu des deux sexes faits à peindre, et beaux par merveille" (vol. iv., chap. vii.). He adds that their skin was extremely fine, and of velvety softness;—"le velours n'est pas plus doux." ... Among the 30,000 blacks yearly shipped to the French colonies, there were doubtless many representatives of the finer African races.

4. Leur sueur n'est pas fétide comme celle des nègres de la Guinée," writes the traveller Dauxion-Lavaysse, in 1813.

5. Dr. E. Rufz: "Études historiques et statistiques sur la population de la Martinique." St. Pierre: 1850. Vol. i., pp. 148-50.

It has been generally imagined that the physical constitution of the black race was proof against the deadly climate of the West Indies. The truth is that the freshly imported Africans died of fever by thousands and tens-of-thousands;—the creole-negro race, now so prolific, represents only the fittest survivors in the long and terrible struggle of the slave element to adapt itself to the new environment. Thirty thousand negroes a year were long needed to supply the French colonies. Between 1700 and 1789 no less than 900,000 slaves were imported by San Domingo alone;—yet there were less than half that number left in 1789. (See Placide Justin's history of Santo Domingo, p.147.) The entire slave population of Barbadoes had to be renewed every sixteen years, according to estimates: the loss to planters by deaths of slaves (reckoning the value of a slave at only £20 sterling) during the same period was £1,600,000 (\$8,000,000). (Burck's "History of European Colonies," vol. ii., p. 141; French edition of 1767.)

6. Rufz: "Études," vol. i., p. 236.

7. I am assured it has now fallen to a figure not exceeding 5,000.

8. Rufz: "Études," vol. ii., pp. 311, 312.

9. Rufz: "Études," vol. i., p. 237.

10. *La race de sang-mêlé, issue des blancs et des noirs, est éminemment civilizable. Comme types physiques, elle fournit dans beaucoup d'individus, dans ses femmes en*

général, les plus beaux spécimens de la race humaine.—"Le Préjugé de Race aux Antilles Françaises." Par G. Souquet-Basiège. St. Pierre, Martinique: 1883. pp. 661-62.

11. Turiault: "Étude sur le langage Créole de la Martinique." Brest: 1874. On page 136 he cites the following pretty verses in speaking of the *fille-de-couleur*:—

*L'Amour prit soin de la former
Tendre, naïve, et caressante,
Fait pour plaire, encore plus pour aimer,
Portant tous les traits précieux
Du caractère d'une amante,
Le plaisir sur sa bouche et l'amour dans ses yeux.*

12. A sort of land-crab;—the female is selected for food, and, properly cooked, makes a delicious dish;—the male is almost worthless.

13. "Voyage à la Martinique." Par J. R., Général de Brigade. Paris: An. XII., 1804. Page 106.

long,—thin as card-board, and even less heavy. It has no substantiality, no weight;—it is a mere appearance, a mask, a delusion... But remembering the spectral, cunning, juggling something which magnified and moved it but a moment ago,—I feel almost tempted to believe, with certain savages, that there are animal shapes inhabited by goblins...

IV

—“Is there anything still living and lurking in old black drains of Thought,—any bigotry, any prejudice, anything in the moral world whereunto the centipede may be likened?”

—“Really, I do not know,” replied the friend to whom I had put the question; “but you need only go as far as the vegetable world for a likeness. Did you ever see anything like this?” he added, opening a drawer and taking therefrom something revolting, which, as he pressed it in his hand, looked like a long thick bundle of dried centipedes.

—“Touch them,” he said, holding out to me the mass of articulated flat bodies and bristling legs.

—“Not for anything!” I replied, in astonished disgust. He laughed, and opened his hand. As he did so, the mass expanded.

—“Now look!” he exclaimed.

Then I saw that all the bodies were united at the tails—grew together upon one thick flat annulated stalk... a plant!—“But here is the fruit,” he continued, taking from the same drawer a beautifully embossed ovoid nut large as a duck’s egg, ruddy-colored, and so exquisitely varnished by nature as to resemble a rose-wood carving fresh from the hands of the cabinet-maker. In its proper place among the leaves and branches, it had the appearance of something delicious being devoured by a multitude of centipedes. Inside was a kernel, hard and heavy as iron-wood; but this in time, I was told, falls into dust: though the beautiful shell remains always perfect.

Negroes call it the *coco-macaque*.

NOTES

1. According to the Martinique “Annuaire” for 1887, there were even then, out of a total population of 173,182, no less than 125,366 unable to read and write.

XI. Ma Bonne

I

I CANNOT teach Cyrillia the clock;—I have tried until both of us had our patience strained to the breaking-point. Cyrillia still believes she will learn how to tell the time some day or other;—I am certain that she never will. “*Missié*,” she says, “*lézhè pa aïen pou moin: c’est minitt ka fouté moin yon travail!*”—the hours do not give her any trouble; but the minutes are a frightful bore! And nevertheless, Cyrillia is punctual as the sun;—she always brings my coffee and a slice of corossolle at five in the morning precisely. Her clock is the *cabritt-bois*. The great cricket stops singing, she says, at half-past four: the cessation of its chant awakens her.

—“*Bonjour, Missié. Comment ou passé lanuitt?*”—“Thanks, my daughter, I slept well.”—“The weather is beautiful: if *Missié* would like to go to the beach, his bathing-towels are ready.”—“Good! Cyrillia; I will go.”... Such is our regular morning conversation.

Nobody breakfasts before eleven o’clock or thereabout; but after an early sea-bath, one is apt to feel a little hollow during the morning, unless one take some sort of refreshment. Cyrillia always prepares something for me on my return from the beach,—either a little pot of fresh cocoa-water, or a *cocoyage*, or a *mabiyage*, or a *bavaroise*.

The *cocoyage* I like the best of all. Cyrillia takes green cocoa-nut, slices off one side of it so as to open a hole, then pours the opalescent water into a bowl, adds to it a fresh egg, a little Holland gin, and some grated nutmeg and plenty of sugar. Then she whips up the mixture into effervescence with her *baton-lélé*. The *baton-lélé* is an indispensable article in every creole home: it is a thin stick which is cut from a young tree so as to leave at one end a whorl of branch-stumps sticking out at right angles like spokes;—by twirling the stem between the hands, the stumps whip up the drink in a moment.

The *mabiyage* is less agreeable, but is a popular morning drink among the poorer classes. It is made with a little white rum and a bottle of the bitter native root-beer called *mabi*. The taste of *mabi* I can only describe as that of molasses and water flavored with a little cinchona bark.

The *bavaroise* is fresh milk, sugar, and a little Holland gin or rum,—mixed with the baton-lélé until a fine thick foam is formed. After the cocoyage, I think it is the best drink one can take in the morning; but very little spirit must be used for any of these mixtures. It is not until just before the midday meal that one can venture to take a serious stimulant,—*yon ti ponch*,—rum and water, sweetened with plenty of sugar or sugar syrup.

