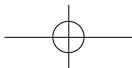
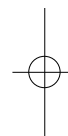
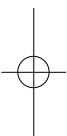


# A VOYAGE TO NEW ORLEANS



Elisée Reclus

A VOYAGE TO NEW ORLEANS  
Anarchist Impressions of the Old South

Revised and Expanded Edition

Translated and Edited by

John Clark and Camille Martin

Thetford, VT: Glad Day Books, 2003

Glad Day Books

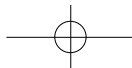
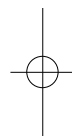
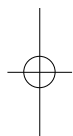
© 2003 John Clark and Camille Martin

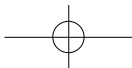
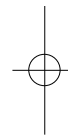
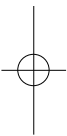
ISBN # 1-930180-03-9

“A Voyage to New Orleans” was originally published as “Fragment d’un voyage à la Nouvelle-Orléans, 1855” in *Le Tour du monde* 1 (1860), pp. 177–192. The illustrations in the present edition are from the original. The “Letters from Louisiana” were originally published in Elisée Reclus, *Correspondance*, Tome Premier, Décembre 1850–Mai 1870 (Paris: Librairie Schleicher Frères, 1911), pp. 73–111.



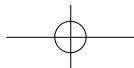
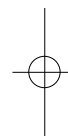
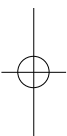
*for Ronald Creagh*





## CONTENTS

Preface <i>Camille Martin</i>	viii
Introduction: Reclus' Voyage to Liberty <i>John Clark</i>	1
A Voyage to New Orleans <i>Elisée Reclus</i>	15
Letters from Louisiana <i>Elisée Reclus</i>	63
Epilogue: Humanity, Nature, and the Anarchist Ideal <i>John Clark</i>	99





## PREFACE

*Camille Martin*

Elisée Reclus' "Voyage to New Orleans" is a small but remarkable gem written in his youth by the great geographer and anarchist thinker. Many years ago John Clark ran across the text while working in the Loyola University Library. He read it and found it to be a quite extraordinary work. He put it aside but never forgot it.

Years later, after both of us had become increasingly interested in such topics as French culture, ecology and radical politics, John re read the article and found that it had become even more intriguing to him over the years. He showed it to me excitedly, asking me whether I would be willing to work with him on a translation. The fact that this was an account of Reclus' visit to our native New Orleans almost a century and a half ago was enticing enough, but what hooked me on the project were his beautifully detailed and poetic language and his keen insights into the culture, politics and economics of antebellum New Orleans (certain aspects of which—notably the tendency toward a care-free hedonism and a complacent tolerance for corruption—seem not to have changed much since then!). I readily agreed to do a preliminary translation during the summer of 1993, after which we worked together to produce a polished version.

The translation offered some fascinating challenges for the translators. The young Reclus of the "Voyage" was already a keen observer of plant and animal life, people and social interactions, and was an astute critic of political, economic and religious institutions. His knowledge necessitated research into a number of technical terms, such as the parts of a nineteenth-century ship, sea animals, and the plan and history of antebellum

New Orleans. The “Letters,” as personal correspondence, contain a number of cryptic references, and linguistic inventiveness, particularly in his often playful exchanges with his brother Elie. We have tried to preserve his energy, creativity and wit, and have retained some of his exuberant run-on sentences.

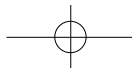
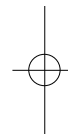
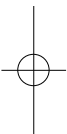
Throughout, the translation has been a labor of love for both of us, and inspired us to continue our study and translation of Reclus. Our work culminated in the book *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: The Radical Social Thought of Elisée Reclus*, a collection of his most important political and social writings in translation, along with extensive analysis of commentary on Reclus’ ideas. We have also begun the translation of a complete collection of Reclus’ writings on the American South, to be entitled *An Anarchist in the Old South: Elisée Reclus on Slavery and Antebellum Society*.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to our friend and colleague Ronald Creagh of l’Université Paul Valéry in Montpellier, France, for his invaluable assistance on many fine points of translation and historical detail. We are also extremely grateful to our friend Pierre Bravo-Gala of Paris, who was very generous and helpful in discussing with us many details of our translation. We also wish to thank Robert Nichols for proposing the present work and offering numerous helpful suggestions, and Barbara Jones for her capable work on the production of the book. Finally, our thanks go out to Art Carpenter and the late Rosalie McReynolds of Loyola University Library Special Collections, for assistance in our research, and to Gary Dunbar for generously supplying useful research materials.

Through our research and translation, we came to admire Reclus as an anarchist who seemed, perhaps more than many others of his time or our own, to put his ideals of cooperation and love of others into practice in his own personal life. We

we re particularly impressed by his sense of humility, his confidence in a utopia of the present moment, and his belief that anarchists must begin to create the future world of solidarity and freedom among their small groups of friends who practice in their daily lives the principles of love and human liberty. We came to see Reclus not only as a theoretician of anarchism, but also as a practitioner of its most utopic ideals.

New Orleans, 2003



## INTRODUCTION: RECLUS' VOYAGE TO LIBERTY

*John Clark*

Elisée Reclus' "Voyage to New Orleans"<sup>1</sup> is an extraordinary document. Its author was later to become the foremost geographer of his age, a founder of the field of social geography, a well-known revolutionary, an important political theorist, and a precursor of the contemporary ecology movement. But when he came to Louisiana in 1853, Reclus was a young man of only twenty-three, setting out on his first voyage of discovery. He was full of enthusiasm and curiosity, eager to explore the world, and hungry for experience and knowledge. In his delightful account of his journey we find that he was also an acute observer of society and nature, wise beyond his years, that he had already developed a lively and pleasing prose style, and that the distinctive political and philosophical ideas of his maturity were already very much in evidence.

"A Voyage to New Orleans" is a small classic that beautifully synthesizes the genres of travel literature, nature writing and social criticism. It is certainly unfortunate that despite Reclus' later importance the text remained untranslated for almost a century and a half. It is noteworthy not least of all for its insightful and eloquent observations on the antebellum South. The "Voyage" certainly speaks for itself as a fascinating and historically important document. However, it will be useful to situate the work in its larger context through a brief survey of Reclus' life and thought.

Elisée Reclus was born on March 15, 1830, in Sainte-Foy-la-Grande, a small town on the Dordogne River in southwestern

France. His father, Jacques Reclus, was a minister in the French Reformed Church, but left it to become the pastor of a “Free Church” in the town of Orthez in the Pyrenees. It was there that Elisée was to spend much of his early life. Elisée’s independent thinking was no doubt encouraged by the example of his father, who, he said, “was not an ordinary man who is content to live in accord with the world: he had the strange fantasy of wishing to live according to his conscience.”<sup>2</sup> His mother, Margaret Trigant, who directed a school for girls while raising her own thirteen children, was a good model for Elisée’s future indefatigable efforts in scholarship, political activism and other areas. Elisée maintained close ties with many members of his large family, above all with his older brother Elie, with whom he shared a deep personal, political and intellectual relationship throughout the course of their long lives.

Elisée was educated at the Moravian School in Neuwied, Germany, the Protestant College of Sainte-Foy, and the Protestant University in Montauban. It was at the latter institution that he and Elie began to become radicalized as they heard news from Paris “of political struggles,” and “then, all at once, of the Revolution itself.”<sup>3</sup> Social unrest had been spreading across Europe and had become particularly intense in France, which had been shaken by severe economic crisis. The “Revolution” in question was the February revolution of 1848, in which the Orléanist regime was overthrown and the Second Republic established. It was followed in June by an unsuccessful insurrection in which the poorer classes attempted to radicalize the bourgeois Republic.

The young Reclus brothers were infected with the spirit of the times. Increasingly rebellious and hungry for travel and experience, they set off on a trip to the Mediterranean without bothering to ask permission from the university—a step that

resulted in their expulsion. Elisée returned to the school at Neuwied to teach briefly, after which he completed his formal education with six months' study at the University of Berlin, where his future vocation began to take shape under the influence of the famous geographer Carl Ritter.

Reclus' anarchist social and political ideas are already present in embryonic form in a manuscript that he wrote as a 21-year-old student. Discussing the development of freedom in history, he concludes that "our destiny is to reach that state of ideal perfection in which nations will no longer need to be under the tutelage of a government or of another nation; it is the absence of government, it is anarchy, the highest expression of order."<sup>4</sup> He already conceives of freedom not as a mere absence of coercion but rather as implying social justice and the ability of all to attain self-realization. He notes that "political liberty is nothing without other liberties," and that freedom is meaningless "for those who despite their sweat cannot buy bread for their families, and for those workers who only incur new sufferings through the revolutions they themselves make."<sup>5</sup>

In expressing such libertarian and egalitarian ideas, Reclus was preparing to take his place in the forefront of European revolutionary thought. Proudhon had published his crucial anarchist work *What Is Property?* only a decade earlier, and Marx had begun to develop his contending radical political theories in the mid-1840's. Bakunin was soon to become a powerful and incendiary force for anarchist revolution. Before long, the European socialist movement was to split into Marxist and anarchist factions, and Reclus would become a major figure in the latter, libertarian tendency.

After leaving Berlin, Elisée joined Elie in a walk across France from Strasbourg in the northeast to Orthez in the south-

west. The brothers were outraged by Louis-Napoléon's coup d'état of December 2, 1851, and hoped to organize resistance in their hometown. Unfortunately for them, their efforts to organize a crowd to storm the *mairie* were a complete failure, and only attracted attention to them as possibly dangerous young revolutionaries.

Consequently, they were compelled to leave France to seek refuge in England. For Reclus, this flight began over five years of foreign travel, a period that was to affect deeply his future development as a geographer, a social philosopher, and a human being. He spent most of the next year working as a tutor in London and as a farm worker near Dublin. During this time, he began to entertain the idea of exploring the Americas and finding a place to establish a cooperative agricultural experiment with Elie and some of their friends.

By early 1853, he had realized his dream of crossing the Atlantic and was living in Louisiana.<sup>6</sup> "A Voyage to New Orleans" recounts his passage through the Antilles, his trip up the Mississippi to New Orleans, and his fascinating observations on the "Queen City of the South" and on antebellum society.

After working briefly as a dockworker in New Orleans, Reclus was hired to tutor the children of the Fortier family at Félicité plantation.<sup>7</sup> He spent most of his two and one-half years in Louisiana on this plantation, fifty miles upriver from New Orleans on the west bank of the Mississippi. From his life in the much-romanticized plantation society of the Old South, Reclus gained detailed first-hand experience of the cruel inhumanity of slavery. He eloquently testifies to this experience in his moving depiction of the antebellum slave market in the "Voyage," in his letters from Louisiana, and in several lengthy articles on slavery written a few years later.<sup>8</sup>



His revulsion against any society founded on slavery was a major factor in his decision to leave Louisiana. He could not morally justify his service to the slaveholders and his acceptance into their milieu. Explaining his decision to leave the privileged class of the plantation house, he remarks in a letter to Elie that he felt he was “robbing the Negroes who have truly earned by their sweat and blood the money that I put in my pocket,” and that by continuing to serve the plantation system “it is in fact I who hold the whip.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition to offering him new insights into the injustices of slavery and racism, Reclus’ visit to Louisiana also reinforced his opposition to capitalism. While he had already experienced in Europe the evils of economic inequality and exploitation, he discovered in America an economic outlook that went beyond anything he had previously encountered. He writes to Elie that the country seemed to be nothing more than “a great auction house in which everything is for sale, the slaves and the owner into the bargain, votes and honor, the Bible and consciences. Everything goes to the highest bidder.”<sup>10</sup> While Reclus found many admirable qualities such as energy and creativity in American culture, he retained throughout his life the view that it was deeply corrupted by the dominance of economic power and capitalist values.<sup>11</sup>

Reclus’ diagnosis of American society might be compared to the more widely known observations of Alexis de Tocqueville. That earlier French voyager in the United States believed the great threat to American society to lie in its rampant egalitarianism and in its excesses in the pursuit of democracy. While his analysis of the threat of the tyranny of the majority was in many ways astute, he seems less than perceptive in his judgment that the concentration of economic power in the hands of “the man-

ufacturing aristocracy which is growing up under our eyes” may have been “one of the harshest which has ever existed in the world,” but was at the same time “the most confined and least dangerous.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Reclus, writing fifteen years later, saw domination by wealth and economic power and the society’s pervasive economistic outlook to be much more powerful and disturbing tendencies. Over the century and a half to follow, economic inequality has become ever more entrenched, democracy has become increasingly nominal as concentrated wealth openly dominates the political sphere, and economistic values have become more deeply rooted in the culture of consumer society. Reclus has proven to be a more prescient observer of American society than was his famous predecessor.

On leaving Louisiana, Reclus spent eighteen months in New Granada (Colombia) attempting unsuccessfully to realize his dream of a cooperative agricultural project, in which he originally hoped his brother Elie would join him. While in Louisiana he dreamed of the wonders of the mountains of South America and remarked in a letter to his mother that “I’ll be tempted to throw myself into some kind of venture in agriculture or commerce. I think that nowhere could I succeed as easily as there.”<sup>13</sup> This prediction turned out to be quite ironic, for his efforts were doomed to dismal failure by poor planning, a bout of malaria, and an ill-fated partnership with a dishonest elderly Frenchman. In the end he was left, as he said, “without the means even to buy a pair of shoes.”<sup>14</sup>

But despite his various diseases, disappointments, and misfortunes, his travels on both continents were of inestimable value to his development as a geographer and social theorist. His experience with American capitalism, slavery and racism had a profound effect on his later social thought. During his stay in Louisiana, he traveled up the Mississippi as far as Canada, and

made observations that would be invaluable for his later writings on North America. And his visit to New Granada formed the basis for his first book, *Voyage to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta*.<sup>15</sup>

After six years of travel, Reclus returned to France. He was still full of energy, idealism and enthusiasm, and was seemingly unruffled by his misfortunes. His experiences during his travels had led him to a strong belief in the desirability of blending races and cultures. He soon had a chance to put this belief into practice when he married, in December 1858, Clarisse Brian, the daughter of a French father and a Senegalese mother. According to Reclus' nephew and biographer Paul, "there is not the slightest doubt that Reclus' stay in Louisiana formed in him the idea of marrying a daughter of the despised race."<sup>16</sup> To whatever degree this motive was present, the marriage was also based on personal affinity, and was a happy one. Unfortunately, it ended after only a few years with Clarisse's death shortly after the birth of their third child, who also died soon thereafter. A year later, Reclus married an old friend, Fanny L'Herminez, in an anarchist ceremony—that is, without the sanction of either church or state. Their relationship was a very close and fulfilling one, and the two shared many common values, intellectual interests, and political commitments. This union ended with the death of Fanny a few years later, after which Reclus entered into another "free" marriage with his third wife, Ermance Beaumont-Trigant.

According to the unanimous testimony of Reclus' friends and colleagues, his egalitarian and cooperative ideas were practiced admirably in his personal life. His rejection of traditional marriage resulted not merely from an opposition to control by Church and state, but from a rejection of the patriarchal authoritarian family itself. Reclus' egalitarianism extended not only to his relationship with his wives, but to his interactions with other members of his family and his wide circle of friends and political

comrades. While he became well known as a scientist, political theorist and social activist, he vehemently rejected the idea of having followers or of placing himself in a position of superiority. As he once wrote to a would-be follower: “you call yourself ‘my disciple.’ Bah! This is very unpleasant! Do you therefore think that it is acceptable for some to subordinate themselves to others? In no way do I call myself ‘your disciple,’ even though you may be an example for me through all your admirable qualities and through your perfect kindness, but I know that within each of us is found our own ideal, what I would call the interior hero—and it is this that needs to be revealed and allowed to grow while preserving its unique nature.”<sup>17</sup>

During the 1860’s, Reclus published a great many geographical essays and completed the first of the three great geographical projects of his life, *The Earth*.<sup>18</sup> He also published *The Story of a Brook*,<sup>19</sup> a popular work that became a classic of nature writing for young people, and which was later to be followed by a popular companion work, *The Story of a Mountain*.<sup>20</sup> Reclus was beginning to gain widespread recognition for his achievements as a scholar. However, his life was soon to reach a crucial turning point.

In the spring of 1871 the citizens of Paris rose up and established the Paris Commune, one of the most important chapters in revolutionary history. Reclus threw his energies into the defense of this revolt, which exemplified many of the libertarian and decentralist ideals that he was developing. Although he was beyond the normal age for military service, he volunteered for the National Guard. Elie, also eager to serve the Commune, was appointed director of the National Library.

The experiment in equality and popular democracy was not to last long. When Paris fell after ten weeks, Reclus’ column was

captured by the Versailles troops. Though he escaped the fate of the tens of thousands of Communards who were massacred in the ensuing bloodbath, he spent time in fourteen different prisons over the following eleven months, and was tried and sentenced to deportation to New Caledonia. However, because of his growing prestige as a scientist and intellectual, there was a public outcry against his deportation. As a result of efforts on his behalf by many friends and admirers, his sentence was reduced to ten years' exile in Switzerland.

It is rather ironic that it was in part as a result of this punishment at the hands of reactionary authorities that Reclus was to become an important figure in the international anarchist movement. For during his Swiss exile he came under the influence of the anarchist Jura Federation, and he began to develop close ties with the major anarchist theorists Bakunin and Kropotkin. Before long he had become a dedicated activist and had begun to write articles, pamphlets and theoretical works in defense of the anarchist cause.

It was also in Switzerland that Reclus began his greatest geographical work, the *New Universal Geography*.<sup>21</sup> This monumental seventeen-thousand-page undertaking appeared in nineteen large volumes between 1876 and 1894. The work is notable for the excellence of the writing, which, according to Patrick Geddes, "raised anew geography into literature,"<sup>22</sup> as well as its expansive scope, its exhaustive details, and its magnificent illustrations. Geographer Gary Dunbar concludes that "for a generation [it] was to serve as the ultimate geographical authority" and constituted "probably the greatest individual writing feat in the history of geography."<sup>23</sup> Though Reclus soon became known as one of the world's foremost scholars, he was intent on remaining a people's geographer and not merely an academic one. For this

reason he published the *New Universal Geography* in small weekly installments that could be bought and read by working class people.

