

AUDUBON IN W. FELICIANA

By Sarah Turnbull Stirling.

In ye ancient days of 1816—which are just a century past—and when West Feliciana parish, Louisiana, was at its loveliest with mystery of forest and fern laden ravine, the silver of creek bottom and the beautiful "red clay cuts," a wanderer came home, and as the hospitable doors in West Feliciana were always open and the hearth fires bright, he was made welcome and dwelt amongst them; and their children's children tell of the "Angel unawares."

John James Audubon was born at Mandeville on the shores of Lake Ponchartrain, May 4th, 1780; his hundred and forty third birthday being now at hand.

From Mrs. Audubon's "Memoirs of her husband," kindly loaned me from the "Cottage" library, I found that John was the son of Commander Audubon, who was the youngest but one of a family of twenty-seven, the children of a poor fisherman of Sable de Lorne in France. This worthy man was often seen with his wife and twenty-one children in church. The commander says that when he was 12 years old his father gave him "A shirt, a warm dress, a cane and his blessing and sent me out to seek my fortune." The boy shipped before the mast at Nantes and at seventeen was captain of a small trading vessel. Afterwards he bought a fleet of small trading vessels and sailed to San Domingo; there he got a Government appointment. Finally we see him at the court of Napoleon, devoted to the Emperor, and commander of a war vessel. It was in it, I suppose that he

visited the French Colony of Louisiana and met the beautiful Anne Monette. They were married and had three sons and a daughter; John James, our Audubon, was the youngest of these.

When he was a few years old his parents went back to San Domingo, where his mother miserably perished in a revolt of the negroes. After that the Commander married again, presumably in France. Audubon's stepmother was devoted to him, but with a foolish devotion that allowed him to stay away from school, stuff himself on candy and dress extravagantly. John's father, finding this out on one of his visits home, hurried the young man off, with only a few hours notice, to school at Rochefort.

Mother Nature had taught Audubon to draw, and at Rochefort he was so fortunate as to have David as his first master. All his spare time at school was spent collecting specimens of birds, butterflies, small animals and fragments of strange looking rock. After his school days his father wanted him to be a soldier of Napoleon—a life that at that time would have satisfied almost any young Frenchman—but Audubon loved a free life, the rain on the mountains, the wind in the trees, sunshine, star-shine, and the song of birds, held a divine harmony for him, a harmony that found a home in his soul, and is transmitted in his beautiful pictures and writings to us.

Audubon came over to America to manage one of his father's estates in Pennsylvania, called Mill Grove. Next to Mill Grove, is Falland Ford, where Mr. William Bakewell lived, and these two gentlemen hunted and fished together; and there he met and loved at first sight sweet Lucy Bakewell, who, by the way, is the great, great aunt

of our own veteran leader, Rev. Gordon Bakewell, the Rector of Trinity Chapel in New Orleans.

Our lover affected velvet coats and lace ruffles while out hunting, filled his home with specimens and dreamed of his life work the "Ornithological Biography," and if you will read Scott's "Peveril of the Peake," it is the romantic history of the house of Basquinle or Bakewell. This pair "loved and married and lived happy ever afterwards."

Several years after the marriage, Audubon sold Mill Grove, and put the money into goods, which he and his partner loaded on an ark and came down the river as far as Hendersonville, Kentucky. He did not take kindly to commercial life, and every time the ark stopped, was off to the woods to collect specimens. One most productive time was once when they were ice bound in Kentucky, Audubon went off with some Indians to an inland lake where there was a quantity of white swans.

While wandering about the country he met Daniel Boone, and the first American ornithologist, Alex Wilson. Naturally commerce did not prosper at this rate, and after many failures we find him in Natchez, Mississippi, (1820) painting portraits for a living. Mrs. Audubon and their two sons were living with her father, as often Audubon did not know where the next meal was coming from. Even at this time of great poverty, which was never hopeless with him, he was corresponding with President Harrison, President Monroe and Henry Clay.

In the meantime, Mrs. Audubon, with the boys, had come to New Orleans and was teaching there; so that Audubon got on a keel-boat and was towed down the river to Bayou Sara. On his way to see her, he was taken

in here by Mrs. Lucretia Alston Perrie at Oakley, her plantation home three or four miles from the twin towns of Bayou Sara and St. Francisville. He did not stay long, but went on to New Orleans to his wife. Here, also, he painted portraits for a living, and endured the criticism of "Jarvis" who "objected to his manner of painting birds," but "Vanderlyns" encouraged him, and with these ups and downs he turned to West Feliciana and the friends he had found there. Audubon said himself that he believed Mrs. Perrie only engaged him to teach, that she might further his enterprise. She gave him sixty dollars a month to teach her daughter Eliza, half the day; he spent the other half in his beloved woods. Oakley is beautiful, set in its park of oaks and cedars, and is intact now except that its handsome young chatelaine has seen fit to change the Spanish built steps to a modern pair. On the dining room walls are pictures that Audubon painted and hung there. In 1823 Mrs. Audubon came up to teach at Mrs. Jane Percy's, where she staid three or four years. The Percy home was "Hollywood" on the big Bayou Sara creek. Later she taught at Mrs. Wm. Garrett Johnson's, and it seems Mr. and Mrs. Audubon made frequent visits to the home of Dr. Nathaniel Pope in St. Francisville, as described so charmingly by Mrs. John Monroe Sherrouse in a chapter by itself. Miss Lula Robinson, a granddaughter, kindly loaned me the Mms. to make extracts from, but I think it too valuable and interesting to tamper with. Mrs. Sherrouse is an enthusiastic member of the Audubon Monument Association. The rest of the information I have (1911) is from Mr. Clarence Percy, Sr., Mrs. James Stewart and Mrs. James Stewart and Mrs. Wm. Walker. In all these homes a life long friendship commenced and an ideal time for the Audubons. They were together, each with perfect love and perfect faith in the other, and each with congenial occupation.