The word *sucre* is rarely used in Martinique,—considering that sugar is still the chief product;—the word *doux*, “sweet,” is commonly substituted for it. *Doux* has, however, a larger range of meaning: it may signify syrup, or any sort of sweets,—duplicated into *doudoux*, it means the corrossole fruit as well as the sweetheart. *Ça qui lè doudoux?* is the cry of the corrossole-seller. If a negro asks at a grocery store (*graisserie*) for *sique* instead of for *doux*, it is only because he does not want it to be supposed that he means syrup;—as a general rule, he will only use the word *sique* when referring to quality of sugar wanted or to sugar in hogsheds. *Doux* enters into domestic consumption in quite remarkable ways. People put sugar into fresh milk, English porter, beer, and cheap wine;—they cook various vegetables with sugar, such as peas; they seem to be particularly fond of sugar-and-water and of *d’leau-pain*,—bread-and-water boiled, strained, mixed with sugar, and flavored with cinnamon. The stranger gets accustomed to all this sweetness without evil results. In a northern climate the sequence would probably be at least a bilious attack; but in the tropics, where salt fish and fruits are popularly preferred to meat, the prodigal use of sugar or sugar-syrups appears to be decidedly beneficial.

...After Cyrillia has prepared my *cocoyage*, and rinsed the bathing-towels in fresh-water, she is ready to go to market, and wants to know what I would like to eat for breakfast. “Anything creole, Cyrillia;—I want to know what people eat in this country.” She always does her best to please me in this respect,—almost daily introduces me to some unfamiliar dishes, something odd in the way of fruit or fish.

II

Cyrillia has given me a good idea of the range and character of *mangé-Créole*; and I can venture to write something about it after a year’s observation. By *mangé-Créole* I refer only to the food of the people proper, the colored population; for the *cuisine* of the small class of

wealthy whites is chiefly European, and devoid of local interest:—I might observe, however, that the fashion of cooking is rather Provençal than Parisian;—rather of southern than of northern France.

Meat, whether fresh or salt, enters little into the nourishment of the poorer classes. This is partly, no doubt, because of the cost of all meats; but it is also due to natural preference for fruits and fish. When fresh meat is purchased, it is usually to make a stew or *daube*;—probably salt meats are more popular; and native vegetables and manioc flour are preferred to bread. There are only two popular soups which are peculiar to the creole cuisine,—*calalou*, a gombo soup, almost precisely similar to that of Louisiana; and the *soupe-d’habitant*, or “country soup.” It is made of yams, carrots, bananas, turnips, *choux-caraïbes*, pumpkins, salt pork, and pimento, all boiled together;—the salt meat being left out of the composition on Fridays.

The great staple, the true meat of the population, is salt codfish, which is prepared in a great number of ways. The most popular and the rudest preparation of it is called “Ferocious” (*féroce*); and it is not at all unpalatable. The codfish is simply fried, and served with vinegar, oil, pimento;—manioc flour and avocados being considered indispensable adjuncts. As manioc flour forms a part of almost every creole meal, a word of information regarding it will not be out of place here.

Everybody who has heard the name probably knows that the manioc root is naturally poisonous, and that the toxic elements must be removed by pressure and desiccation before the flour can be made. Good manioc flour has an appearance like very coarse oatmeal; and is probably quite as nourishing. Even when dear as bread, it is preferred, and forms the flour of the population, by whom the word *farine* is only used to signify manioc flour: if wheat-flour be referred to it is always qualified as “French flour” (*farine-Fouance*). Although certain flours are regularly advertised as American in the local papers, they are still *farine-Fouance* for the population, who call everything foreign French. American beer is *bié-Fouance*, canned peas, *ti-pois-Fouance*, any white foreigner who can talk French is *yon beké-Fouance*.

Usually the manioc flour is eaten uncooked:—merely poured into a plate, with a little water and stirred with a spoon into a thick paste or mush,—the thicker the better;—*d’leau passé farine* (more water than manioc flour) is a saying which describes the condition of a very destitute person. When not served with fish, the flour is occasionally mixed with water and refined molasses (*sirop-battrie*): this preparation,

which is very nice, is called *cousscaye*. There is also a way of boiling it with molasses and into a kind of pudding. This is called *matêté*; children are very fond of it. Both of these names, *cousscaye* and *matêté*, are alleged to be of Carib origin: the art of preparing the flour itself from manioc root is certainly an inheritance from the Caribs, who bequeathed many singular words to the creole patois of the French West Indies.

Of all the preparations of codfish with which manioc flour is eaten, I preferred the *lamori-bouilli*,—the fish boiled plain, after having been steeped long enough to remove the excess of salt; and then served with plenty of olive-oil and pimento. The people who have no home of their own, or at least no place to cook, can buy their food already prepared from the *mâchannes lapacotte*, who seem to make a speciality of *macadam* (codfish stewed with rice) and the other two dishes already referred to. But in every colored family there are occasional feasts of *lamori-au-lait*, codfish stewed with milk and potatoes; *lamori-au-gratin*, codfish boned, pounded with toast crumbs, and boiled with butter, onions, and pepper into a mush;—*coubouyon-lamori*, codfish stewed with butter and oil;—*bachamelle*, codfish boned and stewed with potatoes, pimentos, oil, garlic, and butter.

Pimento is an essential accompaniment to all dishes, whether it be cooked or raw: everything is served with plenty of pimento,—*en pile, en pile piment*. Among the various kinds I can mention only the *piment-café*, or “coffee-pepper,” larger but about the same shape as a grain of Liberian coffee, violet-red at one end; the *piment-zouëseau*, or bird-pepper, small and long and scarlet;—and the *piment-capresse*, very large, pointed at one end, and bag-shaped at the other. It takes a very deep red color when ripe, and is so strong that if you only break the pod in a room, the sharp perfume instantly fills the apartment. Unless you are as well trained as any Mexican to eat pimento, you will probably regret your first encounter with the *capresse*.

Cyrellia told me a story about this infernal vegetable.

III

ZHISTOUË PIMENT

Té ni yon manman qui té ni en pile, en pile yche; et yon jou y pa té ni aïen pou y té baill yche-là mangé. Y té ka lèvé bon matin là sans yon sou: y pa sa ça y té doué fai,—là y té ké baill latête. Y allé lacaïe macoumè-y, raconté lapeine-y. Macoumè baill y toua chopine farine-manioc. Y allé

lacaill lautt macoumè, qui baill y yon grand trai piment. Macoumè-là di y venne trai-piment-à, épi y té pè acheté lamori,—pisse y ja té ni farine. Madame-là di: “Mèci, macoumè;”—y di y bon-jou; épi y allé lacaïe-y.

Lhè y rivé àcaïe y limé difè: y metté canari épi dleau assous difè-à; épi y cassé toutt piment-là et metté yo adans canari-à assous difè. Lhè y ouè canari-à ka bouï, y pouend baton-lélé, épi y lélé piment-à: aloss y ka fai yonne cala-lou-piment. Lhè calalou-piment là té tchouitt, y pouend chaque zassiett yche-li; y metté calalou yo fouète dans zassiett-là; y metté ta-mari fouète, assou, épi ta-y. Épi lhè calalou-là té bien fouète, y metté farine nans chaque zassiett-là. Épi y crié toutt moune vini mangé. Toutt moune vini metté yo à-tabe.

Pouèmiè bouchée mari-à pouend, y rété,—y crié: “Aïe! ouaill! mafenm!” Fenm-là réponne mari-y: “Ouaill! monmari!” Cés ti manmaille-là crié: “Ouaill! manman!” Manman-à réponne:—“Ouaill! Yches-moin!”... Yo toutt pouend couri, quitté caïe-là sèle,—épi yo toutt tombé lariviè à touempé bouche yo. Cés ti manmaille-là bouè dleau sitellement jusse temps yo toutt néyé: té ka rété anni manman-là épi papa-là. Yo té là, bô lariviè, qui té ka pleiré. Moin té ka passé à lhè-à;—moin ka mandé yo: “Ça zautt ni?”