Reclus remained in Switzerland until 1890, heavily occupied with his extensive scholarship and his political activities, and then finally returned to France. In 1894 he accepted an invitation to teach at the New University in Brussels. He had originally been offered a position at the Free University of Brussels, but it was decided that he was too notorious an anarchist to teach at a respectable university and the invitation was withdrawn. The controversy over Reclus' exclusion contributed to the decision to found the New University. While this institution was outside the educational mainstream, Reclus worried that even it might co-opt him to serve the interests of the system of domination. He wrote that although the slogan of the New University was "Make Men!" he feared that it would to a certain degree also "make exploiters."<sup>24</sup> However, he overcame his reservations and threw himself into his teaching with great enthusiasm. According to all accounts, he was highly successful, influencing many of his students profoundly, and winning their enduring admiration.

During this period Reclus completed his last great project, *Man and the Earth*.<sup>25</sup> This impressive work of six volumes and thirty-five hundred pages is a synthesis of his ideas in such fields as geography, history, philosophy, science, political theory, sociology of religion, and anthropology. The work is both the culmination of his life's work as a geographer and the most developed expression of his social philosophy. It was published after his death, between 1905 and 1908, and remains a classic of social geography.

Near the end of his life, in failing health, the indefatigable Reclus wrote of "two powerful attractions" that still inspired his

efforts. The first, he said, was “affection, tenderness, the joy of loving, the happiness of having friends and of making them feel that one loves them,” and the second, “the study of history, the joy of seeing the interconnection of things.”<sup>26</sup> He might have added a third, for just as in his youth, he was still inspired by the age-old struggle for human freedom. His companions reported that in his final days he rejoiced at news of a popular revolution in Russia. He died on July 4, 1905, in the countryside near Brussels, shortly after hearing of the revolt of the sailors of the battleship Potemkin.

## NOTES

- 1 “Fragment d’un voyage à la Nouvelle-Orléans, 1855” in *Le Tour du monde* 1 (1860), pp. 177–192.
- 2 Elisée Reclus, “Vie d’Elie Reclus,” in *Les frères Elie et Elisée Reclus* (Paris: Les Amis d’Elisée Reclus, 1964), p. 159. Our translation. For all quotations for which a French work is cited, the English translation is ours.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- 4 From the manuscript “Développement de la liberté dans le monde,” in Paul Reclus, “Biographie d’Elisée Reclus,” in *Les frères Elie et Elisée Reclus*, p. 53.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 For additional details of Reclus’ life in Louisiana, see Gary S. Dunbar, “Elisée Reclus in Louisiana” in *Louisiana Studies* 23 (1982), pp. 341–352. The article includes much fascinating information, including an account of Reclus’ bout with yellow fever during the great epidemic of 1853 (pp. 345–346).
- 7 There is an interesting parallel with the life of another famous Frenchman, the naturalist John James Audubon. In 1821 Audubon spent five months as a tutor at Oakley Plantation in West Feliciana Parish, where he painted thirty-two of his renowned bird paintings, completed sketches for many others, and explored the rich natural surroundings.
- 8 “De l’esclavage aux Etats-Unis: I. Le code noir et les esclaves,” in *Revue des deux mondes* 30 (Dec. 15, 1859), pp. 868–901; and “De l’esclavage aux Etats-

Unis: II. Les planteurs et les abolitionnistes,” in *Revue des deux mondes* 31 (Jan. 1, 1860), pp. 118–154.

9 Below, p. 89

10 Below, p. 79 Reclus’ statement is strikingly echoed in von Reizenstein’s *Mysteries of New Orleans*, a fascinating example of the “urban mysteries” genre that was published in 1853, the same time that Reclus lived in Louisiana. In its preface, the author states that “New Orleans is the great gambling den at whose roulette and faro wheels excited players consort day and night with the goddess of luck, from whom they receive in the end only a stab in the back.” Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein, *The Mysteries of New Orleans*, trans. and edited by Steven Rowan (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 3. In this socially and sexually iconoclastic work, considered scandalous in its time, von Reizenstein is, like Reclus, a harsh critic of American racism and acquisitiveness.

11 Reclus is unlike most other radical theorists of his age, in that his analysis of class oppression never leads him to neglect what he sees as American society’s other distinctive tragic flaw, its deeply-rooted racism.

12 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: New American Library, 1956), p. 220. It should be added that although de Tocqueville did not see this economic power as a significant threat in his own time he warned “the friends of democracy to keep their eyes anxiously fixed in this direction,” for it was the most likely possible source of any future inequality and aristocracy.

13 Below, p. 93 and 94 In view of his later criticisms of economic speculation and colonial domination it is rather surprising to find him waxing so enthusiastic about a proposal that he buy land for the Fortier family in the Amazon, for which he would receive half for his own use. But as he mentions in another letter, he thought the Amazon valley to be “rich and vast enough” to support the population of the earth at that time. (Below, p. ?)

14 Paul Reclus, “Biographie d’Elisée Reclus,” in *Les frères Elie et Elisée Reclus*, p. 39.

15 *Voyage à la Sierra-Nevada de Sainte-Marthe: paysage de la nature tropicale*. (Paris: Hachette et Cie., 1861).

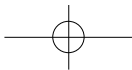
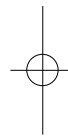
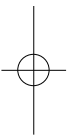
16 Paul Reclus, “Biographie d’Elisée Reclus,” in *Les frères Elie et Elisée Reclus*, p. 43.

17 Letter to Mlle. de Gérando (Jan. 1, 1882) in *Correspondance* (Paris: Librairie Schleicher Frères, 1911), Vol. II, p. 238.

18 *La Terre: description des phénomènes de la vie du globe* (Paris: Hachette et Cie., 1868–69).



- 19 *Histoire d'un ruisseau* (Paris: Hachette, 1869).
- 20 *Histoire d'une montagne* (Paris: Hetzel, 1880).
- 21 *Nouvelle géographie universelle*, 19 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1876-94). The work was translated as *The Earth and Its Inhabitants: The Universal Geography*, 19 vols. (London: H. Virtue and Co., Ltd., 1882-95).
- 22 Patrick Geddes, "A Great Geographer: Elisée Reclus" in Joseph Ishill, ed., *Elisée and Elie Reclus: In Memoriam* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: The Oriole Press, 1927), p. 155.
- 23 Gary S. Dunbar, Elisée Reclus: *Historian of Nature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), p. 95.
- 24 Letter to Jean Grave (Oct. 6, 1894) in *Correspondance* (Paris: Alfred Costes, 1925), vol. III, p. 172.
- 25 *L'Homme et la Terre*, 6 vols. (Paris: Librairie Universelle, 1905-08).
- 26 Letter to Clara Mesnil (March 25, 1905) in *Correspondance*, vol. III, p. 314.



# A VOYAGE TO NEW ORLEANS

*Elisée Reclus*

## I. The Caribbean

The sea was calm and phosphorescent. At regular intervals, the ship parted the waves with a heavy rumbling like an enormous cetacean, and the sails, swelled by the breeze, coaxed a gently swaying from the masts. All of nature seemed to enjoy a mysterious well-being.

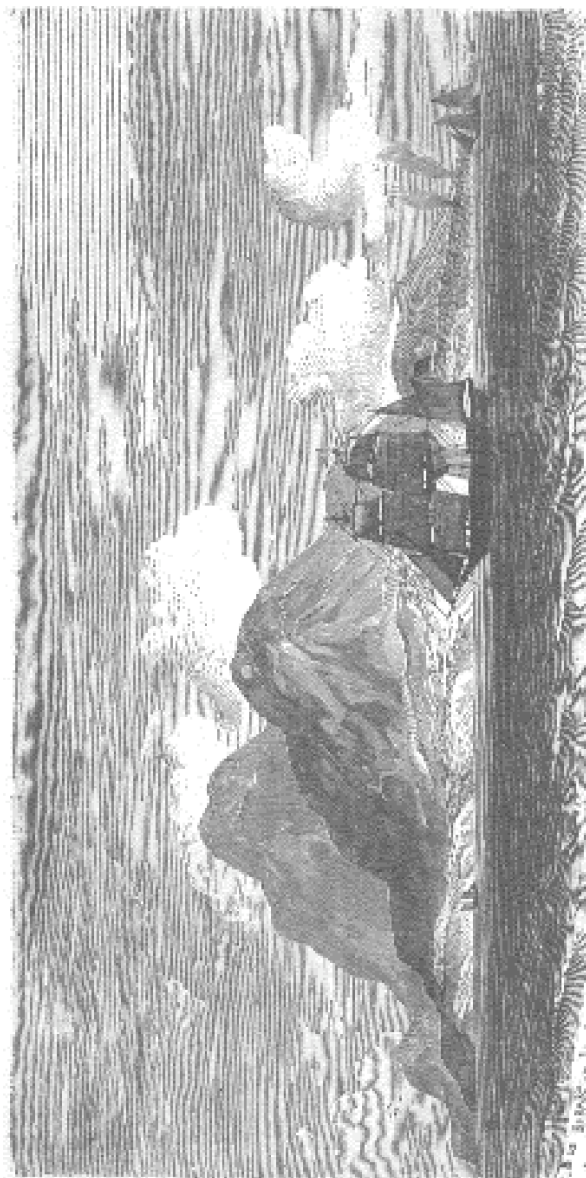
I was stretched out in the launch above the rudder, gazing at the stars. In this position, I seemed to exist only for pleasure. The rocking motions of the ship and the waves caused shivers of contentment to pass through my body. It was as if my very soul had been abolished, and I had nothing left but the faculty of relishing great lungfuls of the night's cool air. I swayed in the suspended launch as if in a hammock, in turn lifted to twenty feet above the water, then brought back down just to the surface, I heard the waves alternately strike the planking of the launch and disappear under the rudder of the ship with a cavernous sound. The phosphorescence of the jellyfish and therotiferae<sup>1</sup> cast a pale, flickering glow about me, and sometimes the meeting of two luminous waves glistened in my eyes, like the reflection of lightning. Up close, the sea seemed to roll with fire, while in the distance it emitted a vague bluish light, like flaming alcohol.

I sensed all the beauties of the sea without seeing them. My eyes remained fixed on the stars; I would have had to fight against my nature to cease contemplating them. In the midst of

them, the masts, in turn lowered and lifted by the rolling of the ship, seemed to trace enormous circles with their points. I was deceived by the illusion that causes us to see motion in a body at rest and stability in moving objects, and I vaguely believed that the stars were myriads of fireflies swarming around the masts and dancing about the sails. Sometimes I saw something like snowing light, swirling in space and descending in vast spirals. I was dazzled by the vivid radiance that makes the tropical sky completely different from ours. The stars seem to shine at least four times more brilliantly, and, far from appearing to be set in a solid dome, they seem suspended from various heights in the blue-black air of the night. The Milky Way, so faint in our northern regions, stretches over the tropical sea like a vast transparent zone of luminous clouds, and beyond its own infinity, points us toward other infinities. Under this glorious sky, so deep and pure, I wondered how the ancient astronomers could have invented their crystal vault. At the very most, we can understand the Scandinavians, who saw in their misty sky a great skull, in which scattered clouds represented wisps from the divine brain.

Little by little my eyes closed, and I fell gently into a sleep as pleasant as my vigil. Dreaming, I again saw the stars sparkling at me from the deep sky of mysterious promises, when I was awakened with a start by the voice of a hearty fellow at the bow. A great black solid mass loomed in front of us two miles toward the northwest—it was the island of Montserrat. Through the deep blue of the air, in which something like dimly glowing particles were floating, we made out perfectly the sharp profiles of twin mountains above the horizon.

This was the first time that I had seen American soil, and yet I was not sorry that it was night. The country of my imagination did not appear to me suddenly laid bare by the brutal heat of the sun, but permitted speculation by the light of the stars and



Island of Montserrat (British Antilles). Drawing by de Bérard, after Reclus.

allowed me to give free rein to my dreams. On this black solid mass, I imagined gazing on all its tropical splendors—the impenetrable forests teeming with life, deep gorges with shimmering waterfalls, white houses shining through the thick foliage of mango trees, and fields of cane or plantain swaying in the breeze.

While I imagined that I was catching a glimpse of these splendid sights, the ship advanced rapidly, and soon Montserrat was only a nebulous, hovering cloud on the horizon. I let myself sink back to the bottom of the launch, and dreamed of leisurely walks under groves of orange trees. My walk lasted for a long time, for I slept even past sunrise. A rude stream of water woke me up suddenly—the sailors were doing their morning wash from the ship, and without seeing me, had directed their water hose right on me. As I was dressed lightly, I was not too alarmed by this improvised shower that crashed on my head, and I let myself brave the bath like a Triton.<sup>2</sup>

The physiology of a good many idlers has been described, but the idler who prowls around on board ships has usually been overlooked. His life is much more agreeable and varied than one might imagine, and if he loves nature, he will never be bored. When the ship is still in the harbor, moored by a cable from the dock, the traveler wonders with a certain trepidation whether it is not madness to risk his life on this small floating house, and to imprison himself there cheerfully for months on end. But if he dares enter, this narrow craft, this simple plank that the poets say separates life from eternity, this trembling hull on the sea, reveals itself all at once to be a world. One is constantly making new discoveries here, and in most cases, at the end of the voyage, many areas of the ship remain unknown territory for the passenger. I'm speaking not only of the hold, the storeroom, the steward's room, and all those dark mysteries hidden by the shiny wooden floor of the cabins. There are vats of fresh water in

which a person could drown without his cries ever being heard, hiding places and holes where brown and black rats organize their enemy republics, and the hideous depths of the hold, where seawater, streaming across the oak and mingling with the rubbish of the cargo, emits a foul and noxious odor. Even a sailor hardly knows how to find his bearings in this unhealthy labyrinth. All the more would a passenger accustomed to open air and sun get miserably lost in these gloomy shadows.

The rest of the ship offers a good deal more to the sharp observer, and there is no lack of subjects to study. Even remaining in one's cabin, one is surprised to find a host of delightful objects, for on board, everything is in constant motion, and the least of objects seems to take on its own life. There's a barometer that dances and flickers, suspended by its elastic ligaments, and a compass dial that springs into action with each movement of the tiller. Tables and chairs lean forward with a moan, then right themselves, incline, and knock against each other. From all corners come strange cries and mysterious groans. Each plank makes its own creaking sound, each metal nail its shrill grating, and on the deck, violent shocks transmitted by the sea make the chains jostle about with a terrible clatter like a galloping squadron. From time to time, a wave that is stronger than usual crashes against the side of the ship, and when one feels it passing very close by, just outside the ship's frame, one cannot help shuddering with fear. At the same time, the lurching becomes more violent, and all the objects in the cabin suddenly and unexpectedly begin to perform a kind of gymnastics. Poorly fastened doors open and shut again with a loud crash, and bottles and glasses are hurled from the table and smash against the wooden floors. Everything comes to life in merry motion, and this dizzying dance, these crazy oscillations, seem to give life even to the small blackened beams of the ceiling. But nothing is

more charming than the play of sunrays penetrating the room through the deadlight.<sup>3</sup> These rays scamper about in every nook and cranny, entering into the cabins furtively, hiding, chasing each other, reflecting for a moment in the mirrors, then flitting away again like startled birds. When the ship is swaying heavily, they come in, flicker, and vanish so rapidly that the eye cannot follow them.

If the passenger goes for a walk on the poop deck,<sup>4</sup> other sights await him. First of all, he has to walk with small steps to avoid falling, and know how to keep his balance through improbable and complicated movements. The ground undulates, quakes and slips away from under his feet. At the same time, the waves rise up with curiosity one after another along the sides of the ship, as if to examine his clumsy maneuvering. But he finally arrives, and his promenade seems to have been so much longer because of all his stumbling along the way.

One of my favorite retreats on the ship was the far end of the stern behind the chains of the rudder. Leaning over the side, I would gaze at the wake for hours on end. The waves came one after the other to lure my vision into their spirals, and looking away required a strong effort. The curls, the circular ripples, the bedlam, the eddying wavelets, the dances of the foamy trails, the struggles between the waves that reunite behind the keel, clutching and writhing, the formation of swift funnels trailing clusters of transparent bubbles in their vortex—all these little dramas of drop and foam attracted my attention with an irresistible fascination. Beyond the swift and twisting line of the wake, large surfaces of foam pass by, thrown aside to the right and left by the prow of the ship. There are islands, archipelagos, and continents that coalesce, break apart, diminish, dissolve and vanish. In reality, there is not a great difference, geologically speaking, between these continents of foam and the continents of land that we



inhabit. Small or large, all phenomena are analogous: our continents will also dissolve and reform elsewhere, like clusters of white bubbles carried along by the wake of the vessel.

Leaning over in order to see the dark mass of the ship reflected in the sea, one can distinguish strange animals in the enormous depths—nemertine<sup>5</sup> worms rolled up like black ribbons; jellyfish spreading out their transparent mantle until almost invisible, and flexing it again in the shape of a yellow or white sphere; stephanomies<sup>6</sup> like quivering embroideries of fine lace; squid; and cuttlefish with great cords of suckers. Then there are vague, formless creatures, almost completely dissolved by the water that contains them. In the midst of these living depths teeming with organisms, one occasionally sees an enormous green or bluish mass with an elusive outline passing by. It could be a shark that with a simple vibration of its powerful tail can hurl itself up to twenty meters toward the surface, or a family of porpoises playing hide-and-seek under the keel of the ship.

Toward noon, the overwhelming heat would force me to seek shelter, and I would stretch myself out on the sails in the shade of a mast. I would read or nap there for several hours, and when the somewhat cooled atmosphere permitted me to leave my hideaway, everything seemed more beautiful than before. The air had become more luminous, the waves more joyful, the ship more alert to its course. Then I would go staggering off to find some observation post, such as the main mast or the foremast. Clinging to the vibrating lines of the rigging, I clambered up slowly and without looking down, for fear of being overcome with vertigo in seeing the sea under my feet. My heart beating with a not very virile emotion, I hoisted myself with the strength of my arms across the bars of the maintop and leaned solidly against the mast. There, a true coward enjoying the emotions of danger, I loved feeling myself swaying by the ship's

lurching, and tracing vast curves in the atmosphere. The sailors who climbed up the rigging or slid down the lines with the dexterity of monkeys never guessed that I had a greater pleasure than they—that of vertigo and fear.