Mrs. Audubon made three thousand per year teaching and gave her husband the money to travel on and study—out of Nature's book, not in college. She had perfect confidence in him, and he, in himself. Thus she was his help meet in a life time of weary waiting and disheartening misfortune. They lived in West Feliciana sixteen years—as happy as any they ever spent in all their married life, she making money in the home of their friends, teaching select schools; fifteen scholars at a time, that she might pour it all in his hands for his life work.

Here is a list of all the scholars that could be remembered, that I am very sure will be precious to their descendants:

Miss Margaret Percy, (Mrs. Geo. W. Sargent).
Miss Sarah Percy, (Mrs. Dr. Provan).
Miss Christine Percy, (Mrs. Dr. A. DASHILL). John Woodhouse Audubon lover Christine.
Miss Julia Ann Randolph, (Mrs. James Stewart).
Miss Sallie Ann Randolph, (Mrs. Jones Stewart).
Miss Augusta Randolph, (Mrs. W. C. S. Ventress).
Miss Francina Ratcliffe, (Mrs. Gen. Brandon).
Miss Amy Mathews, (Mrs. Major Chase).
Miss Isabelle Kendrick, (Mrs. David Fluker).
Miss Marshall of Mississippi, whom she taught at the Percy's.

At the Johnson's:
Miss Susan Johnson, (Mrs. Pleasant Harbour).
Miss Malvina D. Johnson, (Mrs. Dr. Warren Stone).
Miss Jane Montgomery, (Mrs. McDermott).
Miss Susan Montgomery, (Mrs. Smiley).
Miss Jane Harbour, (Mrs. James Hill).
Miss Mary Harbour, (Mrs. Dr. McGhoon).
Miss Margaret Butler of the "Cottage."
Miss Mary Rucker, Mrs. James Leake).
And the Mascot, little Ellen Johnson, who married Mr. Wm. Broadner Walker.

The Audubons were so noble, refined and sincere, that the "for true" fairy tale of their happiness comes down to us through the vista of years and changes that have happened since then. The tale is told of how she made a companion of nature for his sake; the long walks they took together on the white sand of the creek bottom and the beautiful West Feliciana hills. How the seasons came and went with happiness, and were counted by the drumming partridge, the call of the whip-poor-will, the changing of the dove's breast, and the long flight of birds to the southward when winter winds blew.

Audubon, as was his wont, would dress in his old brown hunting suit (perhaps homespun or leather), and go off for weeks in the forest to live with the birds and beasts—and he said, "spirits." While at Mrs. Percy's he made his books so complete that he began to travel about to get subscribers for it that he might get it published. In 1824 he went to Philadelphia and there met Prince Canino Le Suer, Sully, Peale, Joseph Bonaparte and daughter, DeWitt Clinton, and the Rev. John Hopkins, who converted him to Episcopacy.

He also had a sweet and affected visit to Mill Grove, and rushed out to the place where Lucy Bakewell had promised to marry him, and gave thanks for their marriage. Then he started home in a skiff from Pittsburgh and came all the way down to Bayou Sara. On arriving there before day in the morning, he got a horse and started out to see his wife, who was only about twenty-five miles off at "Hollywood." His "bump of locality" was so strong that he never dreamed of getting lost, but just out-

side of town, in his haste, he missed his way and rode around and around in the quicksand until he was almost drowned. I have had the place pointed out to me.

Audubon commenced to teach again after his arrival, giving his wife's pupils music and French. He also had a dancing class of sixty in Woodville, Mississippi, which was near by. When he had made two thousand dollars, he again sailed for Europe, arriving in England on the 20th of July, 1826. His business was to have plates of his paintings, that his book could be published.

Here he met Mr. Roseo, Lord Stanley, Baron Humbolt, Sir Walter Scott, Sir Thomas Laurence, Hannah More, Miss Edgeworth, and at Edinburgh, Francis Jeffries, Lord Elgin, and Lady Mary Clark. All these became his patrons; Sir Walter Scott showed his book to George the IV, who pronounced it "fine."

(Continued on page six)

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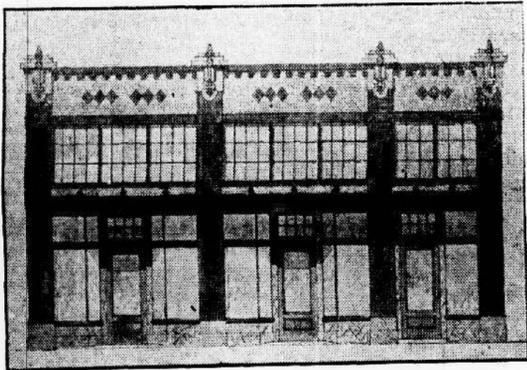
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