Nhomme-là lèvé: y baill moin yon sèle coup d’piè, y voyé moin lautt bô lariviè—ou ouè moin vini pou conté ça ba ou.

PIMENTO STORY

There was once a mamma who had ever so many children; and one day she had nothing to give those children to eat. She had got up very early that morning, without a sou in the world: she did not know what to do: she was so worried that her head was upset. She went to the house of a woman-friend, and told her about her trouble. The friend gave her three *chopines* [three pints] of manioc flour. Then she went to the house of another female friend, who gave her a big trayful of pimentos. The friend told her to sell that tray of pimentos: then she could buy some codfish,—since she already had some manioc flour. The good-wife said: “Thank you, *macoumè*,”—she bid her good-day, and then went to her own house.

The moment she got home, she made a fire, and put her *canari* [earthen pot] full of water on the fire to boil: then she broke up all the pimentos and put them into the *canari* on the fire.

As soon as she saw the *canari* boiling, she took her *baton-lélé* and beat up all those pimentos: then she made a *pimento-calalou*. When the

pimento-calalou was well cooked, she took each one of the children's plates, and poured their calalou into the plates to cool it; she also put her husband's out to cool, and her own. And when the calalou was quite cool, she put some manioc flour into each of the plates. Then she called to everybody to come and eat. They all came, and sat down to table.

The first mouthful that husband took he stopped and screamed:—"Aie! ouaill! my wife!" The woman answered her husband: "Ouaill! my husband!" The little children all screamed "Ouaill! mamma!" Their mamma answered: "Ouaill! My children!"... They all ran out, left the house empty; and they tumbled into the river to steep their mouths. Those little children just drank water and drank water till they were all drowned: there was nobody left except the mama and the papa. They stayed there on the river-bank, and cried. I was passing that way just at that time;—I asked them: "What ails you people?"

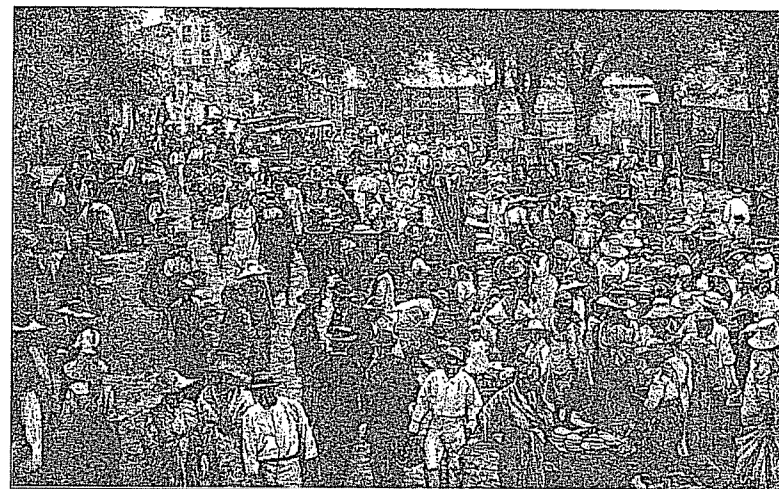
That man got up and gave me just one kick that sent me right across the river; I came here at once, as you see, to tell you all about it...

IV

...IT is no use for me to attempt anything like a detailed description of the fish Cyrilla brings me day after day from the Place du Fort: the variety seems to be infinite. I have learned, however, one curious fact which is worth noting: that, as a general rule, the more beautifully colored fish are the least palatable, and are sought after only by the poor. The *perroquet*, black, with bright bands of red and yellow; the *chirurgien*, blue and black, the *patate*, yellow and black; the *moringue*, which looks like polished granite; the *souri*, pink and yellow; the vermilion *Gouûs-zie*, the rosy *sade*, the red *Bon-Dié-manîé-moin* ("the-Good-God-handled-me")—it has two queer marks as of great fingers; and the various kinds of all-blue fish, *balaou*, *conliou*, etc., varying from steel-color to violet,—these are seldom seen at the tables of the rich. There are exceptions, of course, to this and all general rules: notably the *couronné*, pink spotted beautifully with black,—a sort of Redfish, which never sells less than fourteen cents a pound; and the *zorphi*, which has exquisite changing lights of nacreous green and purple. It is said, however, that the *zorphi* is sometimes poisonous, like the *bécunne*; there are many fish which, although not venomous by nature, have

always been considered dangerous. In the time of Père Dutertre it was believed these fish ate the apples of the manchineel-tree, washed into the sea by rains;—today it is popularly supposed that they are rendered occasionally poisonous by eating the barnacles attached to copper-plating of ships. The *tazard*, the *lune*, the *capitaine*, the *dorade*, the *perroquet*, the *couliou*, the *congre*, various crabs, and even the *tonne*—all are dangerous unless perfectly fresh: the least decomposition seems to develop a mysterious poison. A singular phenomenon regarding the poisoning occasionally produced by the *bécunne* and *dorade* is that the skin peels from the hands and feet of those lucky enough to survive the terrible colics, burnings, itchings, and delirium, which are early symptoms. Happily these accidents are very rare, since the markets have been properly inspected: in the time of Dr. Rufz, they would seem to have been very common,—so common that he tells us he would not eat fresh fish without being perfectly certain where it was caught and how long it had been out of the water.

The poor buy the brightly colored fish only when the finer qualities are not obtainable at low rates; but often and often the catch is so enormous that half of it has to be thrown back into the sea. In the hot moist air, fish decomposes very rapidly; it is impossible to transport it to any distance into the interior; and only the inhabitants of the coast can indulge in fresh fish,—at least sea-fish.



Old Market-place of the Fort, St. Pierre (removed in 1888)

Naturally, among the laboring class the question of quality is less important than that of quantity and substance, unless the fish-market be extraordinarily stocked. Of all fresh fish, the most popular is *tonne*, a great blue-gray creature whose flesh is solid as beef; next come in order of preference the flying-fish (*volants*), which often sell as low as four for a cent;—then the *lambi*, or sea-snail, which has a very dense nutritious flesh;—then the small whitish fish classed as *sàdines*;—then the blue-colored fishes according to price, *couliou*, *balaou*, etc.;—lastly, the shark, which sells commonly at two cents a pound. Large sharks are not edible; the flesh is too hard; but a young shark is very good eating indeed. Cyrillia cooked me a slice one morning: it was quite delicate, tasted almost like veal.

The quantity of very small fish sold is surprising. With ten sous the family of a laborer can have a good fish-dinner: a pound of *sàdines* is never dearer than two sous;—a pint of manioc flour can be had for same price; and a big avocado sells for a sou. This is more than enough food for any one person; and by doubling the expense one obtains a proportionately greater quantity—enough for four or five individuals. The *sàdines* are roasted over a charcoal fire, and flavored with a sauce of lemon, pimento, and garlic. When there are no *sàdines*, there are sure to be *coulious* in plenty,—small *coulious* about as long as your little finger: these are more delicate, and fetch double the price. With four sous' worth of *coulious* a family can have a superb *blaffe*. To make a *blaffe* the fish are cooked in water, and served with pimento, lemon, spices, onions, and garlic; but without oil or butter. Experience has demonstrated that *coulious* make the best *blaffe*; and a *blaffe* is seldom prepared with other fish.