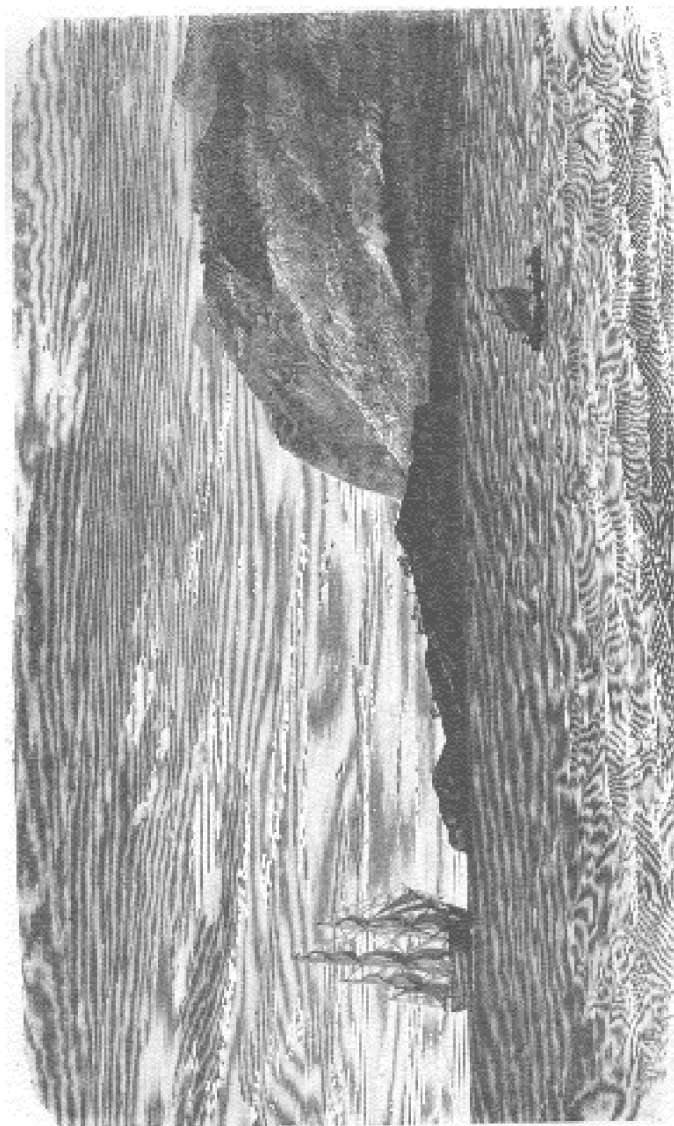
From the height of this observation post, swaying powerfully in space, I perceived the beauty of the sea all the better in seeing it from an unusual perspective. First of all, my horizon increased by several leagues, and the vast circumference that seemed so ruffled with waves from the deck had become calm, like a beach of bronze. Closer up, I had seen distinctly the waves rolling in military order, and when, under the influence of two opposing winds, two systems of waves crossed at right angles, I grasped all the details of their harmonious and periodic interference. On the shifting surface, sperm whales sometimes appeared, blowing jets of mist and water through their spouts and lifting their enormous tails in the air, and tribes of porpoises crossed the sea with a series of leaps and dives. Around the ship, long trails of sea wrack or sea grapes<sup>7</sup> floated, and tricolored Portuguese men-of-war swayed their long arms at the whim of each wave. Sometimes we came upon a broken yard, the remains of some shipwreck. Sea bream and dolphins circled around this wreckage like wolves in order to devour the little fish hidden in its shadow. This floating yard was a world unto itself in the middle of the sea, and countless scenes of slaughter took place relentlessly around it.

Looking down below me, I found the ship strangely diminished in size, and I wondered how the weight of the distended sails did not capsize the hull. The poop deck, the launches, the chains, and the anchors seemed to have become impossibly tiny, and the creaking ribs of the ship, the clinking chains, and the shouts of the sailors merged into one plaintive moan. Around the lower hull, the foam lifted up by the prow whirled in white

spirals on the bluegreen backdrop of the sea. Seen from a height, it had the transparency and the luster of a vast surface of liquid and bubbling porcelain.

I did not easily tire out when I looked at the sea from the height of the top mast, but I had an even more agreeable post—the uppermost part of the bowsprit.<sup>8</sup> There, I was completely outside the ship, and turning around, I saw it behind me, cleaving the waves with its prow, and I defied this enormous enraged mass that chased me but could never catch me. With each sudden pitch, I swooped almost to the level of the water, then I was thrown to a great height above it. The bowsprit reared up under me or plunged wildly, without being able to throw me off. Intoxicated with motion, I almost thought I commanded the monster that carried me. Leaning into the sea, breathing in the space through my gaze, I imagined that the great wings of the ship were inflated not by the wind but by the breath of my will. With a naïve arrogance, I felt myself to be the center of the universe.

Thus I wandered around the ship, endlessly finding wonderful sights to contemplate. But especially since reaching the Caribbean, I loved to go from mast to mast, scanning the horizon, searching for land. Thirty-six hours after having passed Montserrat, we did indeed see land, as the southern coast of Haiti—blurry at first, then becoming larger and bolder—rose up toward the north. The peninsula that ends at Cape Requin or Tiburon is actually a narrow chain of mountains strewn in the middle of the sea, and the peaks lined up on the ridge have a magnificent, audacious character. The highest peak reaches about twenty-eight hundred meters. From this point, one looks downward to a succession of terraces and pyramids, and then finally to Cape Tiburon, where the jagged ridge plunges into the blue of the water with a lofty and proud descent. Alexandre



Cape Tiburon (Haïti). Drawing by de Bérard, after the *Pilote des Antilles*.

Dumas' insightful image of a cape as a bull lifting its horns to the waves returned constantly to my mind.

The mountains toward which our ship was headed are rather bare, and large trees grow only in the gorges and in the narrow hollows set at intervals between the shore and the foot of the escarpments. Forests of mahogany, magnificent African baobabs, and mangroves are generally found more to the east, on the coast of the Dominican Republic, but here the shore of the island is much too steep to allow a significant amount of vegetation to take hold. In several places, cliffs gleaming like metal rise up at the shore, and the fishermen's huts cling like goats to the ledges in the rock. Incubated by a relentless sun, almost the entire coast has taken on a reddish and severe aspect that would seem better suited to some promontory in Arabia.

The escarpments of several mountains are interrupted by horizontal terraces that are evidently ancient beaches. These terraces, spaced one above the other at more or less equal heights, are proof that there must have been successive periods of halting and ascending to bring about the upthrust of the whole island. At intervals, heavy tropical rains have taken advantage of the least fold in the soil to dig deep ravines through the parallel rims of the superposed terraces. From a distance, one could imagine that all of these steps, separated from each other by enormous troughs, were carved into the rock by a race of giants. There is no lack of terraces except in places where the rock is too hard for the sea to cut in very deeply, but almost everywhere else the island is surrounded by an uninterrupted belt of staggered tiers. These tiers often take a remarkable shape. Thus, near the village of Le Môle St. Nicolas, an island that was thrust up during a rather recent geological age, appears exactly like a mole or breakwater. It creates the impression of extensive fortifications

that might have required many centuries and many lifetimes for its construction.

Near Cape Tiburon, we had the pleasure of observing the marvelous clarity of the water. Sheltered by the coastal mountains, the ship felt only the effects of puffs of the trade winds. The sea became as smooth as a mirror, and the calm began to spread its silver coating over the distant waters. I was lying on some sails at the far end of the cabin, and I put my head through the porthole to observe the harmonious ruffling of the waves. For a long time, I saw what seemed to be black trails resembling drifting algae at the bottom of the water, but I believed my sight to be deceived by the play of shadow and light. All of a sudden, I saw clearly some rocks and marine plants. I called out to the captain, and a sailor heaved the lead, which indicated twenty-six meters of depth. The water was as pure as liquified air. The fish were moving in jolts, and the sharks, so common and dangerous in these waters, seemed to be suspended there above the void. Meadows of algae, colonies of polyps, and traveling schools of jellyfish passed by in turn under our eyes, and we could see creeping at the bottom of the sea chaotic and blurred assemblages of enormous legs and monstrous heads. Finally, the evening breeze lifted, and propelled us in the direction of Jamaica. The next morning, we were in sight of the Blue Mountains.

In these waters, the high peaks of the Antilles interrupt the steadiness of the trade winds, and often make them spin in aerial whirlpools. Sometimes a raging wind was followed by absolute calm, and the sails, only a moment before strained to the point of tearing, fell back heavily along the masts. Then, on the coast of Jamaica, the wind suddenly dropped and the heavy waves flattened out little by little, gradually taking on the color and appearance of oil. Soon, the ship was affected only by the pressure of the equatorial current, and for two whole days, the island



A view of the coast of Jamaica (St. Ann's Bay). Drawing by de Bérard.

slowly revealed before us its magnificent panorama of mountains and forests, of azure and light.

On the evening of the second day, the sight was especially dazzling in its splendor. The sun was setting and had already assumed that oval shape that it always has on the hazy horizon. The western sky was flooded with the most intense violet glow up to the zenith, and the polished sea reflected this glow so well that the sun, already grazing the surface of the water, appeared like the keystone of an immense cupola of light. Large fishing birds wheeled in the air. Sometimes an eagle soared by, waiting for an easygoing bird to make a lucky catch. The eagle would then pursue it and force it to release its prey, which the eagle then caught before it could fall back into the water. Near the shore, the Negroes' pirogues glided like waterbugs, and farther away, in the bays of the island, ships with white sails appeared, like dragonflies poised on a leaf at the edge of a pond. Fields of cane extended even along the shore, interspersed with villages and covered with the trailing smoke from factories. Farther on, the hills rose up, cut through in all directions by ravines and bearing thick forests in their valleys. Beyond this first range of green hills was another range darkened by distance, and beyond that, a blue jagged range. Finally, above all these levels of summits, a great peak thrust its summit to a height of twenty-four hundred meters, and seemed to want to extend its enormous cloak of azure over the whole island. And the peace, the tranquility, the power contained by the earth and the sea—how can they ever be described? It is said that nature knows how to enjoy her own beauty and doesn't ask for the sympathetic admiration of humans. In tropical passages, there is nothing gentle, delicate, melancholy, and familiar, as are the lawns, brooks, and mists of our northern country. Here, nature is disdainful, impassive, and



relentless in her beauty—she seems unaware of her children.

The following day, toward four o'clock in the afternoon, we were opposite the Grand Cayman, formerly the hideaway of brigands who had situated their den in the middle of the reef in order to confront the enemy frigates better. This island was now remarkable only for its memories, and I probably would have forgotten about it if, even while we were still in sight of its shores, a violent squall had not assaulted our ship.

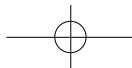
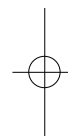
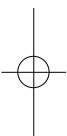
No matter how courageous one is, one cannot help being shaken to the very core on seeing a storm amassing in the sky. But once the ship is being bombarded and all its ribs creak under the force of wind and wave, one assumes a brave spirit at the height of danger, and feels only virile courage in the face of the raging sea. At least, that is the general impression of those who have confronted such blasts of wind, and I experienced it like everyone else. For quite a while, a little grayish cloud had hovered red over the island. Toward evening, it grew little by little, and soon, beach by beach, reef by reef, it covered the entire island, like an enormous veil drawn over the sky. Above our heads, the atmosphere was still a stunning blue shimmering like a soft fabric of sunbeams, but the black selvage that separated the cloud from the blue sky constantly drew nearer to our zenith. A brilliant rainbow advanced, carried on the mists of the storm, and its two ends, softly shading into the sea, extended another almost invisible semi-circle onto the foam of the waves. Preceding the dark mass, little waves arose as if spurred on by an underwater force, and their crests scattered in spurts of droplets. At the same time, the wind roared with a heavy bellowing noise, like distant thunder. The sailors—resolute, calm, agile and strong—climbed up to the yards and clambered along the rigging, clewing up the sails in the blink of an eye, looking at the

rigging of the ship and the approaching storm with the same fearless eyes. The voice of the captain rose and projected with its clear and resonant timbre over the dismal rumbling. The sails were scarcely clewed up before the gusting winds of the storm rocked the ship and leaned it toward the sea. The rigging stretched and vibrated, the yards creaked, and to withstand the violence of the wind, the pilot tied himself to the helm. In a few minutes, the sea had become wild. Each wave became a horrible battering ram hurled against the sides, and with each new rolling, the ship took on more water. The chains clattered on the deck, the barrels rolled from port to starboard, the spars hammered forcefully against the partitions, the ship plunged and reared up like a frantic horse, and from their cabins, the passengers could see the wave crests rising above the poop deck.

But there was no need to worry, for everything turned out well. We were a considerable distance from the shore, the careening had stabilized, and the storm was short-lived. Our ship had behaved bravely and weathered Cape San Antonio without accident.

Our voyage had already lasted forty-five days, and despite my explorations of the hold, the launches, and the masts of the ship, I longed to touch soil. When I thought about the walks I would soon take on the banks of the Mississippi and in the woods of Louisiana, an impatient shiver passed through my body. Toward the second day of our voyage through the Gulf of Mexico, I looked anxiously toward the north and was completely unable to concentrate on the book at which I glanced from time to time. Suddenly, it seemed that the color of the water had changed. Indeed, it had turned from a dark blue to yellow, and I saw a straight line of separation, as if drawn with a taut string, extending from east to west between the two differently colored zones. To the north, a thin blackish line half-hidden by the fog

indicated land. We were in the waters of the Mississippi! Soon after the ship had slackened its pace, it advanced only with difficulty and then came to a dead halt—its hull was stuck in the mud. Thus the voyage had come to an end, and we could do nothing but wait patiently in our slushy hole of liquid mud.



## II. The Mississippi Delta

All night, the ship swayed on a bed of foul-smelling silt. But far from complaining, I rejoiced instead to feel myself rocking on this mud, as I had just traveled two thousand leagues to see it. From a geological point of view, nothing was more interesting than these vast alluvia still in a semi-liquid state. These sands and clays, slowly worn away by flooding and by centuries of erosion from the mountain ranges of North America, form a thick stratum of two or three hundred meters. Sooner or later, through settling and the influence of geothermal heating, they will be transformed into vast foundations of rock and will serve as the basis for fertile and populated regions. These fine particles filter through the sea continuously in a creative process that adds islands, peninsulas, and coastline to the continent, or else, carried by the Florida current, they are deposited a thousand leagues away on the banks of Newfoundland.

Toward daybreak, the captain pondered how to escape our bed of mud, and sent one of his launches to the mouth of the river to find a pilot. The craft soon disappeared in the morning mist and the sound of its oars, growing more and more faint, finally died away toward the north. We tried in vain to follow it by sight and sound without being able to penetrate the thick layer of fog that separated us from it. Suddenly, lifting our eyes, we caught sight of it again, seemingly suspended from a curtain of clouds. The launch, after having crossed the first trail of mist that crept on the sea and blocked our view for a few cable lengths, reached a space perfectly free of humidity and, appear-

ing to us beyond the fog, seemed to drift through limpid air. These parallel zones of mist and transparent atmosphere are not rare at the mouth of the Mississippi, where currents of fresh water and salt water meet and mingle in different temperatures.

During two hours of waiting, we could leisurely observe the whales that are plentiful in these waters. These animals always frolic with their families, and gather in groups of two or three that always stay together. All their movements are rhythmic and interdependent. Sometimes, several whales leap out of the water one after the other and plunge back after tracing an enormous parabola. They give the impression of several cogged wheels slowly rolling, all engaged in the same system of gears. A group of whales seems to form a single mechanism.

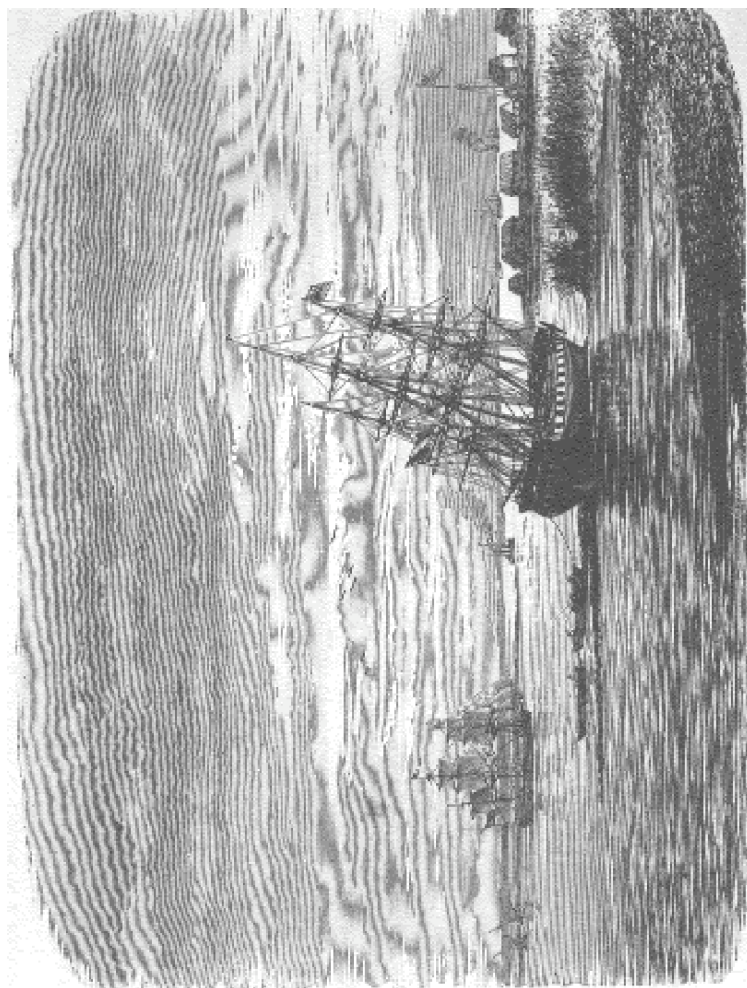
Finally, we saw a black point leave the mouth of the Mississippi and head toward us—it was the tugboat coming to extract us from the mire. It gradually increased in size, and soon I was able to observe all its details. I had not yet seen an American steam vessel, and I have to say that this one delighted me, first of all because of its bold shape, its speed, and its resolute air. I found in it a youthfulness, and also a heroic bearing that I had to admire—it seemed as though it had led a life superior to that of humans. Leaning slightly to one side, moving the powerful levers of its machinery on its deck like gigantic arms, unfurling its thick plumes of smoke up to the horizon, and heaving a prolonged and loud rumbling at regular intervals, it seemed like a supreme realization of power. With each turn of the wheel that brought it closer to us I found it still more amazing. Soon it was at our side. It pirouetted gracefully, took hold of a cable that we threw out to it, and without a tremor attached itself side by side to our ship.

The two bows were hardly touching when a young man leaped from the paddle box of the wheel and jumped onto our

deck. He kept his cap on his head and at best mumbled between his teeth the word “captain,” which could, perhaps, be taken for a greeting. In an instant he was on the poop deck, grasping the helm and giving orders to the flabbergasted sailors. He was not on board thirty seconds when the keel of our ship, under the pull of steam power, began to plow through the silt. A true American, the pilot did not waste a single second on politeness. Taking a liking to this man of a different race, I went up to him. He didn’t see me at all, but hearing my approaching steps, he drew out of his pocket a bundle of newspapers which he held out without looking at me, without expecting the least gratitude from me. Indeed, I didn’t have the glaring naïveté to thank him, and I got as far away from him as possible, to engross myself in reading the *New Orleans Daily Delta*.

Thanks to the speed of the tugboat, we advanced rapidly. I folded all my newspapers and stopped thinking about Sebastopol<sup>9</sup> in order to observe the appearance of the Southwest Pass, the main mouth of the Mississippi, in all its details. Several miles in front of the ship, a long, thin black line seemed to extend across the sea like an immense jetty. Beyond this dark line, the river appeared like a great white silk ribbon, then came another black line parallel to the first, and farther away the blue waters of the sea stretched out to the gray curve of the horizon. The Mississippi resembled a canal advancing toward the open sea between two long jetties, and the forty or fifty ships, whose tapered masts we saw standing out vaguely against the sky, completed the picture. It is a spectacle that some day will be witnessed, on a much reduced scale, at the Suez Canal planned for the waters of the Mediterranean.

As soon as we arrived at the mouth, the tugboat slowed its pace a little to make its way cautiously among the buoyed channels that lead to the entrance of the river, for these channels are



The mouth of the Mississippi. Drawing by de Bérard, after Reclus.



treacherous, and all the movements of the currents and tides create variations in depth. Ordinarily, alluvial islands emerge imperceptibly. During storms, the underwater terrain of the river's mouth changes completely, and the ships can only attempt to enter after numerous soundings. In spite of his American audacity, our pilot still had several soundings taken.

Finally, we entered the riverbed itself and joyfully felt the pressure of its current against the sides of the ship. However, we still couldn't see the banks of the Mississippi on which we were floating. It seemed like a river flowing miraculously in the middle of the sea, except that to the left and right were slight swellings of silt spreading their vague contours on the water and marking the elevated areas of the underwater strand that arise between fresh and salt water. As we advanced, these islands of mud became more numerous and elongated. Soon, they were close to one another, resembling solidified waves, then connected end to end, finally forming an unbroken shore above the level of the current. Here the sandbar or alluvial embankment that forms through the mouth of the river reaches its greatest height.

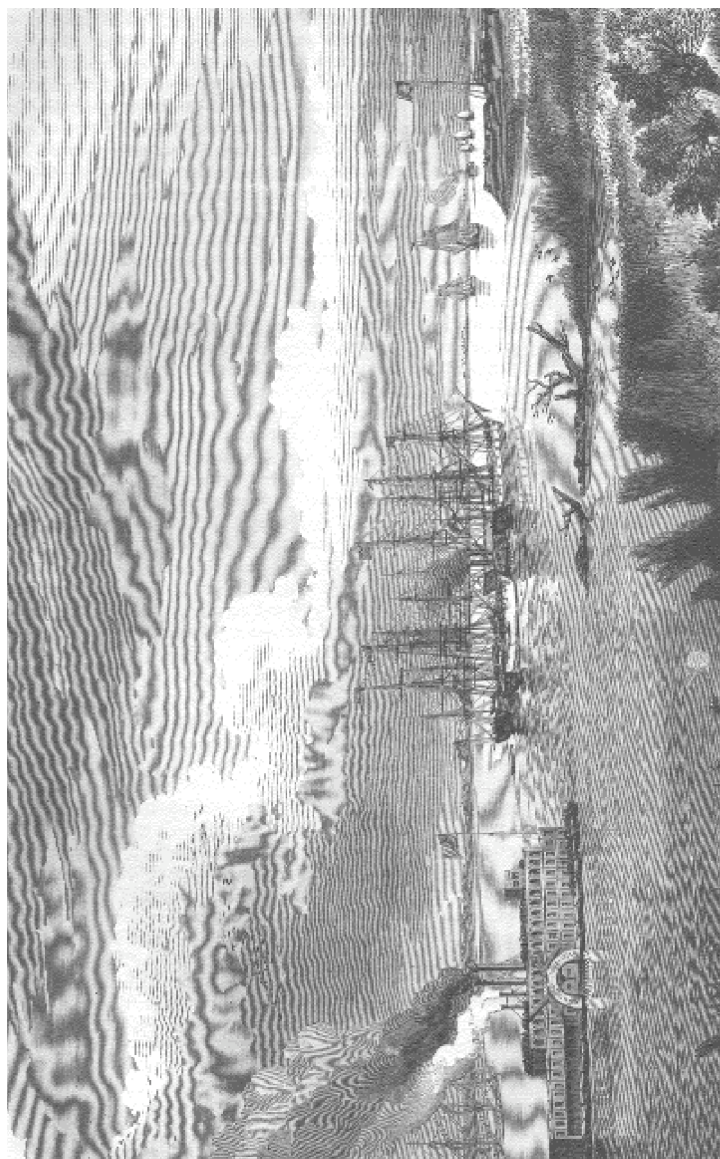
Up to this point, the water displaced by the keel and pushed back with great churning in the wake was the clear blue water of the underwater counter-current that spreads under the yellow surface of the river. But as soon as the keel touched the sandbar and the impetus of the ship was slowed down by the resistance of the silt, the color of the wake immediately changed to dirty yellow, and swirls of mud again rose in the already muddy current. Then, the pilot had to grasp the helm with a firm hand and follow the channel with a sure eye, for the sandbar was close to a mile long, and a slight deviation to the right or left would be enough to commit the body of the ship irrevocably. Once the keel is stuck in the muddy bottom, its listing stirs up the fine

particles of silt and lifts them up into the shallow current that carries them away. At the same time, the heavy grains of sand accumulate around the hull and, piling up around it, finally retain it like walls of rock.

Thus it takes very little to determine whether a ship is lost or safe. We saw ships, their keels stuck four feet in the silt, that easily freed themselves with no tugboat, and reached deep water, flags waving, sails up. On the other hand, many ships attached to a tugboat and passing in the middle of the canal must have been taken crosswise by the current and pushed toward the bank in a moment of indecision. Some meters from us, we passed by a magnificent three-master that was ruined in such a manner, and which could not be set afloat. Enormous banks of sand were already forming around it, like great masses of cork floating on the surface of the river.

After having launched us into deep water, the pilot took his money and left us without saying a word, and without even the semblance of courtesy. Then, leaving our ship in the middle of the river, his steamboat set off again to sea in order to fetch another three-master. But we didn't remain there alone very long, for soon swarms of boats loaded with oranges, liquor, sugar, and shellfish were untied from their pilings at the edge of the river and came to offer us their goods.

The village of Pilotsville,<sup>10</sup> where shacks made of boards rise up along the left bank, is commonly known by the name of Balize. Actually, this name belongs to another village established by the French settlers at the Southeast Pass, but since the Southwest Pass has become the principal mouth of the Mississippi, the pilots have transplanted both their industry and the name of their miserable town. Surely there are very few places in the world that look as sad and desolate as Balize. The narrow strip of land where the houses are clustered is the shore of both river and sea. Waves



Steamboat and tugboat on the Mississippi. Drawing by de Bérard, after Reclus.

of salt water and fresh water lap over it in turn and meet there in a maze of ditches full of a viscous, putrid mixture. Wherever a spongy bulge allows plants to take root, wild cane and reeds grow in impenetrable thickets.<sup>11</sup> The huts are constructed of boards as light as possible so that they don't sink into the waterlogged soil, and they are perched atop high pilings like roosts so that the moisture will penetrate them less. Also, when a storm blows and the waves of the sea crash one after another over the coastal strip into the river, the houses of Balize could very easily be swept away, were they not anchored like ships. Sometimes the village even reaches the point of dragging its anchors. Fever and death ceaselessly emanate from the blanket of miasma covering Balize. Nevertheless, four hundred Americans have the courage to roost in these huts and sleep off their fever in hopes of being able to fleece the ships passing through.

A light wind blew from the south, and our captain wanted to take full advantage of it by sailing upstream. Unfortunately, there were numerous bends in the river, and the sailors constantly had to tack, bracing and clewing up the sails only to brace them again. They were at the point of exhaustion when the ship did them the favor of getting stuck several feet in the soft mud of the shore. The sailors hardly complained about this mishap, and as for me, I happily hastened to the anchor chain hanging at the bow, slid down, and jumped onto the bank.

It's a strange sensation to touch solid ground after treading on the moving, quaking surface of the ship for weeks on end. One feels as dizzy as a convalescent trying to walk after a long illness. One's feet become accustomed to a moving surface and finally get used to it so well that the earth seems unstable by contrast, and appears to vibrate as if shaken by a volcanic tremor. This strange sensation did not diminish the pleasure that I felt in walking on solid ground once again, and with the joy of a liber-

ated prisoner, I disappeared into a thicket of wild cane. I had scarcely succeeded in creeping along a few meters in this thick mass of vegetation when I was already unable to distinguish the ship through the immense number of stalks waving back and forth. My every step made the dry reeds strewn about the ground crackle and crunch, and I was almost afraid that all the noise I was making might awaken some snake coiled around a root. The cane rose twenty feet above my head, and only allowed a narrow view of the sky and . . . an electric telegraph wire.

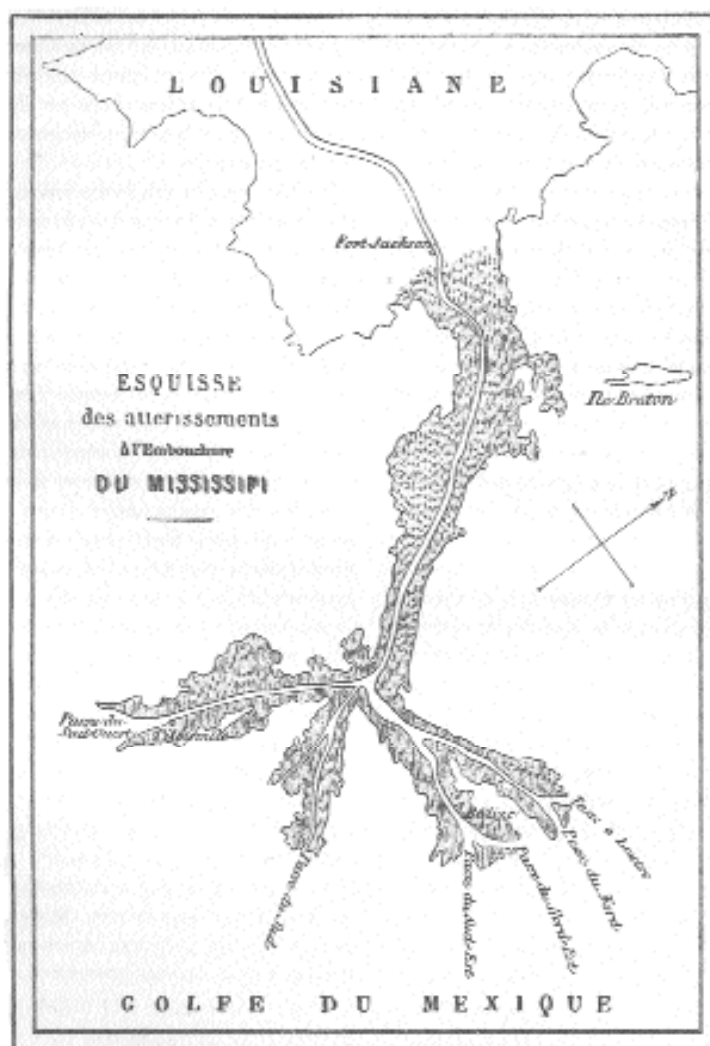
Science seems out of place in the wilderness of Louisiana, and this wire that mysteriously transmits thoughts seemed all the more strange in that it passes above these reeds, far from all cultivated fields, between stagnant marshes and a muddy river. Such is the march of civilization in the United States: here, on soggy ground that is not even part of the continent yet, but only the residue of waves, the telegraph is the first work of humans. Before having disturbed this earth with pickax or plow, the American already has his thoughts circulating here—or at least his calculations. As soon as a ship arrives at Balize, this wire announces to the Orleanian merchants how many barrels of salt, immigrants, or bolts of cotton fabric are contained in the cargo. Rarely does an employee come to examine the condition of the wire's insulation. It sways amid the high stalks of cane, and so long as a speculator does not have it cut, it transmits the news quite well. Sometimes, wild cattle wandering through the thicket knock down the poles with their horns, but as long as electricity flows obediently through the wire, no one even thinks of putting them back up. These wandering cows belong to the *Islingues*, semi-barbaric people who are descended from the *Islenots* or *Canaiotes* so numerous in Cuba and in the other Antilles.<sup>12</sup>

Toward evening, a tugboat came to pull our ship from its ridiculous position and start it off on its last stretch, accompa-

nied by three other sailing ships. It's a thrilling sight to see four ships crowded together, with their twelve masts, their yards, their inflated sails, their countless riggings stretched in all directions, their streamers, and their waving flags forming something like one gigantic structure. A thick smoke erupted from the middle of these ships. This, along with the bellowing of the steam escaping at regular intervals, were the only things that revealed the powerful tugboat hidden behind the high bulwarks of the three-masters. The little steamer grasped the four ships as if in a vise and dragged them along against the current of this vast Mississippi that flows like a sea into the sea. The strength of that little steamer has something terrifying and inexorable about it. It is with good reason that the tugboats take such proud names as Titan, Briareus, Hercules, Jupiter, and Enceladus.<sup>13</sup>

Thanks to the powerful engine, in less than one hour we reached the point at which the river branches out into several mouths. For the last 150 kilometers of its course, the Mississippi resembles a gigantic arm projecting into the sea and spreading its fingers on the surface of the waters. Barataria Bay extends to the west, the Gulf and Lake Borgne to the east, while to the south, the sea thrusts a little gulf between each of the mouths, so that everywhere the land consists only of thin strips of coastal mud constantly demolished by the waves and endlessly renewed by alluvial deposits. In some places, the levee of soil that separates the salt water from the current of fresh water is so narrow that the waves break right into the Mississippi. If the creeping roots of the reeds did not hold the soil with their clinging network, a few waves would suffice to carry away the embankment and cut out a new mouth in the river.

The only vegetation of these damp, narrow beaches is wild cane, for trees cannot take root there. One must go about forty kilometers from the mouth to find a clump of earth high



Engraved by Erhard, after a map of Franklin-Bache.

enough for even a poor stunted willow to cling to. A few hundred meters farther, two or three braver willows venture out and huddle together. Farther on, clusters of willows gather, mingling their foliage and forming a continuous curtain of pale greenery. This hides the view of the sea from the voyagers traveling upstream, making the landscape appear more like the mainland.

The region of willows is followed by that of the Louisiana cypress. Although these trees require a firmer soil than willows, the ground in which they grow is still half-hidden under pools of stagnant water, and in fact disappears entirely during flooding. The cypress is a superb tree with a straight, smooth trunk that has no branches for twenty to twenty-five meters. Its base is supported in the ground by thick roots that project in all directions like buttresses. Conical excrescences resembling thorns several feet high rise through the pools of water around the cypress. They are actually aerators that serve to carry air to the underground roots of the cypress, which would otherwise be deprived of it by the layer of water. The foliage of the tree consists of needles that are much smaller than those of the pine, and the branches are often so bare that they seem to have been devastated by fire. Their only embellishment is long tresses of flowing moss, locally called "Spanish beard." The extraordinary appearance of these trees adorned with immense gray beards lends a unique and strange character to the landscape. Parisians can get a vague impression of this by going to admire the acclimated cypresses in Rambouillet Park.

Great savannas sometimes extend between the cypress forest bordering the edge of the Mississippi and the already distant seashore. These areas are home to multitudes of birds. The hunters have found that the easiest way to make them leave their nests and shoot them in flight is to set the grass of the savanna on fire. This barbarous method is forbidden, because the



fire can spread little by little across the grass to the plantations. But this does not in the least stop the hunters from resorting to such an expeditious means of flushing out the birds. During the day, all these burning prairies cast a distinctly reddish glow on the atmosphere, and one can see nothing but black smoke extending heavily over the horizon. But the night reveals an awesome sight to the traveler. When the flames of several days of fire finally die out, the ground is covered with a thick layer of ash over an area of several square kilometers, and the marsh grass that composes the soil of the undulating prairies has been burned several feet deep. The hunters have achieved their goal. They had a magnificent fowl hunt.

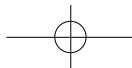
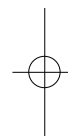
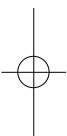
The first plantations appear above Fort Jackson, a type of small earthen fort that the patriots of Louisiana like to think of as impregnable.<sup>14</sup> These plantations incorporate everything. On the bank are trunks of fallen trees and an earthen levee to prevent flooding. Behind, there is a road parallel to the river, and then high fences made of boards split by the ax. Next come fields of cane like vast blocks of greenery, isolated magnolias, and alleys of pecan trees and azedarachs.<sup>15</sup> There are also wooden houses painted with a red or white wash and perched on two- or three-foot pilings of masonry above the always-moist soil, and Negroes' quarters resembling beehives, half-buried in the tall grass of a garden. Finally, in the distance, there is a thick wall of cypress tracing the outline of the river.

This landscape has an eternal, unchanging quality, and it inspires through its tranquility, its majesty, and the grandeur of its lines, rather than because of its details. In order to love and understand Louisiana, one must spend every evening contemplating the severe horizon of its forests, the solemn beauty of its countryside, the silent current of its river.