V

THERE are four dishes which are the holiday luxuries of the poor:—*manicou*, *ver-palmiste*, *zandouille*, and *poule-épi-diri*.²

The *manicou* is a brave little marsupial, which might be called the opossum of Martinique: it fights, although overmatched, with the serpent, and is a great enemy to the field-rat. In the market a *manicou* sells for two francs and a half at cheapest: it is generally salted before being cooked.

The great worm, or caterpillar, called *ver-palmiste* is found in the heads of cabbage-palms,—especially after the cabbage has been cut out, and the tree has begun to perish. It is the grub of a curious beetle, which has a proboscis of such form as suggested the creole appellation, *léfant*: the “elephant.” These worms are sold in the Place du Fort at two sous

each: they are spitted and roasted alive, and are said to taste like almonds. I have never tried to find out whether this be fact or fancy; and I am glad to say that few white creoles confess a liking for this barbarous food.

The *zandouilles* are delicious sausages made with pig-buff,—and only seen in the market on Sundays. They cost a franc and a half each; and there are several women who have an established reputation throughout Martinique for their skill in making them. I have tasted some not less palatable than the famous London “pork-pies.” Those of Lamentin are reputed the best in the island.

But *poule-épi-diri* is certainly the most popular dish of all: it is the dearest, as well, and poor people can rarely afford it. In Louisiana an almost similar dish is called *jimbalaya*: chicken cooked with rice. The Martiniquais think it such a delicacy that an over-exacting person, or one difficult to satisfy, is reproved with the simple question:—“*Ça ou là 'ncò—poule-épi-diri?*” (What more do you want, great heavens!—chicken-and-rice?) Naughty children are bribed into absolute goodness by the promise of *poule-épi-diri*:—

—“*Aïe! chère, bô doudoux!*

Doudoux ba ou poule-épi-diri;

Aïe! chère, bô doudoux!”...

(*Aïe*, dear! kiss *doudoux*!—*doudoux* has rice-and-chicken for you!—*Aïe*, dear! kiss *doudoux*!)

How far rice enters into the success of the dish above mentioned I cannot say; but rice ranks in favor generally above all cereals; it is at least six times more in demand than maize. *Diri-doux*, rice boiled with sugar, is sold in prodigious quantities daily,—especially at the markets, where little heaps of it, rolled in pieces of bananas or *cachibou* leaves, are retailed at a cent each. *Diri-aulaitt*, a veritable rice-pudding, is also very popular; but it would weary the reader to mention one-tenth of the creole preparations into which rice enters.

VI

EVERYBODY eats *akras*;—they sell at a cent apiece. The *akra* is a small fritter or pancake, which may be made of fifty different things,—among others codfish, titiri, beans, brains, *choux-caraïbes*, little black peas (*poix-zié-nouè*, “black-eyed peas”), or of crawfish (*akra-cribiche*). When made of carrots, bananas, chicken, palm-cabbage, etc., and sweetened, they are

called *marinades*. On first acquaintance they seem rather greasy for so hot a climate; but one learns on becoming accustomed to tropical conditions, that a certain amount of oily or greasy food is both healthy and needful.

First among popular vegetables are beans. Red beans are preferred; but boiled white beans, served cold with vinegar and plenty of oil, form a favorite salad. Next in order of preference come the *choux-caraïbes*, *patates*, *zignames*, *camanioc*, and *cousscouche*: all immense roots,—the true potatoes of the tropics. The *camanioc* is finer than the *choux-caraïbe*, boils whiter and softer: in appearance it resembles the manioc root very closely, but has no toxic element. The *cousscouche* is the best of all: the finest Irish potato boiled into sparkling flour is not so good. Most of these roots can be cooked into a sort of mush, called *migan*: such as *migan-choux*, made with the *choux-caraïbe*; *migan-zignames*, made with yams; *migan-cousscouche*, etc.,—in which case crabs or shrimps are usually served with the *migan*. There is a particular fondness for the little rosy crab called *tourlouroux*, in patois *touloulou*. *Migan* is also made with bread-fruit. Very large bananas or plantains are boiled with cod-fish, with *daubes*, or meat stews, and with eggs. The bread-fruit is a fair substitute for vegetables. It must be cooked very thoroughly, and has a dry potato taste. What is called the *fleu-fouitt-à-pain* or “bread-fruit flower”—a long pod-shaped solid growth, covered exteriorly with tiny seeds closely set as pin-heads could be, and having an interior pith very elastic and resistant,—is candied into a delicious sweetmeat.

VII

THE consumption of bananas is enormous: more bananas are eaten than vegetables; and more banana-trees are yearly being cultivated. The negro seems to recognize instinctively that economical value of the banana to which attention was long since called by Humboldt, who estimated that while an acre planted in wheat would barely support three persons, an acre planted in banana-trees would nourish fifty.

Bananas and plantains hold the first place among fruits in popular esteem;—they are cooked in every way, and served with almost every sort of meat or fish. What we call bananas in the United States, however, are not called bananas in Martinique, but figs (*figues*). Plantains seem to be called *bananes*. One is often surprised at popular nomenclature: *choux* may mean either a sort of root (*choux-caraïbe*), or the top of the cabbage-palm; *Jacquot* may mean a fish; *cabane* never means a cabin, but a bed; *crickett*

means not a cricket, but a frog; and least fifty other words have equally deceptive uses. If one desires to speak of real figs—dried figs—he must say *figues-Fouance* (French figs): otherwise nobody will understand him. There are many kinds of bananas here called *figues*—the four most popular are the *figues-bananes*, which are plantains, I think; the *figues-makouenga*, which grow wild, and have a red skin; the *figues-pommes* (apple-bananas), which are large and yellow; and the *figues-dessè* (little-dessert-bananas), which are to be seen on all tables in St. Pierre. They are small, sweet, and always agreeable, even when one has no appetite for other fruits.

It requires some little time to become accustomed to many tropical fruits, or at least to find patience as well as inclination to eat them. A large number, in spite of delicious flavor, are provokingly stony: such as the ripe guavas, the cherries, the barbadines; even the corossol and *pomme-cannelle* are little more than huge masses of very hard seeds buried in pulp of exquisite taste. The *sapota*, or *sapodilla*, is less characterized by stoniness, and one soon learns to like it. It has large flat seeds, which can be split into two with the finger-nail; and a fine white skin lies between these two halves. It requires some skill to remove entire this little skin, or pellicle, without breaking it: to do so is said to be a test of affection. Perhaps this bit of folk-lore was suggested by the shape of the pellicle, which is that of a heart. The pretty *fille-de-couleur* asks her doudoux: “*Ess ou ainmein moin?—pouloss tiré ti lapeau-là sans cassé-y.*” Woe to him if he breaks it... The most disagreeable fruit is, I think, the *pomme-d’Haïti*, or Haytian apple: it is very attractive exteriorly; but has a strong musky odor and taste which nauseates. Few white creoles ever eat it.