In the middle of one of these plantations, situated on the east bank of the Mississippi, rises a commemorative column in honor of the Battle of New Orleans.<sup>16</sup> It was there that the British under General Pakenham were routed by the celebrated Andrew Jackson. The Americans were admirably positioned and took advantage of the terrain to enclose themselves, as if in a fortress. By digging a ditch, they cut the narrow isthmus that separated the Mississippi from the impenetrable cypress forests of Lake Borgne. They then used piles of cotton bales to create a rampart that was impervious to bullets and cannon fire. The British, marching in step over sodden ground, slow and unconcerned as if on parade, were shot down like wild game by the skilled riflemen from Louisiana and Kentucky. The true story of this battle is yet to be told. According to popular accounts, the British army supposedly lost seven thousand men, more soldiers than it counted in its ranks, while the Americans lost only seven soldiers. Such is the ratio: one to a thousand.<sup>17</sup>

We had already recognized the proximity of the great city by the thick black atmosphere that hung over the distant horizon and by the high towers softly outlined in the haze. All of a sudden, as we rounded a bend, the buildings of the southern metropolis came into sight. With each turn of the wheel, a new detail was revealed, belfry after belfry, house after house, ship after ship. Finally, when the tugboat left us, the whole city spread its vast crescent, two kilometers long, before us. Intersecting in all directions on the river were great commercial steamers, little tugboats that were harnessed to large ships and made them lightly pirouette, ferries trafficking ceaselessly between the city and its suburb of Algiers, and skiffs swimming like insects in the midst of all these powerful monsters. The bank of the river was an endless avenue of ships tied to the shore. Appearing in turn were luggers,<sup>18</sup> schooners, high steamboats resembling gigantic

stabled mastodons, and then three-masters arranged along the bank in an interminable avenue. Behind this vast semi-circle of masts and yards were wooden jetties crowded with all sorts of merchandise, carriages and wagons bouncing along the pavement, and finally, houses of brick, wood, and stone, gigantic billboards, factory fumes, and bustling streets. Bright sunlight illuminated this vast horizon of movement and noise.



### III. New Orleans

The plan of New Orleans is, like that of all American cities, one of extreme simplicity. However, the great curve of the Mississippi (which has earned the metropolis of the south the poetic name “the Crescent City”) has prevented laying out the roads perfectly straight from one end of the city to the other. It necessitated arranging the districts in trapezoids, separated from each other by wide boulevards, with their small bases facing the river. On the other hand, the western suburbs of Lafayette, Jefferson, and Carrollton are constructed on a semi-circular peninsula of the Mississippi. Consequently, their larger bases face the river, and the boulevards that border them on each side join in a point at the edge of the forest in which the city was built. Thanks to the recent annexing of these districts, New Orleans has taken on a new appearance, and the two graceful curves that the Mississippi traces along its embankment for about seven miles should give it the name “the Double Crescent City.”

The wetness of the ground in Louisiana’s principal city is proverbial, and it is easy to imagine that the whole city, with its buildings, warehouses, and boulevards, rests on an enormous raft carried by the waters of the river. Core drillings up to 250 meters deep are sufficient proof to the contrary. They also demonstrate that the soil on which the city is built is composed solely of layers of mud alternating with clay and of tree trunks that are slowly turning into peat and then coal, due to the forces continually operating in the great workshop of nature. One has

to dig only a few centimeters, or during dry spells, one or two meters, to reach muddy water. Also, the slightest rain is enough to flood the streets, and when a heavy rain beats down over the city, all of the avenues and plazas become rivers and lagoons. The steam engines work almost constantly to rid New Orleans of its stagnant waters and to discharge them through a canal into Lake Pontchartrain, four miles north of the river.

Obviously, the banks of the Mississippi, like those of all waterways that flood alluvial plains, are higher than the riparian terrain. Nowhere is this fact more evident than in New Orleans, for there is a difference of four meters between the parts of the city distant from the river and those near the embankment. For this reason, structures are protected against the flooding of the Mississippi by a boarded levee one hundred meters wide. In addition, the flooding of the river always brings an enormous amount of sand and clay that reinforces the levee and forms a new batture,<sup>19</sup> on which several streets have already been constructed since the beginning of the century. The districts far from the Mississippi are only a few centimeters above sea level, and people's homes are separated from alligator nests only by drainage pools of stagnant and always iridescent water. However, a certain bulge, called a "hill" in these parts, stretches between the city and Lake Pontchartrain. This swelling, imperceptible to the naked eye, might be one meter high. The plain is so level that the water, at its lowest point, falls only about ten centimeters over a total distance of 180 kilometers, from the city to the Gulf of Mexico.

The oldest district of New Orleans, the one usually called the French Quarter, is still the most elegant of the city. In fact, the French are only a small minority here, and most of their houses have been purchased by American capitalists. There is the main post office, the large banks, the shops selling Parisian goods, the

cathedral, and the opera house. Even the name of this last building is proof of the gradual disappearance of foreign or Creole elements. Formerly, this theater showed only French plays, comedies, or vaudeville, but to continue to be profitable, it was forced to change its playbills and its name. Today it is patronized by the American public. It is clear that the French language will increasingly disappear. The population of New Orleans, which fluctuates between 120,000 and 200,000 inhabitants depending on the season, includes barely 6,000 to 10,000 French, or one-twentieth. In addition, there are the same number of Creoles who are not yet completely Americanized. Soon the Anglo-Saxon idiom will dominate unchallenged, and all that will remain of the aboriginal Indians and the French and Spanish settlers who had established themselves on the land well before the immigrants of British origin will be the names of streets: Tchoupitoulas, Perdido, Bienville, etc. At the French Market, which foreigners once visited without fail in order to hear the medley of languages, one now hears only English conversations. The Germans, always ashamed of their heritage, try to prove that they have become Yankees through their clearly articulated curses and barroom jokes. The Negroes, with their inexhaustible chatter, deign to speak French only out of sympathy for the listener. And the occasional Indian hunters, proud and sad as prisoners, respond to questions in monosyllabic English.

The American section, located west of the French Quarter on the other side of the wide and beautiful Canal Street, is inhabited mostly by merchants and brokers. It is also the center of political life. Here one finds hotels almost as beautiful as those of New York, cotton warehouses, most of the churches and theaters, and City Hall. This is also where the big slave market is held. A huge mob always crowds inside Bank's Arcade, the interior of which is dominated by a large counter, abundantly

stocked with bottles and glasses. On a platform stands the auctioneer, a large, red-faced, bloated man with a booming voice: "Come on, Jim! Get up on the table. How much for this good nigger Jim? Look how strong he is! He's got good teeth! Look at the muscles on his arms! Come on, now, dance for us, Jim!" And he makes the slave turn around. "Here's a nigger who knows how to do everything—he's a carpenter, a cartwright, and a shoemaker. He won't talk back—you never need to hit him." But most of the time there are long whitish rays etched by the whip on their black skin. Then it is a Negro woman's turn: "Look at this wench! She's already had two niggers, and she's still young. Look at her strong back and sturdy chest! She's a good wet nurse, and a good negress for work!" And the bidding starts again amid laughter and shouts. Thus all the Negroes of Louisiana pass in turn on this fateful table: children who have just ended their seventh year and whom the law in its solicitude deems old enough to be separated from their mothers; young girls subjected to the stares of two thousand spectators and sold by the pound; mothers who come to see their children stolen from them, and who are obliged to remain cheerful while threatened by the whip; and the elderly, who have already been auctioned off many times, and who have to appear one last time before these pale-faced men who despise them and jeer at their white hair. In the end, they are deprived of the most vile and pitiful honor—that of bringing a good price. Sold off for a few dollars, they might as well be buried like animals in the cypress forest. According to the advocates of slavery, all this is willed by the cause of progress itself, the doctrines of our holy religion, and the most sacred laws of family and property.

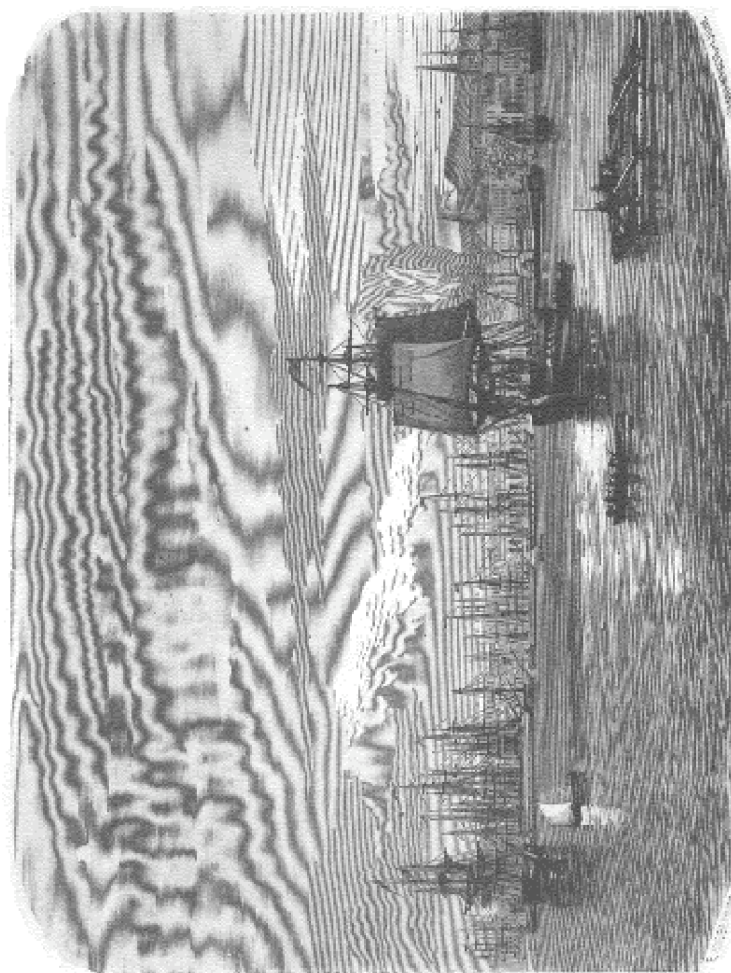
For a long time, all the houses of New Orleans were simple huts made of wood. In spite of its extent, the whole city had the appearance of a huge fairground. To day the houses of the two



main districts are for the most part built with brick and stone. Granite was even used to construct the new customs house. In spite of the strong pilings thirty meters long on which it rests, its walls have already sunk one foot into the ground.

But the principal agent of change in the city is not the aesthetic taste of the property owners, but rather fire. I soon had the opportunity to learn this first-hand, for I arrived in New Orleans at the peak of the annual fire season. According to the poets, the month of May is the season of regeneration; in the chief city of Louisiana, it is the season of conflagration. "Of course," they say, "because then the hot weather begins, and the woodwork of the houses dries out under the sun. It's also a time of merriment when people are less concerned for their own self-interest." "That's true," add the cynics, "but don't forget that the month of May comes right after the April quarter, and the burnings can help balance the books." The fact is that during the last two or three weeks of May, not one night passes in which the alarm does not call the citizens with its slow, deep sound. Often, the purple reflections of four or five fires color the sky at the same time, and the fire brigade, woken up suddenly, doesn't have a clue as to where it is most needed. It has been calculated that in the city of New York alone, flames annually destroy as many buildings as in all of France. In New Orleans, a city with only one-fifth or one-sixth the population of New York, the impact of fire is relatively even greater, since the total destruction caused by fires is equivalent to half the loss due to similar catastrophes throughout France.

One night, early in my stay in the metropolis of the South, one of those horrible disasters so common in the United States occurred. Seven large steamships burned simultaneously. It was an awesome sight. The seven ships, moored side by side, looked



The port of New Orleans (Louisiana).  
Drawing by de Bérard, after an American photograph.

like individual fireplaces joined at the base by a sea of flames. Whirlwinds of fire shot up from the bottom of the holds and then swept back down below the galleries, revealing in all its ephemeral beauty the elegant architecture of these palaces glittering with gilding and mirrors. But soon the tongues of fire penetrated in successive jets through the floor of the galleries, and from top to bottom, the three decks of cabins were enveloped in a blazing hurricane. Above the ships, black smokestacks surrounded by swirling billows of flame remained motionless for a long time, like solemn ghosts. The flags, hoisted to the top of the masts, appeared from time to time through the smoke, fluttering festively as if for a holiday. One after another, the galleries caved in with a horrible groan, and the engines and furnaces, losing their center of gravity, suddenly leaned over, making the whole enormous conflagration flutter like a pennant. The decks and smokestacks collapsed successively, and the burning debris became a river of fire carried along by the Mississippi. The uniform facades of the city, the docks covered with merchandise, the chaotic crowd, the great ships moored along the bank, and on the opposite shore, the houses and forests of Algiers—all seemed illuminated with a bloody glow. By contrast, the sky alone seemed black, and the stars had vanished. The screams that were heard for a long time coming from the burning ships intensified the horror of this frightful scene. Forty-two persons were burned alive before a rescue attempt was organized. It is a fact that from the construction of the first steamboat up to the present time, more than forty thousand persons have been burned or drowned in the Mississippi because of accidents of all sorts, including explosions, collisions, or fires—an average of one thousand victims per year.

The night watchmen are far too few in number to be very effective in preventing disasters. The city, almost seven miles long

and an average of one mile wide, has only 240 watchmen, of whom 120 work at night. Yet they take great care to warn criminals of their approach. They are equipped with big sticks of ironwood or oak, and when they arrive at a street corner, they strike a resounding blow to the edge of the sidewalk. Arsonists, thieves, and murderers thus hear the enemy coming and are able to accomplish their deeds without fear of surprise. The most notorious criminals are hardly ever arrested, except when, emboldened by long success, they have the audacity to kill in broad daylight. Each year several hundred murders are committed and duly reported by the press, but they are rarely pursued by the judges. However, criminal activity is so excessive that, in spite of the casual nature of justice, 25,000 to 30,000 arrests are made each year. It is true that of this considerable number, amounting to one tenth of the population, 4,000 or 5,000 are Negroes guilty of walking about freely without a letter of permission, or even sent by their masters to the executioner to receive twenty-five lashes of the whip.

The city's more than twenty-five hundred taverns are always filled with drinkers, and fuel the most violent passions with brandy and rum. Every big hotel opens its entire first floor in order to take advantage of the national vice of drunkenness. At the center, there is a large rotunda, a type of stock exchange where merchants come to read their newspapers and discuss their finances. It opens onto a gambling hall, where rogues rendezvous with dupes. There is also a bar, with a table richly and abundantly laid out for the public. The meal is completely free, on a first come, first served basis. One just has to pay for the brandy or rum. The picayune (twenty-five cents) that one spends for each little glass is more than enough to cover all the expenses of this public banquet. Besides, the vast majority of persons who enter the hall don't even touch the food, and are

content to drink. Thus, hundreds of drinkers rub shoulders, ignorant of the fact that they are footing the bill for a feast for famished paupers .

The taverns are always full, especially during election time. The candidate has to justify himself to all who are voting for him. If he doesn't know how to drink a cocktail with style, he will lose popularity and be branded a traitor. When political adversaries meet in a bar, drunk or sober, insults followed by fist-fights or gunshots are not unusual. More than once, the conqueror has been seen drinking over the corpse of the conquered. True, it is against the law to carry concealed weapons. But during elections, the boldest among the citizens elude the letter of the law and furnish their belts with a veritable arsenal in plain sight. Most, however, are content to conceal a dagger or pocket pistol in their clothing.

"Is it true that it is expressly forbidden by law to carry weapons on one's person?" someone asked a famous Louisiana judge.

"Certainly. We can't thank our legislators enough for having forbidden the carrying of concealed weapons."

"Then what would you do if I insulted you or slapped you?"

"What would I do?" And seizing a loaded pistol from his belt, he aimed it at the head of his questioner.

A misanthrope might compare the vices of our European society to a hidden evil that gnaws at the individual from within, whereas the vices of American society appear outwardly in all of their hideous brutality. The most violent hatred separates factions and races: the slavery advocate abhors the abolitionist, the white loathes the Negro, the native detests the foreigner, the wealthy planter disdains the small landowner, and rivalry of interests creates an insurmountable barrier of mistrust even between related families. In a society of this type, the arts cannot

be seriously cultivated. Moreover, periodic bouts of yellow fever eliminate all concerns other than commerce, and the merchant places no value on beautifying a city that he plans to flee once he has amassed a sufficient fortune. Under the pretext of art, rich individuals limit themselves to whitewashing the trees in their gardens. This luxury has the double advantage of being pleasing to their sight and of costing very little. They cannot do the same to public promenades because these do not exist. The only tree inside the city is a solitary date palm planted sixty years ago by an old monk. On the other hand, the city holds the honor of erecting a bronze statue to its savior Andrew Jackson. However, this statue has no merit other than that of being colossal and of having cost a million.<sup>20</sup> The artist who modeled and cast it, Mr. Clarke Mills, has been neither to Rome nor to Florence, having studied only in the studios of Washington, D.C. That is exactly what made his reputation among the locals, and those who advanced him money and provided him with work imposed on him the express condition of never traveling outside his native country. His indubitable claims to fame will hardly enable him to eclipse the sculptors of the ancient world. These consist of the patented invention of a very simple process for the fusion of metal, and of the art of perfectly balancing equestrian statues on the two hind legs without the help of a luxuriant tail or an obliging tree trunk. The city of New Orleans has also commissioned from Mr. Mills a statue of Washington, which will be erected in the American quarter.

As for the public buildings, they are for the most part devoid of any architectural merit. The train stations are wretched hangars blackened with smoke, the theaters are mostly dumps at the mercy of fire, and the churches, with the exception of a type of mosque built by the Jesuits, are but large pretentious hovels. Moreover, of all the public buildings, the churches are most sub-

ject to the risk of fire or demolition. The congregations that gather there come together, separate, and meet again, only to disperse once more like flecks of sea foam or whirlwinds of leaves carried along by the wind. If a young man is gifted with a strong voice, if he has been successful in the drawing rooms, or if he attracts attention by a religious zeal, actual or feigned, he can issue shares to raise money for the construction of a church, of which he will become absolute master. The church will be his thing, his capital, his business. If renting out the pews does not generate enough income, and his oratory is not fruitful, he gets rid of his church by bankrupting, selling, demolishing, or burning it, and then changes his denomination. This kind of speculation can very easily be combined with others. Nothing prevents the minister of the Gospel from also being a banker, a planter or a slave merchant. The American never has a fixed vocation. He is constantly on the lookout for opportunities, waiting for fortune to pass by so he can hop on and be carried away toward the land of Eldorado.

In the United States, everyone and everything changes and moves with a rapidity inconceivable to those of us who are accustomed always to follow one long routine. In Europe, each stone has its own history. The church rises where the dolmen once stood, and for thirty centuries, the inhabitants of the country—Gauls, Franks, or French—have worshipped at the same consecrated place. We obey traditions rather than humans, and let ourselves be governed by the dead more than by the living. In America, there is nothing of the kind. Not a single superstition is attached to the past or the native soil, and the population, moving like the surface of a lake seeking its level, distributes itself entirely according to the laws of economics. In the young and growing republic, there are already as many ruins as in our old empires. Present-day life is too active and tempestuous for

the traditions of the past to dominate the soul. Instinctive love of country in its native simplicity no longer exists in the United States. For the masses, all feelings merge more and more with pecuniary interests.

But for those who are noble of heart—as rare in America as in every nation of the world—there is no country other than liberty.

## NOTES

- 1 A class of microscopic animals found in both fresh and salt water. [This and all subsequent notes are by the editors.]
- 2 In classical mythology, a Triton is one of the minor sea deities associated with the major sea gods.
- 3 A nautical term for a strong shutter that is screwed against the interior of a porthole in heavy weather.
- 4 The poop deck is a raised open deck located at the stern of a ship, and having cabins below it.
- 5 Any unsegmented marine worm of the phylum *Nemertea*. Also called a “ribbon worm.”
- 6 *Stephanomia*, a species of plankton of the order *Siphonophora*. It consists of floating or swimming colonies composed of polyps.
- 7 Sea wrack: seaweed or a growth of seaweed; often applied to the larger kinds cast up on the shore. Sea grapes: a coarse, olive-brown seaweed *Sargassum bacciferum*, found in the Gulf Stream and tropical American seas, characterized by numerous berry-like vessels; also called gulf weed.
- 8 A spar projecting from the upper end of the bow of a sailing vessel, used for holding the tacks of various jibs or stays and often supporting a jib boom.
- 9 A port on the Black Sea, famous for its heroic resistance under siege during the Crimean War, 1854–1856.
- 10 Now called Pilot Town.
- 11 Steven Platt, Christopher Brantley and Thomas Rainwater in their recent article “Canebrakes: Bamboo Forests of the Southeast” [*Wild Earth*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2002):38–45] describe the extraordinary cane forests that were once



widespread along the Mississippi. They observe that “cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*), a member of the grass family, is the only bamboo native to the United States and occurs throughout most of the Southeast . . .” The “culms (above-ground stalks) support thick evergreen foliage” that “may reach 9 to 10 meters in height, and crowd together in dense stands called ‘canebrakes’ by the early settlers . . .” The largest of these canebrakes “occurred on natural levees in the Mississippi River floodplain, on a chain of bluffs . . . extending from western Kentucky to Southeastern Louisiana” (p. 38). The authors note that while the canebrakes of the Southeast were once extensive ecosystems that included individual forests of tens of thousands of hectares, most of these were destroyed in the nineteenth century and the canebrake ecosystem is today “critically endangered” (p. 44).

12 This community, descended from immigrants from the Canary Islands, is still well known in southeast Louisiana as the “Isleños.”

13 All of these figures are from classical mythology. Briareus was one of three giants, sons of Uranus and Gaea, who had fifty heads and one hundred arms each. Enceladus, also a giant, was struck down with a great stone thrown at him by Athena during a war with the gods. Jupiter and Hercules are, of course, more familiar symbols of power.

14 The patriots were wrong, as Reclus suspected. On April 18, 1862 the Union fleet attacked the fort and other Confederate defenses along the river. After constant bombardment for nine days, the fort’s supply lines were cut off, it was surrounded, and the defending troops mutinied. The fort surrendered on April 28. See John D. Winter, *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), pp. 85–102.

15 Reclus probably refers to *Melia azedarach*, a naturalized tree commonly known in Louisiana as the chinaberry or chinaball tree.

16 The final battle of the War of 1812 between the United States and the British Empire. The major engagement took place between December 23, 1814 and January 8, 1815. The war officially ended on December 14, 1814, with the Treaty of Ghent.

17 In reality, the ratio was closer to one to three hundred. According to historian Charles B. Brooks, “The Americans had 71 casualties, the British 2,057. More of the wounded would die before morning.” *The Siege of New Orleans* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1961), p. 252.

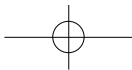
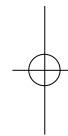
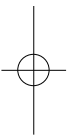
18 A lugger is a small boat for fishing or pleasure sailing that is rigged with a lugsail, a four-sided sail.

19 The term “batture” is still used in New Orleans. It generally refers to land created by deposits in the bend of a river. In New Orleans it refers more broadly to all the land between the levee and the river.

20 General Andrew Jackson, the future president, was hailed as “the hero of New Orleans” because of his victory over the British during the Battle of New Orleans. His famous statue was erected at the center of the Place d’Armes, renamed “Jackson Square” in his honor. Reclus, as an implacable foe of racism and an early critic of American expansionism, could hardly have seen this leader of genocidal expeditions against Native Americans as a hero. It is perhaps for this reason, in addition to aesthetics, that he had little appreciation for Jackson’s monument.

## LETTERS FROM LOUISIANA

Elisée Reclus



*“The countryside is uniform and without a horizon, like the sea.”*

To Elie Reclus. No date. Fortier Plantation, near New Orleans.

My good fellow,

I can't send you de quibus<sup>1</sup> until April 8, and then ten pounds will still be all I can manage. You don't need to send me any clothes unless they've already been ordered, because in fact I have all the scandalous clothing<sup>2</sup> that I need because of the heat, and in New Granada I won't be a “would-be gentleman”<sup>3</sup> in French clothing, but I will be a gentleman in cotton. What's more, Cape didn't make me the frock coat he was supposed to.

Bring serious books; I won't tell you which ones, since you know what I like, and besides, we'll share our studies when we get together.

Pélissier says for whoever wants to hear it that you're an iron bar covered in silk.

As for me, I'd be bored if I were willing to admit it. The countryside is uniform and has no horizon, like the sea. I'm alone in a large house. I'm going to give lessons on the ABCs to children who have been studying them for four years without learning them, and I grab hold of every book available, including (listen and shudder) novels written by the author of *Waverley*.<sup>4</sup>

As I write I have beside me two rattlesnakes, and although they are nicely huddled together in a box, I turn around every now and then to see if they're climbing up my legs as in the case of the late Zinzendorf of bygone memory.<sup>5</sup>

Greetings.

Elisée Reclus.



*“... the Americans are completely sympathetic to the Cossacks;  
there’s not a single democrat  
who forgets to mention the Tsar in his prayers”*

To Elie Reclus. No date. Fortier Plantation. Care of Roman  
and Kenion, 2 New Levee, New Orleans.

I went out specifically to look for a letter in which you give me the details about the new friends you’ve just made—but nix. So don’t fail to swallow all the information that was contained in your epistle and regurgitate it to me by way of the next mail delivery.

As for your ideas about your future in America, I advise you to remain temporarily in Massachusetts where you’ll have more opportunities and be more appreciated. Bring along an abundance of letters and continue to try your hand at teaching until we have the means to establish our home.<sup>6</sup> In Louisiana you face a problem that I wasn’t expecting: English. Precisely because the official language is spoken so badly there, teachers are required to have the most impeccable pronunciation. In England, our English was admired, but it seems to me that people here are not very satisfied with mine.

But if you absolutely want to come to Louisiana, you’ll very easily find a position. No more than a week ago a physician, M. de la Faye, a nice but slightly crazy Martinican (he was ruined by the liberation of his seven hundred slaves, but was still courageous enough to say “They did well to ruin me”) sent me his daughter Blanche as a pupil. That would have brought me an extra thousand francs, but I would have bought these thousand francs too dearly, not counting the indelicacy there would have been in giving lessons outside M. Fortier’s household. If you come here, M. de la Faye will be your

bosom pal and fervent admirer. There's also one of the largest colleges of Louisiana where I almost became a tutor in geology, chemistry, physics, etc. We'll have the advantage of being a few miles from one another if you take a position as a professor there, though the Director has the air of a wigmaker and is basically no more than a lout. I don't trust him. Two weeks ago a position opened up with M. Fortier's brother-in-law. If you had been there, you could have taken the position and would have devoured a salary of 4000 francs; but other similar opportunities can be found. Another thing—if you settle in Texas, the government gives you 200 acres of land, on the condition that you work it and make it productive for five years. Even if everything doesn't go so well at the outset, I can sustain you, considering the *piastres* that fall into my bowl.

My friend Fortier made a proposition the other day that shows his kindness and is something I hope I'll be able take advantage of: "If you settle on the banks of the Amazon," he said, "I'll give you 125 *piastres* for my son Michel and 400 for my other children. With a capital of 3000, you can buy some land in an area that you think likely to become significant after the future colonization of the banks of the Amazon, and, as is fair, half of the land will belong to you." What's more, I couldn't be doing better, I'm treated as politely as if I were a guest, and with as much affection as if I were a member of the family.

Try to get here before the end of the year, since from December to January I'll have a month of vacation that I hope to spend in the mountains of Mexico or elsewhere. And keep clearly in mind that you have to give the lie to all the pronouncements of the kinfolk,<sup>7</sup> you have to make a dime and manage to produce children who are something more than beggars.

Don't forget to write me again with the substance of the lost letter. . . . As for the signs of the times, I want you to know that the Americans are completely sympathetic to the Cossacks; there's not a single democrat who forgets to mention the Tsar in his prayers.

Greetings, brother.



*"For the Irish and the Germans, last year's epidemic was reminiscent of the famous plagues of the Middle Ages. . . ."*

To his mother. No date. M. Fortier's, New Orleans.

Dear Mother,

I see from your last letter that you still harbor fears on my account because of the disease that ravages this land. At one time I would have given you a variety of reasons, and to my mind good ones, for not having any fears for me. But today I can completely lay all your fears to rest, since I have just passed through this disease as if I had passed through fire without being burned. Try hard not to feel any retrospective worry for me, for I really didn't suffer very much, and never had any fear of a fatal outcome. True, my convalescence lasted for some time, and was accompanied by a succession of headaches, rapid heartbeat and other symptoms. However, I've already been perfectly well for two weeks, and now the "brilliant" north wind strengthens my muscles and boosts my energy like a gymnastic workout. So, dear mother, you should do absolutely nothing but rejoice



about my sickness, since as result I will never have a relapse of yellow fever, and I can go to New Orleans, to Vera Cruz, and from Vera Cruz to Rio, and remain at the very source of the infectious disease without running the slightest risk.

I thought that I might well escape this epidemic, since up to last year yellow fever had never appeared in the countryside. Everyone thought that this year would follow the rule, but that was not to be the case. However, the fever jumped over entire parishes without a single victim, while it struck certain isolated plantations with tragic results. I was the last to become ill, and two or three days after my convalescence we had the first hoarfrost, which destroyed once and for all every feverish miasma. I don't need to tell you that I was cared for with the utmost affection. The doctor—who is, besides, the best friend I have in Louisiana—stayed for three nights in the bedroom next to mine and M. Fortier invented needs for me just to have the pleasure of taking care of them.

I feel like a complete egoist to speak at such length of a fever that caused me so little suffering. It's only for you that I would allow myself to go into these details, because if I were there in Orthez, I know that you'd ask me for them. But once more, please don't imagine that I suffered the slightest bit. I never doubted for a single instant that I'd recover. Besides, the illness is seldom dangerous for Frenchmen. For the Irish and the Germans, last year's epidemic was reminiscent of the famous plagues of the Middle Ages, but only one Frenchman in twenty was stricken.

Your letter gave me great pleasure. I'm happy to hear that Onésime,<sup>7</sup> about whom it was impossible for me to have any news for three years, completed his studies brilliantly. It seems that at the moment he's rather undecided, and doesn't know

which way to turn. But whether he studies medicine, agriculture or mechanics, I can only rejoice, for in any case, he can become a useful person. As for me, all my sympathies incline me toward agriculture, but I'm not egoistic enough to want to lead my brothers along the path that I have chosen. When I was in Ireland I thought that I had become a laborer for good, but when I was set straight on this and decided that I ought to leave Europe, I had to take care of the most urgent matters, and for that reason became a teacher again. But I nevertheless continue my studies in agriculture, and when my pupil, Michel Fortier, goes to college and when my other students become little girls who are too big<sup>9</sup> for me to remain here, I'll be proud and happy to become what my grandfather once was. According to your letter, it seems that Uncle Reclus was somewhat revolted to learn that I had been a porter.<sup>10</sup> As for me, it's one of the most pleasant memories of my adventurous life. Please don't imagine that my decision to roll barrels of pork caused me the slightest suffering. Far from it. Very simply, when my last *piastre* was spent I had to earn one each day as a laborer. I didn't have enough false pride to think myself obliged to suffer from hunger. If I had been stronger I would have continued in that trade longer, though I'll admit that sometimes the bags of salt strained my back.

Yours,

Elisée Reclus



*“In the Creole milieu, the spirit of family is so strong that one endures contact with outsiders only with regret.”*

To his mother. No date. At Fortier's, care of Roman and Kenion, New Levee, New Orleans.

Dear Mother,

I was touched to the bottom of my soul by your solicitude. Before I took ill, you already had great anxieties about my health, and now that I've recovered, you fear that there will be detrimental consequences. I can reassure you, dear Mother, by telling you that I enjoy remarkably good health. Thanks to my poor memory, I've already nearly forgotten my few days of illness. Also, I hope that you'd want to allow me at my age to decide whether or not to wear a flannel sweater. Think about it, dear Mother, I'm twenty-five years old, and every morning I practice hydrotherapy, bathing my entire body. So I hope that I will be permitted, dear Mother, to get along very well without having flannel on my skin. Besides, if I wore flannel, I'd feel so old that without doubt I'd soon get rheumatism.

Permit me to tell you that you are badly mistaken in thinking that I've found in this household a father and mother. I've certainly misled you completely if my expression of the gratitude that I owe them for the care that they lavished on me during my illness led you to believe that my relations with them are those of a son to a parent. No, truly, and I don't even know if I have the right to say that I've found a friend in this family. Although I may have been here for over a year, I have never ceased to be treated as a outsider whom one respects and of whom one is even a bit fond, but from whom one keeps a certain distance because one still doesn't know him and doesn't

wish to know him. Friendship isn't possible where there is no confidence, and, between us, there have never been any confidences, but at most a few little indiscreet remarks. With these gentlemen I'm on a perfectly equal footing, and M. Septime, at whose place I stay, is a good friend who laughs, makes jokes and tells little stories, but at the table he always treats me as ceremoniously as if I were a guest. With the other gentlemen I'm still at the stage of deep hats' off, official shaking of hands, and the sacramental "I hope that you are doing well." If I stayed here for twenty years, it would be the same, for I'm an outsider. In the Creole milieu, the spirit of family is so strong that one endures contact with outsiders only with regret. If one is obliged to allow them into one's home, they are accepted as a necessary evil, and the ceremonious politeness they are accorded demonstrates on a daily basis that they must be careful not to think themselves at home. Ah! Dear Mother, how mistaken you are in thinking that I could find a mother here (even if I had sought one); I can hardly be considered even to know Mme. Fortier, with whom I talk seriously and politely during two hours in the evening. When she goes to her house in town and I have a few days off, I don't think I even have the right to visit her, according to convention. Don't think that I would wish to speak ill of persons whom I sincerely like and who themselves like me to the degree that they think that it is appropriate to do so. I just wanted to explain the nature of the relationship between us.

So you see that I'm a bit alone, and with the exception of two hours in the evening, I'm perfectly solitary and speak to no living soul. My only friends are on the table, they are my books. When I've finished reading and scribbling I go walking along the Mississippi and silently look at the quiet waters that will lose themselves in the current of the Gulf, and, after their long voy-

age across the Atlantic, will perhaps break on the rocks of Biarritz. I follow them in my thoughts and visit you in my imagination.

Since you're waiting for it, I'll send you my picture the first chance I have, but I haven't changed.

May you all be happy.

Elisée Reclus



*“... it seems to me absolutely impossible that we should not know  
how to get along in America,  
where the land summons the farmer and  
the labor summons the worker.”*

To his mother, M. and Mme. Fortier's,  
New Orleans, June 28, 1855.

Dear Mother,

I received your letter this morning and I'm replying to it just to give you a sign of life, for your pain seems to me too profound and deep-rooted for a remembrance of me to be able to help heal it. Nevertheless, God knows how happy I would be if I could console you a little. Many things have happened that have bitterly grieved your soul and you seem to fear everything in the future. I don't want to go over the past, for fear of expressing an opinion or writing a word that wounds you, and besides, what's the use of returning to what no longer is, and

which neither force nor rage can ever give us back? I prefer, if you can trust my words a bit, to try to reassure you concerning the future.

I don't know whether my brother has a definite intention to come to America. But if he comes, it would be illusory for you to fear that he and his family might go hungry. Here one doesn't need talent or even courage in order to live comfortably. All that is needed is a little good will, and surely nobody could deny that my brother is a man with energy and talent. I recall that we were able to survive, and would even have been able to live comfortably if we hadn't had so many friends, in an overpopulated England, where thousands of schoolmasters and schoolmistresses fight fiercely over a crust of stale bread, so it seems to me absolutely impossible that we shouldn't know how to get along in America, where the land summons the farmer and the labor summons the worker. As for me, if my beliefs didn't incline me to consider wealth a veritable crime, and if I were I shameless enough to accept the suffering of those that I know to be in misfortune, I would devote myself to becoming rich in the space of a few years. Fortunately, it's more to my taste to live in poverty, and I know that on this subject Elie thinks as I do. In my opinion, my brother is very lucky not to have what is called a post in France. There's no position there without more or less tyrannical authority, and it's certain beyond a doubt that my brother's beliefs would put him in a bad light in the eyes of all those great men adorned with sashes and titles. He would accept a position only to lose it. And what could he do then in a land that's so crowded that you can hardly turn around without stepping on your neighbor's toes? As for me, rather than worshipping the golden calf in France, I'd prefer a hundred times more living in some valley in Santo Domingo, having only a

loincloth to wear and bananas to eat. As for his becoming a minister, only a Jesuit could recommend this alternative to my brother. If I'm not mistaken, this Jesuit has turned up.

Believe me, dear Mother, the little colony that we're going to establish will be charming and my brother's family will find happiness there. So, when you see that your fears aren't realized, all that's left is to forget the past that has caused you to suffer.

... I'm sending you my picture. If it doesn't get there, I'll send another one. Also, ask M.P. if he received a barrel of sweet potatoes that I sent him, because M. Fortier offered to send a second one if the first didn't reach its destination.

I'm in good health, but there are always some minor illnesses in M. Fortier's family. First one complains, then another.