Of the oranges, nothing except praise can be said; but there are fruits that look like oranges, and are not oranges, that are far more noteworthy. There is the *chadèque*, which grows here to fully three feet in circumference, and has a sweet pink pulp; and there is the “forbidden-fruit” (*fouitt-défendu*), a sort of cross between the orange and the *chadèque*, and superior to both. The colored people declare that this monster fruit is the same which grew in Eden upon the fatal tree: *c’est la mênme qui fai moune ka fai yche conm ça atouèlement!* The *fouitt-défendu* is wonderful, indeed, in its way; but the fruit which most surprised me on my first acquaintance with it was the *zabricôt*.

—“*Ou lè yon zabricôt?*” (Would you like an apricot?) Cyrillia asked me one day. I replied that I liked apricots very much,—wanted more than one. Cyrillia looked astonished, but said nothing until she returned from market, and put on the table *two* apricots, with the observation:—

"*Ça ké fai ou malade mangé tout ça!*" (You will get sick if you eat all that.) I could not eat even half of one of them. Imagine a plum larger than the largest turnip, with a skin like a russet apple, solid sweet flesh of a carrot-red color, and a nut in the middle bigger than a duck's egg



Bread-fruit Tree

and hard as a rock. These fruits are aromatic as well as sweet to the taste: the price varies from one to four cents each, according to size. The tree is indigenous to the West Indies; the aborigines of Hayti had a strange belief regarding it. They alleged that its fruits formed the nourishment of the dead; and however pressed by hunger, an Indian in the woods would rather remain without food than strip one of these trees, lest he should deprive the ghosts of their sustenance... No trace of this belief seems to exist among the colored people of Martinique.

Among the poor such fruits are luxuries: they eat more mangoes than any other fruits excepting bananas. It is rather slobbery work eating a common mango, in which every particle of pulp is threaded fast to the kernel: one prefers to gnaw it when alone. But there are cultivated mangoes with finer and thicker flesh which can be sliced off, so that the greater part of the fruit may be eaten without smearing and sucking. Among grafted varieties the *mangue* is quite as delicious as the orange. Perhaps there are nearly as many varieties of mangoes in Martinique as there are varieties of peaches with us: I am acquainted, however, with only a few,—such as the *mango-Bassignac*;—*mango-pêche* (or peach-mango);—*mango-vert* (green mango), very large and oblong;—*mango-greffe*;—*mangotine*, quite round and small;—*mango-quinette*, very small also, almost egg-shaped;—*mango-Zézé*, very sweet, rather small, and of flattened form;—*mango-d'or* (golden mango), worth half a franc each;—*mango-Lamentin*, a highly cultivated variety;—and the superb *Reine-Amélie* (or Queen Amelia), a great yellow fruit which retails even in Martinique at five cents apiece.

VIII

... "*Ou c'est bonhomme càton?—ou c'est zimage, non?*"

(Am I a pasteboard man, or an image, that I do not eat?) Cyrillia wants to know. The fact is that I am a little overfed; but the stranger in the tropics cannot eat like a native, and my abstemiousness is a surprise. In the North we eat a good deal for the sake of caloric; in the tropics, unless one be in the habit of taking much physical exercise, which is a very difficult thing to do, a generous appetite is out of the question. Cyrillia will not suffer me to live upon *mangé-Créole* altogether; she insists upon occasional beefsteaks and roasts, and tries to tempt me with all kinds of queer delicious desserts as well,—particularly those cakes made of grated cocoanut and sugar-syrup (*tablett-coco-rape*) of which a stranger becomes very fond. But, nevertheless, I cannot eat enough to quiet Cyrillia's fears.

Not eating enough is not her only complaint against me. I am perpetually doing something or other which shocks her. The Creoles are the most cautious livers in the world, perhaps;—the stranger who walks in the sun without an umbrella, or stands in currents of air, is for them an object of wonder and compassion. Cyrillia's complaints about my recklessness in the matter of hygiene always terminate with the refrain: "*Yo pa fai ça ici*"—(People never do such things in Martinique.) Among such rash acts are washing one's face or hands while perspiring, taking off one's hat on coming in from a walk, going out immediately after a bath, and washing my face with soap. "Oh, Cyrillia! what foolishness!—why should I not wash my face with soap?" "Because it will blind you," Cyrillia answers: "*ça ké tchoué limié zié ou*" (it will kill the light in your eyes). There is no cleaner person than Cyrillia; and, indeed among the city people, the daily bath is the rule in all weathers; but soap is never used on the face by thousands, who, like Cyrillia, believe it will "kill the light of the eyes."

One day I had been taking a long walk in the sun, and returned so thirsty that all the old stories about travellers suffering in waterless deserts returned to memory with new significance;—visions of simooms arose before me. What a delight to see and to grasp the heavy, red, thick-lipped *dobanne*, the water-jar, dewy and cool with the exudation of the *Eau-de-Gouyave* which filled it to the brim,—*toutt vivant*, as Cyrillia says, "all alive"! There was a sudden scream,—the water-pitcher was snatched from my hands by Cyrillia with the question: "*Ess ou lé tchoué cò-ou?*"—*Saint Joseph!*" (Did I want to kill my body?)... The Creoles use the word "body" speaking of anything that can happen to one,—"*hurt one's body*," "*tire one's body*," "*marry one's body*," "*bury one's body*," etc.;—I wonder whether the expression originated in zealous desire to prove a profound faith in the soul... Then Cyrillia made me a little punch with sugar and rum, and told me I must never drink fresh-water after a walk unless I wanted to kill my body. In this matter her advice was good. The immediate result of a cold drink while heated is a profuse and icy perspiration, during which currents of air are really dangerous. A cold is not dreaded here, and colds are rare; but pleurisy is common, and may be the consequence of any imprudent exposure.

I do not often have the opportunity at home of committing even an unconscious imprudence; for Cyrillia is ubiquitous, and always on the watch lest something dreadful should happen to me. She is wonderful as a house-keeper as well as a cook: there is certainly much

to do, and she has only a child to help her, but she always seems to have time. Her kitchen apparatus is of the simplest kind: a charcoal furnace constructed of bricks, a few earthenware pots (*canari*), and some gridirons;—yet with these she can certainly prepare as many dishes as there are days in the year. I have never known her to be busy with her *canari* for more than an hour; yet everything is kept in perfect order. When she is not working, she is quite happy in sitting at a window, and amusing herself by watching the life of the street,—or playing with a kitten, which she has trained so well that it seems to understand everything she says.

IX

WITH darkness all the population of the island retire to their homes;—the streets become silent, and the life of the day is done. By eight o'clock nearly all the windows are closed, and the lights put out;—by nine the people are asleep. There are no evening parties, no night amusements, except during rare theatrical seasons and times of Carnival; there are no evening visits: active existence is almost timed by the rising and setting of the sun... The only pleasure left for the stranger of evenings is a quiet smoke on his balcony or before his door: reading is out of the question, partly because books are rare, partly because lights are bad, partly because insects throng about every lamp or candle. I am lucky enough to have a balcony, broad enough for a rocking-chair: and sometimes Cyrillia and the kitten come to keep me company before bedtime. The kitten climbs on my knees; Cyrillia sits right down upon the balcony.

One bright evening, Cyrillia was amusing herself much by watching the clouds: they were floating high; the moonlight made them brilliant as frost. As they changed shape under the pressure of the trade-wind, Cyrillia seemed to discover wonderful things in them: sheep, ships with sails, cows, faces, perhaps even *zombis*.