Goodbye, dear Mother.

Elisée Reclus.



*"What you say about the Yankee vomito has remarkable accuracy.  
In this vomito,  
one doesn't vomit his entrails, he vomits his spirit,  
his heart, he vomits himself."*

To Elie Reclus. March, 1855. M. Fortier's, New Orleans.

Greatest of brothers,<sup>11</sup>

My letter is not at all pecunious<sup>12</sup> and I have already given you the reasons. I'm even to a certain point in debt, since I haven't yet

paid the 7 pounds that Darrigrand<sup>13</sup> lent to Mannering. So if you leave Liverpool (April 5?) try to go to New York, given the few *sous* you will have saved or borrowed here and there. When you arrive in Boston or New York, write me, either by telegraph or otherwise, and I'll come to your rescue with a broadside of *piastres*. If I'm supposed to send you some pecunious substance before April 5, I won't really have the time, since to do so I would have to travel to New Orleans, and I can't leave whenever I want. Kéfa! kéfa?<sup>14</sup> . . . But here's what I'm going to do in a month, that is, around April 15. I'll send ten or 12 pounds, which is all that I'll be able to spare then, either to help you run off to America if you haven't left yet, or to reimburse the decent gentleman who will have advanced you this amount. The letter will be addressed to Lady E, and you should explain to her the *meaning*<sup>15</sup> of this letter if you leave before it arrives.

Darrigrand is supposed to be dying from a chest ailment. He's going to leave for Europe.

I received a mamaternal<sup>16</sup> letter. Summary: O my son, son of my heart, put on your flannel sweater. Otherwise, she's very goodhearted: for fear of injuring me and reawakening bad feelings between us, she carefully avoids speaking about the Bible, conversion, grace from above and other pious topics, and I was certainly touched by this motherly delicacy, which meant at the same time forsaking the cause of the Almighty.

I'm not of the opinion that we should go immediately to Mexico. There are the passports, the police, the gendarmes, the [illegible], and Santa Ana, another Napoleon III, elected by the will of the people.

Popocatepetl and Orizaba and Perote and the Plateau of Anáhuac and the mines of Xihuatitlan<sup>17</sup> and the magueys<sup>18</sup> and the thieves, all of that would without doubt be quite interesting



to see, but in New Granada we'll find a world of nature that is every bit as beautiful as that in Mexico and much further beyond our expectations. It's the country that holds the future of South America, since it's the place where all the forces come together, build up and flow at the same time into two seas, etc. What can you say of the plateau of Ambato, where the seasons are superimposed more than anywhere else, and where a single glance can take in the blue depths of the Pacific and the torrents that descend toward the Amazon. . . There are no passports or gendarmes, but there are, if I'm not mistaken, nice people who aren't at all Yankee. Another conclusive reason: from New Orleans to Vera Cruz, 25 *piastres*; from New Orleans to Chagres,<sup>19</sup> 25 *piastres*; from Chagres to Darien,<sup>20</sup> let's assume nothing, to avoid misunderstanding. From Darien to Bogota, *pedibus*,<sup>21</sup> joy, corn crabs, baying at the moon, and Pantagruel-  
esque<sup>22</sup> pleasures. Mexico will come later on. What do you say?

Mannering still hasn't found anything. He doesn't want an easy job, so consequently he's going to find none at all. He's pursuing his education, something that is indeed taking quite a bit of time.

What you say about the Yankee *vomito* is remarkably accurate. In this *vomito*, one doesn't vomit his entrails, he vomits his spirit, his heart, he vomits himself. There's nothing left of you but a flabby thing, like the empty goatskins that were filled in days of yore with Val de Penas.<sup>23</sup>

So, brother of my soul,

Elisée



*“... the United States [is] a great auction house in which everything is for sale, the slaves and the owner into the bargain, votes and honor, the Bible and consciences. Everything goes to the highest bidder.”*

To Elie Reclus. No date.

From the Fortier brothers' plantation, near New Orleans.

I'm sending you 24 pounds, but I needed almost two weeks of negotiations to get the draft. Try to do what you can with the 24 pounds: pay a debt, a few *sous* for the kids, I don't know what. I can't send anything directly to the house, so if there's a need to do so, it's your responsibility, *de facto* and *de jure*. My advice is for you to send them something if possible, then, after two or three months, I'll send them a stuffed crocodile and some other crazy things like this, which will give mama as much pleasure as a hundred crowns . . .

You judge the United States well, but not harshly enough. It's a great auction house in which everything is for sale, the slaves and the owner into the bargain, votes and honor, the Bible and consciences. Everything goes to the highest bidder. But since the mind needs some kind of nourishment, they feed it with baloney,<sup>24</sup> and all of a sudden their minds are much more enriched than those of those poor ignoramuses who think that learning produces knowledge, whereas it's actually enough just to know the name of something in order to rant on about it. Often I've been stupefied by an America that is so highly respected *abroad*<sup>25</sup> (outside), but is so far from respectable within, and have asked myself how it shows the progress that each people must necessarily achieve in its evolution. The truth of the matter is that it all comes down to development in space, achieved by the continual migration from

the Atlantic to the Pacific, to progress in time, since Americans enter working life at the end of childhood, and to progress in the vegetative life of man, since everyone has a little bread to eat. But this great progress is almost completely independent of their will, and is imposed by a series of new relations between man and the Earth and between one race and another. These new relations have posed for humanity new questions that must be answered, willingly or unwillingly. Fortunately, every problem contains within itself its own solution, and the Americans will certainly not be to blame if a mixing of the races takes place and the Negro, Indian and white end by resembling one another both physically and morally, blending into a single nation. It would be interesting to investigate the extent to which the southern Negro has become Creole and the northern Negro has become Yankee, to determine the degree to which the planter has adopted the habits and the character of the Negroes, from whom he has already borrowed language, how many steps Negroes and Yankees have taken along the path to that coppery shade that is the model American countenance. Here's an interesting subject for study that we can pursue when we get together.

However, the Americans have achieved a great deal of progress for humanity that I've reflected on only very briefly. In the present era of social reconstruction, human nature must be explored all the way down to the dregs, which is what the Americans undertake with particular pleasure in regard to certain vices. They explore lying and impudence with indomitable energy, and move mountains by the force of prevarication, for in these days of wavering faith, it's up to hypocrisy to work miracles. It's incredible just to listen to them. All Yankees are apostles of civilization. An angel of peace is contained in each ball of

cotton. A sweet Gospel verse is engraved on each blade of the *bowie-knife*. The *goddam* that they always have at the tip of their tongues becomes the *shibboleth* of the nations. Society, independence, civilization, and freedom are nothing but words, but after all, words have a certain value. The child, when left to himself—as you have pointed out to me—begins with the most real and most philosophical ideas. He first draws the trunk, then the branches, and then the leaves. But the man who teaches the child begins at the other extreme. He focuses on the form, on the external appearance and goes from the outside to the inside. He teaches names and forgets only the things themselves, whereas nature teaches the things and forgets only the names. Thus the two forms of education complete and pervade one another. The education of Americans resembles the kind that our pedants give us, they know the names of things; they speak of the bare facts to the whole world, and later, we give an explanation of those facts. To make use of an Anglo-Saxon comparison, they place the glasses on the table waiting for us to come and fill them. . . Eh!

A fact that will no doubt interest you is that the sympathies of the American people are completely with Russia, everyone is crazy about Nicholas; the ministers of the Holy Gospel pray for him, women sigh at the thought of him, the bold go to serve in his army.

How wonderful are the signs of the times!

Greetings, o man.  
Tell Herzen he's a good fellow.

Elisée.



*"I saw a certain newspaper defending the sacred Ark of slavery because it's a necessary evil, because the temperature reaches 100 degrees in the summer, and because only the Negroes know how to cut sugarcane."*

To Elie Reclus. No date. New Orleans.

In case the first bank draft was lost, here's a second one to replace it. If this one also gets lost I have a third at your service. At least by the beginning of October I hope to have another of the same amount to send to you. And what the hell, you'll end up saying good-bye to the . . . hassles over there and coming to get a taste of those over here, which will at least have the advantage of novelty. Kidnap the girl from the national guard quickly, for after all, you don't have to stick to formalities with the uncle of a porter,<sup>26</sup> say a quick good-bye to poverty, to hunger, to the filthy jackets with holes, come here and find a change of scenery, new experiences, and new revelations. A change of place produces a really magical change in the interior decoration—all the dead ideas that I burned on a slow fire within myself in Berlin and London, each object reminds me of them. D. was a Saint Paul, and X, my good people, was none other than Jesus Christ; but since I've seen the golden waves of the tropics, since I've seen the hummingbirds fly among the lataniers, I've made a bundle of all the rags of the old man and thrown them in the Mississippi. The Gulf Stream will carry them to the coast of England and you can fish them out if you need a change of rags. You'll experience the same thing: when you stroll through the Liverpool fog among the casks of palm oil<sup>27</sup> and barrels of wheat, waiting for the departure of some John Howell,<sup>28</sup> you'll stop being a Christian and stop "causing the infamy,"<sup>29</sup> because it will have disappeared. Also, it may be

that the American climate is anti-mystical and accounts largely for the general atheism of the all the Yankees, from the Bostonians to the Creoles. Moreover, it's here that the most interesting ethnographic question of the century is posed: that of the fusion of the races. In France, it's the fusion of classes and principles; here it's fusion at gunpoint<sup>30</sup>; in France they dream of the brotherhood of souls; here, the brotherhood of colors moves forward almost entirely by the brute force of gravity. But be that as it may, there's a perfect parallel between the two continents. Here the facts of the case are so clear and so numerous that no one can mistake them; everyone knows that the slaves will fade away behind the gods, the kings, the executioners, the scholars, the men, the women, and everything else out of the past.

To begin with, the slave owners defend themselves; therefore they are defeated, since the essence of authority is that it must be unquestionable: it exists, because it exists. As soon as it gives a justification, even that of might makes right, it commits suicide. God struck himself down when he had the unfortunate idea of appearing on Mount Sinai, surrounded by thunder and lightning. I saw a master deny his slave the right to have a will of his own and in that way revealed to the latter the rights of the human person. I saw a certain newspaper defending the sacred Ark of slavery because it's a necessary evil, because the temperature reaches one hundred degrees in the summer, and because only the Negroes know how to cut the sugarcane. What a beautiful sight to see this fierce war in the press, in discussions, in conversations of every moment of the day and night, against the elusive phantom of human liberty. There's not a single Negro or white person who protests vocally on behalf of the rights of man; in all of the South not a word, not a line asserts that man is the brother of man; and yet, every newspaper, every planter,

every woman rages against the silence, foams and howls at this nothing, at this gust that comes from who knows where, which no one produced but which threatens to sweep away the entire past. As for the sophisms they use, I'll refrain from repeating them; you only have to recall the pamphlets from the Rue de Poitiers<sup>31</sup> to imagine the idiocies of the newspapers of Camp Street.

For those who understand the future, the question lies, as Gaubert says, in the when, the how and the how much. Here are some facts regarding the solution to this problem that might interest you.

First, the *proportion of Negroes and whites changes constantly in favor of the latter*. The foolish are fearful that the blacks will free themselves where they outnumber the whites, whereas there's hope for them only where they are in the minority. When they are many, they have the mentality of a herd, rather than that of a man; when they are alone, they look their adversary straight in the eye and size him up. Besides, all the whites who immigrate to the country compete with the blacks for menial jobs, and behind the Irish workers comes the powerful rear guard of machinery.

*Slavery leaves the city to take refuge in the countryside*, since the masters and slaves are driven out by the competition of free workers, and have no choice but to flee.

*A landed aristocracy develops*, fortunes are concentrated in a few hands, and soon nine-tenths of the slaves belong to the great lords of cotton, sugar, and capital. The Canadians,<sup>32</sup> who form the white proletariat, are gradually forced off their small farms. They sell their slaves one by one and daily become increasingly opposed to the interests of their dispossessors. The slaves, in changing their domicile, create an irreconcilable

antagonism between the multitude of the poor and the few masters. Day by day, slaves become more and more a luxury.

*The slave ceases to be immovable property*<sup>33</sup> and becomes movable property,<sup>34</sup> as soon as roads and railroads have begun to be built. Movement is itself liberty. . . etc. Besides, slavery no longer really exists. It's no longer the slavery of antiquity. . . . But that's for another time.

And how about Gaufrès and Hickel<sup>35</sup> and everyone? Speak.

I shake your hand.

Elisée.



*"If only you knew how far I am from all science, from all literature!"*

To Elie Reclus. July 22, 1855. [New Orleans.]

I'm in New Orleans for four or five hours. I've come to come, and to take care of business for *l'Homme*.<sup>36</sup> I know a baker, a decent fellow who sold me bread during my first month of poverty. He's a socialist and a republican inside and out. I asked him to find subscribers, and as is fitting I told him that I'd take out a subscription for him. So without waiting a single day, if possible, subscribe with your own money to *l'Homme* for Londès, 159 Dauphine St., New Orleans. He's already gotten another subscription, and he'll take responsibility himself for sending it to you. So be prepared to pay the postage for the services of the social and democratic Republic. On the other hand, I don't know the fate of the first two mailings, one



of 2, and the other of 6 books. So don't forget to tell me if you received the two bank drafts and another for 24 pounds, since if you didn't get them, I could still perhaps get them to you. In any case, I hope to be able two months from now to send you a thousand francs,

Holy name of a dog! how far the journal *l'Homme* is from living up to its title! And when are we going to have the universal upheaval?

And Hickel? And all five hundred devils? So write me! and a bit more often than you do! If only you knew how far I am from all science, from all literature! each of your letters gives me a whiff of that strange world in which one thinks, where life isn't completely like being a wooden horse on a merry-go-round, spending its whole life going around the same post.

Greetings, man.

Elisée



*"Here the spirit of class is still inferior to that of caste."*

To Elie Reclus. No date, 1855.  
Fortier Plantation, near New Orleans.

What are you up to, my good fellow? For long months I've heard absolutely nothing about you. The last letter I got from you left you in Paris with our friend Hickel, doing photography and mysticism. Since then, a phrase in a letter from mother led me to believe that you had returned to England, but this as-

sumption isn't enough for me. Where are you? In Paris, Berlin, London, Geneva, New York, I know absolutely nothing about it, and to the extent that I'm uncertain about you and Noémi,<sup>37</sup> I'll also be uncertain about myself. Since I know nothing about what you're doing, I don't know what I myself should do. So write, not one letter, since the American post office specializes in losing letters, but two, three, four, enough so that I'll finally find out what hole you've fallen into.

My lifestyle is still more or less the same. Papa Fortier asked me to stay with the family for another year under more or less the same conditions as in the past, and I accepted only on the condition that one fine day I might decide to take off for Mexico or New Granada. I have an understanding with M. Fortier that if you come I can leave whenever I want to. Besides, for the family members I'm still an outsider that they admire, and even like a bit, but I'm far from being a friend, I'm treated with the greatest politeness, but without any true feeling of warmth. They think I'm a bit crazy, or as they put it politely, monomaniacal. As for the children, they like me very much, and it isn't very hard for me to understand why the parents find this affection inappropriate, especially in the case of the oldest of my pupils, a wide-eyed young woman entering her fourteenth year. All that they ask of me is to be a walking dictionary in the classroom and a good fellow at the dinner table; unfortunately, I'm something more than that. All that doesn't change the fact that they will be somewhat upset if I leave, since it will be rather difficult to replace me. Voilà. . . voilà. What's more, to give you an *insight*<sup>38</sup> into the character of the Creoles, it's enough to tell you that la Faye, the good man who saved me from the jaws of death, has been in this country for six years without making a single friend, even though he's warm, devoted, bold, learned,

and eccentric, and you know that eccentricity makes one at least as many friends as enemies; nevertheless, since the good la Faye belongs to no Creole tribe, it's as hard for him to find a friend as it would be for Chedorlaomer to become the intimate friend of Father Abraham.<sup>39</sup> Here the spirit of class is still subordinate to that of caste.

Write so I can know which way to turn.

And Noémi?

As for Mannering, he's a bit stupid. He wants with all his might to have a *gented*<sup>40</sup> occupation, but has little chance of finding one and doesn't know the first thing about the science of begging. So, while waiting for a job, he spends his time sleeping, chewing tobacco, and staying bored, but you can't be bored free of charge in New Orleans. That explains why I don't have any money.

I'll be seeing you, in a few . . . months? years?

Your good fellow Elisée



*"It's virtue and morality, but above all the horror that  
I feel for slavery, the Church  
and Creole chivalry that all compel me to clear out as soon as possible."*

To Elie Reclus. No date. Countryside near New Orleans.

Man, and you, woman,

It's fine if you want to do it, but it's also fine if you want to do something else. As for me, I'm very determined, and unless I'm struck by lightning, I'll set out from here in the month of March for Santa Fe. In just a few days, I'll make the rounds of all the hotels and bordellos of New Orleans to find a professor who will agree to put on the iron collar and devour *piastres* in my place. I have my reasons for leaving. These reasons are crazy, that goes without saying, and it's precisely for that reason that I like them, for they are truly mine, and I didn't absorb them from "Poor Richard's Science."<sup>41</sup> First, I'm tired of eating and drinking, sleeping in a bed, tapping on a full coin purse, indeed, even checking the time on an authentic pocket watch (*proh pudor!*)<sup>42</sup> I need to starve a little, sleep on pebbles, and sell my watch (souvenir of eternal friendship) for a piece of howler monkey. Surely all this will suit me better than robbing the Negroes who have truly earned by their sweat and blood the money that I put in my pocket. Since one thing leads to another, it is in fact I who hold the whip, and that doesn't please me at all.

But I have another reason . . .

It's virtue and morality, but above all the horror that I feel for slavery, the Church and Creole chivalry that all compel me to clear out as soon as possible.

"What will you do there?" you still ask, dear, wise Noémi?

May the God that Voltaire invented in bygone days save me from knowing! I'm going straight ahead and I'll stop when I've sold my last button. I consider the lack of *picaillons* or *maravédís*<sup>43</sup> as a clear manifestation of a celestial predilection for the place in which I find myself, and it is there that I once more seek to ravish poverty so that she might give birth to a piece of bread, a little straw, and a coat or two. I'll become either a shepherd, or a dog groom, or a housepainter, or a professor of obstetrics, or I might even paint my face black and get a bit of a taste of the status of a Negro. All is fine for me, provided that I can walk. But as soon as you say to me, dear sister, "I'm coming," then I'll stop in some charming valley at the foot of the haughty Andes, on the banks of a river that runs roaring down to the Amazon; I will claim from New Grenada my ten hectares, and there I will build my charming cabin. Come, it will be delicious; later, after three or four years in paradise have worn you out, it will be time to return to the old world.