—"Travaill Bon-Dié joli,—*anh?*" (Is not the work of the Good-God pretty?) she said at last... "There was Madame Rémy, who used to sell the finest *foulards* and Madrases in St. Pierre;—she used to study the clouds. She drew the patterns of the clouds for her *foulards*: whenever she saw a beautiful cloud or a beautiful rainbow, she would make a drawing of it in color at once and then she would send that to France to have *foulards* made just like it... Since she is dead, you do not see any more pretty *foulards* such as there used to be."

—“Would you like to look at the moon with my telescope, Cyrillia?” I asked. “Let me get it for you.”

—“Oh no, no!” she answered, as if shocked.

—“Why?”

—“*Ah! faut pa gâdé baggaïe Bon-Dié conm ça!*” (It is not right to look at the things of the Good-God that way.)

I did not insist. After a little silence, Cyrillia resumed:—

—“But I saw the Sun and the Moon once fighting together: that was what people call an *eclipse*,—is not that the word?... They fought together a long time: I was looking at them. We put a *terrine* full of water on the ground, and looked into the water to see them. And the Moon is stronger than the Sun!—yes, the Sun was obliged to give way to the Moon... Why do they fight like that?”

—“They don’t, Cyrillia.”

—“Oh yes, they do. I saw them!... And the Moon is much stronger than the Sun!”

I did not attempt to contradict this testimony of the eyes. Cyrillia continued to watch the pretty clouds. Then she said:—

—“Would you not like to have a ladder long enough to let you climb up to those clouds, and see what they are made of?”

—“Why, Cyrillia, they are only vapor,—brume: I have been in clouds.”

She looked at me in surprise, and, after a moment’s silence, asked, with an irony of which I had not supposed her capable:—

—“Then you are the Good-God?”

—“Why, Cyrillia, it is not difficult to reach clouds. You see clouds always upon the top of the Montagne Pelée;—people go there. I have been there—in the clouds.”

—“Ah! those are not the same clouds: those are not the clouds of the Good-God. You cannot touch the sky when you are on the Morne de la Croix.”

—“My dear Cyrillia, there is no sky to touch. The sky is only an appearance.”

—“*Anh, anh, anh!* No sky!—you say there is no sky?... Then what is that up there?”

—“That is air, Cyrillia, beautiful blue air.”

—“And what are the stars fastened to?”

—“To nothing. They are suns, but so much further away than our sun that they look small.”

—“No, they are not suns! They have not the same form as the sun... You must not say there is no sky: it is wicked! But you are not a Catholic!”

—“My dear Cyrillia, I don’t see what that has to do with the sky.”

—“Where does the Good-God stay, if there be no sky? And where is heaven?—and where is hell?”

—“Hell in the sky, Cyrillia?”

—“The Good-God made heaven in one part of the sky, and hell in another part, for bad people... Ah! you are a Protestant;—you do not know the things of the Good-God! That is why you talk like that.”

—“What is a Protestant, Cyrillia?”

—“You are one. The Protestants do not believe in religion,—do not love the Good-God.”

—“Well, I am neither a Protestant nor a Catholic, Cyrillia.”

—“Oh! you do not mean that; you cannot be a *maudi*, an accursed. There are only the Protestants, the Catholics, and the accursed. You are not a *maudi*, I am sure. But you must not say there is no sky.”...

—“But, Cyrillia”—

—“No: I will not listen to you:—you are a Protestant. Where does the rain come from, if there is no sky?”...

—“Why, Cyrillia,... the clouds”...

—“No, you are a Protestant... How can you say such things? There are the Three Kings and the Three Valets,—the beautiful stars that come at Christmas time,—there, over there—all beautiful, and big, big, big!... And you say there is no sky!”

—“Cyrillia, perhaps I am a *maudi*.”

—“No, no! You are only a Protestant. But do not tell me there is no sky: it is wicked to say that!”

—“I won’t say it any more, Cyrillia—there! But I will say there are no *zombis*.”

—“I know you are not a *maudi*; —you have been baptized.”

—“How do you know I have been baptized?”

—“Because, if you had not been baptized you would see *zombis* all the time, even in broad day. All children who are not baptized see *zombis*.”

X

CYRILLIA’S solicitude for me extends beyond the commonplaces of hygiene and diet into the uncertain domain of matters ghostly. She fears much that something might happen to me through the agency of

wizards, witches (*sociès*), or *zombis*. Especially *zombis*. Cyrillia's belief in *zombis* has a solidity that renders argument out of the question. This belief is part of her inner nature,—something hereditary, racial, ancient as Africa, as characteristic of her people as the love of rhythms and melodies totally different from our own musical conceptions, but possessing, even for the civilized, an inexplicable emotional charm.

Zombi!—the word is perhaps full of mystery even for those who made it. The explanations of those who utter it most often are never quite lucid: it seems to convey ideas darkly impossible to define,—fancies belonging to the mind of another race and another era,—unspeakably old. Perhaps the word in our own language which offers the best analogy is “goblin”: yet the one is not fully translated by the other. Both have, however, one common ground on which they become indistinguishable,—that region of the supernatural which is most primitive and most vague; and the closest relation between the savage and the civilized fancy may be found in the fears which we call childish,—of darkness, shadows, and things dreamed. One form of the *zombi* belief—akin to certain ghostly superstitions held by various primitive races—would seem to have been suggested by nightmare,—that form of nightmare in which familiar persons become slowly and hideously transformed into malevolent beings. The *zombi* deludes under the appearance of a travelling companion, an old comrade—like the desert spirits of the Arabs—or even under the form of an animal. Consequently the creole negro fears everything living which he meets after dark upon a lonely road,—a stray horse, a cow, even a dog; and mothers quell the naughtiness of their children by the threat of summoning a *zombi*-cat or a *zombi*-creature of some kind. “*Zombi ké nana ou*” (the *zombi* will gobble thee up) is generally an effectual menace in the country parts, where it is believed *zombis* may be met with any time after sunset. In the city it is thought that their regular hours are between two and four o'clock in the morning. At least so Cyrillia says:—

—“*Dèzhè, toua-zhè-matin: c'est lhè zombi. Yo ka sòti dèzhè, toua zhè: c'est lhè yo. A quatthè yo ka rentré;—angelus ka sonné.*” (At four o'clock they go back where they came from, before the *Angelus* rings.) Why?

—“*C'est pou moune pas joinne yo dans larue.*” (So that people may not meet with them in the street), Cyrillia answers.

—“Are they afraid of the people, Cyrillia?” I asked.

—“No, they are not afraid; but they do not want people to know their business” (*pa lè moune ouè zaffai yo*).

Cyrillia also says one must not look out of the window when a dog howls at night. Such a dog may be a *mauvais vivant* (evil being): “If he sees me looking at him he will say, ‘*Ou tropp quirièse quitté cabane ou pou gâdé zaffai lezautt.*’” (You are too curious to leave your bed like that to look at other folks' business.)

—“And what then, Cyrillia?”

—“Then he will put out your eyes,—*y ké coqui zié ou*,—make you blind.”

—“But, Cyrillia,” I asked one day, “did you ever see any *zombis*?”

—“How? I often see them!... They walk about the room at night;—they walk like people. They sit in the rocking-chairs and rock themselves very softly, and look at me. I say to them:—‘What do you want here?—I never did any harm to anybody. Go away!’ Then they go away.”

—“What do they look like?”

—“Like people,—sometimes like beautiful people (*bel moune*). I am afraid of them. I only see them when there is no light burning. While the lamp burns before the Virgin they do not come. But sometimes the oil fails, and the light dies.”

In my own room there are dried palm leaves and some withered flowers fastened to the wall. Cyrillia put them there. They were taken from the *repositoires* (temporary altars) erected for the last Corpus Christi procession: consequently they are blessed, and ought to keep the *zombis* away. That is why they are fastened to the wall, over my bed.

Nobody could be kinder to animals than Cyrillia usually shows herself to be: all the domestic animals in the neighborhood impose upon her;—various dogs and cats steal from her imprudently, without the least fear of being beaten. I was therefore very much surprised to see her one evening catch a flying beetle that approached the light, and deliberately put its head in the candle-flame. When I asked her how she could be so cruel, she replied:—

—“*Ah! ou pa connaît choïe pays-ci.*” (You do not know Things in this country.)

The Things thus referred to I found to be supernatural Things. It is popularly believed that certain winged creatures which circle about candles at night may be *engagés* or *envoyés*—wicked people having the power of transformation or even *zombis* “sent” by witches or wizards to do harm. “There was a woman at Tricolore,” Cyrillia says, “who used to sew a great deal at night; and a big beetle used to come into her room and fly about the candle, and bother her very much. One night she managed

to get hold of it, and she singed its head in the candle. Next day, a woman who was her neighbor came to the house with her head all tied up. 'Ah! macoumè,' asked the sewing-woman, 'ça ou ni dans guiôle-ou?' And the other answered, very angrily, 'Ou ni toupet mandé moin ça moin ni dans guiôle moin!—et cété ou qui té brilé guiôle moin nans chandelle-ou hiè-souè.' (You have the impudence to ask what is the matter with my mouth! and you yourself burned my mouth in your candle last night.)

Early one morning, about five o'clock, Cyrillia, opening the front door, saw a huge crab walking down the street. Probably it had escaped from some barrel; for it is customary here to keep live crabs in barrels and fatten them,—feeding them with maize, mangoes, and, above all, green peppers: nobody likes to cook crabs as soon as caught; for they may have been eating manchineel apples at the river-mouths. Cyrillia uttered a cry of dismay on seeing that crab; then I heard her talking to herself:—"I touch it?—never! it can go about its business. How do I know it is not *an arranged crab* (*yon crabe rangé*), or an *envoyé*?—since everybody knows I like crabs. For two sous I can buy a fine crab and know where it comes from." The crab went on down the street: everywhere the sight of it created consternation; nobody dared to touch it; women cried out at it, "*Miserable!—envoyé Satan!—allez, maudit!*"—some threw holy water on the crab. Doubtless it reached the sea in safety. In the evening Cyrillia said: "I think that crab was a little zombi;—I am going to burn a light all night to keep it from coming back."

Another day, while I was out, a negro to whom I had lent two francs came to the house, and paid his debt. Cyrillia told me when I came back, and showed me the money carefully enveloped in a piece of brown paper; but said I must not touch it,—she would get rid of it for me at the market. I laughed at her fears; and she observed: "You do not know negroes, Missié!—negroes are wicked, negroes are jealous! I do not want you to touch that money because I have not a good opinion about this affair."

After I began learn more of the underside of Martinique life, I could understand the source and justification of many similar superstitions in simple and uneducated minds. The negro sorcerer is, at worst, only a poisoner; but he possesses a very curious art which long defied serious investigation, and in the beginning of the last century was attributed, even by whites, to diabolical influence. In 1721, 1723, and 1725, several negroes were burned alive at the stake as wizards in league with the devil. It was an era of comparative ignorance; but even now things are done which would astonish the most sceptical and practical physician. For example, a laborer discharged from a plantation vows vengeance; and the

next morning the whole force of hands—the entire *atelier*—are totally disabled from work. Every man and woman on the place is unable to walk; everybody has one or both legs frightfully swollen. *Yo té ka pilé malifice*: they have trodden on a "malifice." What is the "malifice"? All that can be ascertained is that certain little prickly seeds have been scattered all over the ground, where the bare-footed workers are in the habit of passing. Ordinarily, treading on these seeds is of no consequence; but it is evident in such a case that they must have been prepared in a special way,—soaked in some poison, perhaps snake-venom. At all events, the physician deems it safest to treat the inflammations after the manner of snake wounds: and after many days the hands are perhaps able to resume duty.

XI

WHILE Cyrillia is busy with her *canari*, she talks to herself or sings. She has a low rich voice,—sings strange things, things that have been forgotten by this generation,—creole songs of the old days, having a weird rhythm and fractions of tones that are surely African. But more generally she talks to herself, as all the Martiniquaises do: it is a continual murmur as of a stream. At first I used to think she was talking to someone else, and would call out:—

—"Épi quiless moune ça ou ka pàlè-à?"

But she would always answer:—"Moin ka pàlè anni cò moin" (I am only talking to my own body), which is the creole expression for talking to oneself.

—"And what are you talking so much to your own body about, Cyrillia?"

—"I am talking about my own little affairs" (*ti zaffai-moin*)... That is all that I could ever draw from her.

But when not working, she will sit for hours looking out of the window. In this she resembles the kitten: both seem to find the same silent pleasure in watching the street, or the green heights that rise above its roofs:—the Morne d'Orange. Occasionally at such times she will break the silence in the strangest way, if she thinks I am not too busy with my papers to answer a question:—

—"Missié?"—timidly

—"Eh?"

—"Di moin, chè, ti manmille dans pays ou, toutt piti, piti,—ess ça pàlè Anglais?" (Do the little children in my country—the very, very

little children—talk English?)

—“Why, certainly, Cyrillia.”

—“*Toutt piti, piti?*” —with growing surprise.

—“Why, of course!”

—“*C'est drôle, ça!*” (It is queer, that!) She cannot understand it.

—“And the little *manmaille* in Martinique, Cyrillia—*toutt piti, piti*, don't they talk creole?”

—“*Oui; mais toutt mounne ka pâlé nègue: ça facile.*” (Yes; but anybody can talk negro—that is easy to learn.)

XII

CYRILLIA'S room has no furniture in it: the Martinique *bonne* lives as simply and as rudely as a domestic animal. One thin mattress covered with a sheet, and elevated from the floor only by a *léfant*, forms her bed. The *léfant* or “elephant,” is composed of two thick square pieces of coarse hard mattress stuffed with shavings and placed end to end. Cyrillia has a good pillow, however,—*bourré épi flèches-canne*,—filled with the plumes of the sugar-cane. A cheap trunk with broken hinges contains her modest little wardrobe: a few *mouchoirs*, or kerchiefs, used for head-dresses, a spare *douillette*, or long robe, and some tattered linen. Still she is always clean, neat, fresh-looking. I see a pair of sandals in the corner,—such as the women of the country sometimes wear—wooden soles with a leather band for the instep, and two little straps; but she never puts them on. Fastened to the wall are two French prints—lithographs: one representing Victor Hugo's *Esmeralda* in prison with her pet goat; the other, Lamartine's *Laurence* with her fawn. Both are very old and stained and bitten by the *bête-à-ciseau*, a species of *lepisma*, which destroys books and papers, and everything it can find exposed. On a shelf are two bottles,—one filled with holy water; another with *tafia camphrée* (camphor dissolved in tafia), which is Cyrillia's sole remedy for colds, fevers, headaches—all maladies not of a very fatal description. There are also a little woollen monkey, about three inches high—the dusty plaything of a long-dead child;—an image of the Virgin, even smaller;—and a broken cup with fresh bright blossoms in it, the Virgin's flower-offering;—and the Virgin's invariable lamp—a night-light, a little wick floating on olive-oil in a tiny glass.

I know that Cyrillia must have bought these flowers—they are garden flowers—at the *Marché du Fort*. There are always old women sitting there

who sell nothing else but bouquets for the Virgin,—and who cry out to passers-by:—“*Gagné ti bouquet pou Viège-ou, chè!*... Buy a nosegay, dear, for your Virgin;—she is asking you for one;—give her a little one, *chè cocott.*”... Cyrillia says you must not smell the flowers you give the Virgin: it would be stealing from her... The little lamp is always lighted at six o'clock. At six o'clock the Virgin is supposed to pass through all the streets of St. Pierre, and wherever a lamp burns before her image, she enters and blesses that house. “*Faut limé lampe ou pou fai la-Viège passé dans caïe-ou,*” says Cyrillia. (You must light the lamp to make the Virgin come into your house.)... Cyrillia often talks to her little image, exactly as if it were a baby,—calls it pet names,—asks if it is content with the flowers.

This image of the Virgin is broken: it is only half a Virgin,—the upper half. Cyrillia has arranged it so, nevertheless, that had I not been very inquisitive I should never have divined its mishap. She found a small broken powder-box without a lid,—probably thrown negligently out of a boudoir window by some wealthy beauty: she filled this little box with straw, and fixed the mutilated image upright within it, so that you could never suspect the loss of its feet. The Virgin looks very funny, thus peeping over the edge of her little box;—looks like a broken toy, which a child has been trying to mend. But this Virgin has offerings too: Cyrillia buys flowers for her, and sticks them all round her, between the edge of the powder-box and the straw. After all, Cyrillia's Virgin is quite as serious a fact as any image of silver or of ivory in the homes of the rich: probably the prayers said to her are more simply beautiful, and more direct from the heart, than many daily murmured before the *chapelles* of luxurious homes. And the more one looks at it, the more one feels that it were almost wicked to smile at this little broken toy of faith.

—“Cyrillia, *mafi,*” I asked her one day, after my discovery of the little Virgin,—“would you not like me to buy a *chapelle* for you?” The *chapelle* is the little bracket-altar, together with images and ornaments, to be found in every creole bedroom.

—“*Mais non, Missié,*” she answered, smiling, “*moin aimein ti Viège moin, pa lè gagnin dautt.* I love my little Virgin: do not want any other. I have seen much trouble:—she was with me in my trouble;—she heard my prayers. It would be wicked for me to throw her away. When I have a sou to spare, I buy flowers for her;—when I have no money, I climb the *mornes*, and pick pretty buds for her... But why should Missié want to buy me a *chapelle*?—Missié is a Protestant?”

—“I thought it might give you pleasure, Cyrillia.”

—“No, Missié, I thank you; it would not give me pleasure. But Missié could give me something else which would make me very happy—I often thought of asking Missié... but—”

—“Tell me what it is, Cyrillia.”

—“Missié makes photographs...”

—“You want a photograph of yourself, Cyrillia?”

—“Oh! no, Missié, I am too ugly and too old. But I have a daughter. She is beautiful—*yon bel bois*,—like a beautiful tree, as we say here. I would like so much to have her picture taken.”

A photographic instrument belonging to a clumsy amateur suggested this request to Cyrillia. I could not attempt such work successfully; but I gave her a note to a photographer of much skill; and a few days later the portrait was sent to the house. Cyrillia's daughter was certainly a comely girl,—tall and almost gold-colored, with pleasing features; and the photograph looked very nice, though less nice than the original. Half the beauty of these people is a beauty of tint,—a tint so exquisite sometimes that I have even heard white creoles declare no white complexion compares with it: the greater part of the charm remaining is grace,—the grace of movement; and neither of these can be rendered by photography. I had the portrait framed for Cyrillia, to hang up beside her little pictures.

When it came, she was not in; I put it in her room and waited to see the effect. On returning, she entered there; and I did not see her for so long a time that I stole to the door of the chamber to observe her. She was standing before the portrait,—looking at it, talking to it as if it were alive. “*Yche moin, yche moin!... Oui! ou toutt bel!—yche moin bel.*” (My child, my child... Yes, thou art all beautiful: my child is beautiful.) All at once she turned—perhaps she noticed my shadow, or felt my presence in some way: her eyes were wet;—she started, flushed, then laughed.

—“Ah! Missié, you watch me;—*ou guetté moin*... But she is my child. Why should I not love her?... She looks so beautiful there.”

—“She is beautiful, Cyrillia;—I love to see you love her.”

She gazed at the picture a little longer in silence;—then turned to me again, and asked earnestly:—

—“*Pouki yo pa ka fai pòtrai palé—anh?... pisse yo ka tiré y toutt samm ou: c'est ou-menm!... Yo douè fai y palé 'lou.*” (Why do they not make a portrait talk,—tell me? For they draw it just all like you!—it is yourself: they ought to make it talk.)

—“Perhaps they will be able to do something like that one of these days, Cyrillia.”

—“Ah! that would be so nice. Then I could talk to her. *C'est yon bel mounne moin fai—y bel, joli mounne!... Moin sé causé épi y.*”...

...And I, watching her beautiful childish emotion, thought:—Cursed be the cruelty that would persuade itself that one soul may be like another,—that one affection may be replaced by another,—that individual goodness is not a thing apart, original, untwinned on earth, but only the general characteristic of a class or type, to be sought and found and utilized at will!... Self-cursed he who denies the divinity of love! Each heart, each brain in the billions of humanity,—even so surely as sorrow lives,—feels and thinks in some special way unlike any other; and goodness in each has its unlikeness to all other goodness,—and thus its own infinite preciousness; for however humble, however small, it is something all alone, and God never repeats his work. No heart-beat is cheap, no gentleness is despicable, no kindness is common; and Death, in removing a life—the simplest life ignored,—removes what never will reappear through the eternity of eternities,—since every being is the sum of a chain of experiences infinitely varied from all others... To some Cyrillia's happy tears might bring a smile: to me that smile would seem the unforgivable sin against the Giver of Life!...

NOTES

1. There is record of an attempt to manufacture bread with one part manioc flour to three of wheat flour. The result was excellent; but no serious effort was ever made to put the manioc bread on the market.

2. I must mention a surreptitious dish, *chatt*;—needless to say the cats are not sold, but stolen. It is true that only a small class of poor people eat cats; but they eat so many cats that cats have become quite rare in St. Pierre. The custom is purely superstitious: it is alleged that if you eat cat seven times, or if you eat seven cats, no witch, wizard or *quimboiseur* can ever do you any harm; and the cat ought to be eaten on Christmas Eve in order that the meal be perfectly efficacious... The mystic number “seven” enters into another and a better creole superstition;—if you kill a serpent, seven great sins are forgiven to you: *ou ké ni sept grands péchés effacé.*