However if you're not coming immediately (which would not please God!), I certainly have a few poor excuses for projects that I might be able to carry out with a bit of luck. You know, or maybe you don't know, that for a long time I've been pregnant with a geographical *Mistouflet*<sup>44</sup> that I want to bring into the world in the form of a book. I've already scribbled enough; but that's not enough for me, I also want to see the Andes so I can cast a bit of my ink on their immaculate snow. For this I'm buying myself a mule, a mule for which I'm already searching vainly for a magnificent name, I load on it a crate full of thread, needles, and pins, and I go from mountain to mountain and town to town selling them to grateful people. There you can buy fifty pounds of bananas for three needles; let's add generously seven needles for fifty pounds of

manioc and I'm living in completely Sardanapalesque abundance<sup>45</sup> for one needle per day. Isn't it true, Noémi, that all these plans are quite sensible?

As for Mannering, our poor friend is dead, miserably dead from yellow fever. He called for me by telegraph during his illness, but the dispatch took two weeks to go forty leagues. Poor Johnny's life was a failure. What killed him psychologically was first of all being a good fellow without learning how to tailor his own life with large strokes of the sword; what killed him physically was eating too much beefsteak. To slow down the blood and the breathing, it's best, especially here, to live solely on fruits and vegetables, but he pounced greedily on the bloody flesh of the American dinner table; so when death got hold of him, it burned him up like a match. When I learned of his death, I cried, "Mannering, come here, holy thunder!" But this invocation had no effect, I didn't see the slightest ghost; if there are any spirits, you have to say that they are quite discrete! On the topic of American ideas, here are two good ones: Fulton gave Harris, the high priest of spiritualism, the plan for a male machine and a female machine that surrender themselves to transports of love at full steam and produce delicious little machinettes that grow and think and develop to the age when they can mate. And that's not all: Napoleon, Tuscaloosa, Jesus Christ, Socrates, and Toussaint Louverture sold shares to start a newspaper in which they extol the wonders of Elysium a bit, but above all the rubber of Goodyear, the shoe polish of Bell, and the syringes of Thomisson. Napoleon has been given responsibility for the publicity. The English say: "*Time is money.*" These people say, "*Humbug is money.*"

The Paya bookstore will take responsibility for the journal. I'll talk to them.

As for subscriptions, I'll send you two or three, if in fact I can find them.

Soon I'll be sending you an article on the Mississippi.<sup>46</sup> You'll have to wait a while longer before I send you an article on slavery.<sup>47</sup>

I'll send you some *sous* in two weeks. To do that, I'll have to go to town.

Write me often. Your letters revitalize me. Remember that I'm leaving at the end of March and that your letters often take over a month to get here. Address your letters to Roman and Kenion, etc.

Be and live.

Elisée.



*"... I think that this desire to wander and to see things  
will give me no rest. Besides, to see the earth  
is for me to study it; the only truly serious study that  
I would undertake is geography ..."*

To his mother. Nov. 13, 1855.

Dear Mother,

Without letters, I feel as if I'm quite truly in another world; but a single one of your good, sweet words is enough to enable me to forget the long months of waiting; it does me good to hear myself called from time to time "my son," since without friends I've found it necessary to create a little world of my own, made up of books, maps, thoughts and memories. Your let-

ters do me good: they carry me to your side, where I've left the better part of myself, my affection. Write me sometimes, dear Mother, to fill up my solitude.

In any case, if you want to make sure that your letter gets to me, try to respond at the latest around the end of January; since it's very likely that I'll be leaving the Fortier family. These gentlemen have already known for a long time of my intention to leave at the end of the second year of my stay with them. I think that they would be very glad to see me remain, but it certainly won't be difficult for them to find a professor who is better versed in the rules about participles than I am and more enthusiastic about the beauties of Noël and Chapsal.<sup>48</sup> My body feels weakened and debilitated beneath this heavy, humid atmosphere, and I need to regain my vigor and agility in a land of mountains and torrents. I need to walk, to see new lands, and above all to survey the Cordilleras,<sup>49</sup> which I've dreamed of since childhood, and which are now so close on the other side of the Gulf of Mexico. As long as I have no family and haven't bought a patch of land to root myself in the soil, I think that this desire to wander and to see things will give me no rest. Besides, to see the earth is for me to study it; the only truly serious study I that would undertake is geography, and I think that it's a lot better to observe nature in her own abode than from deep in your study. No description, however beautiful it may be, can be truthful, because it can't reproduce the life of the landscape, the rush of the water, the shimmering of the leaves, the song of the birds, the scent of the flowers, the changing forms of the clouds; to know them, you must see them. I've read many lines about the sea in the tropics, but I never understood them until I saw with my own eyes the green isles, the trails of seaweed, the long processions of pink nautiluses and the great sheets of luminous light. So that's why I want to see the volcanoes of South Am-



erica. Dear Mother, who knows? maybe before long I'll return and tell you about it.

Don't be afraid that I'll end up in poverty, for any such fear would be completely groundless. I'll know how to work in the South just as I knew how to work in the North, and I have very few artificial needs to satisfy. A vegetarian like I am can make a delicious meal of manioc and bananas, and in this way live on *three sous* a day. There are in fact certain parts of the Upper Amazon where you can buy fifty pounds of bananas for three needles. Also, even if you're lazy, it's impossible to be poor there. All the same, I'll be tempted to throw myself into some kind of venture in agriculture or commerce. I think that nowhere could I succeed as easily as there. Perhaps I'll try to settle permanently on one of the Granadan or Peruvian tributaries, and maybe I'll have the good fortune to draw around me a few peasants from the old world who would be condemned to poverty there for the rest of their lives, but in South America, it's almost impossible not to live comfortably. Already, the immigration seems to be shifting from the United States toward South America, and under the influence of this flood of foreigners, the Spanish republics advance before your eyes in civilization, commerce, and industry. They have no reason to fear overpopulation, as the Know-Nothings<sup>50</sup> in the United States purport to fear for their country, for the valley of the Amazon is rich and vast enough to support in abundance and luxury the twelve hundred million people on earth.<sup>51</sup>

No doubt my uncle long ago received the letter in which I speak of my voyages on the Mississippi and my visit to Chicago and Lake Michigan. I was quite pleased with the trip. This Mississippi, which fourteen hundred miles above its mouth is still just as wide and deep<sup>52</sup> as where it empties into the sea, and which eats away entire islands in the space of a few months, and

swallows up several hundred trees all at once with a thundering sound, can only leave in one's mind a profound impression of power and sublimity.

Good-bye, my dear Mother. Kiss my brothers and sisters for me. I send kisses to my father and I'm very grateful to hear that he's in good health. . . . My successor with the Fortiers is a charming young lady from New England.

Elisée



## NOTES

- 1 Reclus refers presumably to the money needed to help Elie come to America, as is mentioned in a later letter.
- 2 Reclus says "vêtements 'canailles.'" He seems to mean informal clothing appropriate for the tropics. He may be alluding to the perception of some family members that the brothers' wandering life is rather vagabond-like.
- 3 English in the original.
- 4 Sir Walter Scott.
- 5 Reclus refers to the missionary Count Zinzendorf of Saxony who, while in Wyoming in 1742, was writing in his tent and failed to notice a rattlesnake that crawled across his leg. According to legend, he was at this time being watched by mistrustful Native Americans. Greatly impressed by his seeming immunity to attack and the fear of it, they befriended him.
- 6 Reclus says "home" in English.
- 7 Reclus coins the term "parentaille," referring to his relatives in a slightly ironic manner.
- 8 Onésime Reclus, Elisée's younger brother, was also to become a geographer.
- 9 Reclus uses the term "grandettes."
- 10 "Portefaix," an archaic term for one hired to carry burdens.
- 11 Reclus says "Frère fratissime."
- 12 "argenteuses."
- 13 The editor of the *Correspondance* notes that this was "Darrigrand, the baker

from Orthez who so generously helped Elisée at the time of his arrival in America.” Elisée Reclus, *Correspondance* (Paris: Librairie Schleicher Frères, 1911), vol. 1, p. 88.

14 Perhaps Reclus intends some variation on “Que faire?” or “What to do?”

15 English in the original.

16 Reclus coins “mamanternelle,” from “maman” (“mama”) and “matemelle” (“maternal”).

17 Popocatepetl (Aztec for “smoking mountain”), a steep-sided volcanic cone about thirty miles southeast of Mexico City, rises to a height of 13,776 feet. The Pico de Orizaba (or Citlaltépetl), a volcanic peak in the state of Vera Cruz, is the highest mountain in Mexico at 18,700 feet. The Cofre de Perote (or Nauhcampatepetl) is another major volcano in the state of Vera Cruz, rising to 14,048 feet. The plateau of Anáhuac is the large central plateau of Mexico, and includes Mexico City and the lake basin of the Valley of Mexico. Xihuatlán is a mystery. The list of mining centers of Mexico contains no such place, and Reclus himself fails to mention it in his long discussion of Mexico in his *New Universal Geography*. See Elisée Reclus, *Nouvelle géographie universelle* (Paris: Hachette, 1876-94), vol. XVIII, pp. 1-316.

18 Mexican plants used in making pulque, tequila, and mescal.

19 A port on the Caribbean coast of Panama.

20 A town in central Panama.

21 Latin, “on foot.”

22 François Rabelais’ character Pantagruel, son of Gargantua, expressed the author’s love of life, exuberance and ribald good humor.

23 A Spanish wine.

24 Reclus says “de la blague.”

25 English in the original.

26 Reclus is referring to Noémie Reclus, his cousin and the future wife of Elie. Her father is the uncle mentioned earlier who looked askance at Elisée’s employment as a common laborer.

27 Palm oil became a major export from colonial Africa during the era of increasingly illegal slave-trade.

28 The ship on which Elisée came to Louisiana.

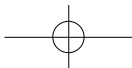
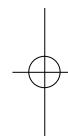
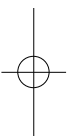
29 A reference to Voltaire’s phrase, “écrasez l’infâme.” The “infamous thing” Voltaire had in mind was traditional, authoritarian religion.

30 Reclus says “la fusion des carabineurs.” This statement, which means literally, “the fusion of riflemen,” seems a bit cryptic. He obviously cannot mean in an entirely literal sense that the “fusion of races” occurs at gunpoint. It is meant metaphorically, in the sense that it is the force of historical circum-

stances, rather than any conscious social movement (as in France's "fusion of classes and principles"), that produces the blending of races in America. Nevertheless I think that there are undertones of literalism also in Reclus' statement. For there is indeed actual force at the basis of these historical forces: the violent conquest of the Native Americans and the violent system of slavery.

- 31 The Comité de la Rue de Poitiers was a monarchist faction organized in 1848 that engaged in numerous political activities, including the distribution of anti-socialist propaganda.
- 32 Reclus refers to the Acadians, or Cajuns, who came to Louisiana as refugees from Nova Scotia in the eighteenth century.
- 33 "Propriété immobilière," equivalent to "real property" in American law.
- 34 "Propriété mobilière," equivalent to "personal property" in American law.
- 35 The editor of the *Correspondance* notes that these are friends of Elie.
- 36 According to the editor of the *Correspondance*, *l'Homme (Man)* was "a journal published by Charles Ribeyrolles (of the earlier journal *Réformateur*), in Saint-Hélier (Isle of Jersey) and London, after the expulsion of political refugees from Jersey. *Correspondance*, vol. 1, p. 99.
- 37 Noémi Reclus was a cousin of the Reclus brothers, and the future spouse of Elie.
- 38 English in the original.
- 39 King Chedorlaomer of Elam was a powerful conqueror who vanquished Sodom and captured Abraham's nephew Lot. He was then defeated by the avenging army of Abraham.
- 40 English in the original.
- 41 Reclus refers to Benjamin Franklin's "The Way to Wealth, or Poor Richard Improved," which in French was entitled "La science du Bonhomme Richard, ou moyen facile de payer les impôts"—"Poor Richard's Science, or a Convenient Method for Paying Your Taxes." It was first published as a preface to *Poor Richard's Almanac* in 1758 under the title "Father Abraham's Speech."
- 42 Latin, "For shame!"
- 43 Reclus refers to old French and Spanish coins. The term "picayune," for the coin of Louisiana that became proverbial for its trivial value, was derived from the French *picaillon*.
- 44 Colloquialism for a child.
- 45 Sardanapal is the Greek name for Ashurbanipal, the powerful king of Assyria in the seventh century B.C.E. He is known for expanding his empire and establishing a great library at Ninevah that contained tens of thousands of stone tablets.

- 46 Reclus published this extensive article in two parts as “The Mississippi: Studies and Memories” (“Le Mississippi: Etudes et Souvenirs” which includes “The Upper Mississippi”), (“Le Cours Supérieur du Fleuve”) in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. 29 (July 15, 1859), pp. 257–296; and “The Delta and New Orleans” (“Le Delta et la Nouvelle-Orléans”) in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. 29 (August 1, 1859), pp. 608–646.
- 47 He was probably referring to the most important of his writings on slavery, the two-part article “Slavery in the United States” (“De l’Esclavage aux Etats-Unis”). It includes “The Black Code and the Slaves” (“Le Code Noir et les Esclaves”) in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. 30 (Dec. 15, 1860), pp. 868–901; and “The Planters and the Abolitionists” (“Les Planteurs et les Abolitionistes”), in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. 31 (Jan. 1, 1861), pp. 118–154.
- 48 French instruction during the period was based strictly on the grammar codified in François-Joseph-Michel Noël and Charles-Pierre Chapsal’s *Nouvelle Grammaire Française sur un plan très-méthodique, avec de nombreux exercices d’orthographe, de syntaxe et de ponctuation, tirés de nos meilleurs auteurs, et distribués dans l’ordre des règles* (Paris:Vve Nyon Jeune, 1823). The sort of pedagogical rigidity expressed in this “very methodical framework,” its “numerous exercises,” and its “order of rules,” was the complete antithesis of the libertarian theory of education later developed by Reclus. On Reclus’ own educational ideas and his critique of authoritarian education, see John Clark and Camille Martin, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: The Radical Social Thought of Elisée Reclus* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, forthcoming), Chs. 5 and 6.
- 49 The Andes and its component ranges.
- 50 The Know-Nothing Party (officially the “American Party”) was a nationalist, anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic political organization that attracted a large following between 1852 and 1856. The party’s greatest success came in the 1856 elections in which its presidential candidate Millard Fillmore received 21% of the vote, after which it declined rapidly.
- 51 Reclus, like most observers of his time, had little concern for the negative consequences of population growth, though his position on this issue became more nuanced in his later work. See Clark and Martin, *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity*, Ch. 3.
- 52 This statement is rather misleading. The Mississippi is indeed equally wide far from its mouth as it is at the delta. And the depth is also fairly consistent, ranging from ten to twelve feet for much of its course down to Baton Rouge. However, further south the depth of the river increases precipitously and at one point at New Orleans reaches 192 feet.



EPILOGUE:  
HUMANITY, NATURE,  
AND THE ANARCHIST IDEAL

*John Clark*

Although Reclus' "Voyage to New Orleans" and letters from Louisiana were written when he was no more than twenty-five years old, they give abundant evidence of the direction that his political and social thought was to take over the next half century. The descriptions of his passage through the Caribbean and up the Mississippi exhibit a deep sensitivity to the natural world. His acute perceptiveness concerning nature is expressed through precise scientific observations of phenomena as well as evocative, poetic depictions.<sup>1</sup> His comments on topics such as slavery, political corruption, and the growing dominance of economic values reveal to us an incisive social critic inspired by a passion for freedom and a love of humanity, and outraged by all oppression and injustice. All of these qualities of the young Reclus were to come to fruition in his mature work as he developed into one of the foremost scientists of his age, a prophetic exponent of ecological balance, and a major theorist of human liberation. Beginning in his early works, Reclus shows strong concern for maintaining a balanced relationship between humanity and the rest of nature. He writes of a "secret harmony" that exists between the earth and humanity, and warns that when "reckless societies allow themselves to meddle with that which creates the beauty of their domain, they always end up regretting it."<sup>2</sup> For Reclus, whatever we do to nature, we inevitably do to ourselves. He observes that "where the land has been defaced, where all poetry has disappeared from the countryside, the imag-

ination is extinguished, the mind becomes impoverished, and routine and servility seize the soul, inclining it toward torpor and death.”<sup>3</sup> In short, our injuries to the natural world immediately become injuries to humanity itself.

Despite Reclus’ deep concern about humanity’s abuse of nature, he was far from accepting the idea that our pursuit of our own welfare is fated to be destructive of the natural world. Indeed, if “man” is guided by “the intimate and deeply-seated harmony of his work with that of nature,”<sup>4</sup> it is possible for our human creations to complement and resonate with the beauty and goodness that we find and appreciate in nature as a whole. This occurs, he says, in those cases in which we act to “assist the soil instead of inveterately forcing it,” and to achieve “the beautification as well as the improvement of [our] domain” by giving “an additional grace and majesty to the scenery which is most charming.”<sup>5</sup> Reclus notes that there were in his own day good examples of the manner in which agricultural productivity could be reconciled with an appreciation of the landscape. He remarks that “a complete alliance of the beautiful and the useful” has been attained in certain areas of England, Lombardy and Switzerland, places where agriculture is in fact “most advanced.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet he finds these examples to be the exception rather than the rule for the modern age. In general we find that “everything has been mismanaged,” so that what is left is “a pseudo-nature spoilt by a thousand details—ugly constructions, trees lopped and twisted, footpaths brutally cut through woods and forests.”<sup>7</sup> He notes that the motivation for our treatment of the natural world has not been “a sentiment of respect and feeling” for nature, but rather (in a phrase that echoes some of his concerns in the “Voyage”) “purely industrial or mercantile interests.”<sup>8</sup> He concludes that the ruthless destruction of nature will continue unless there is a process of fundamental social transformation. Our sentiments



and motivations must change, and this cannot occur unless the social institutions that shape them are also transformed. In short, the economic and political system that dominates and exploits both humanity and nature must be abolished.

In his analysis of society's destructive effects on the natural world, Reclus showed a level of awareness of problems such as biodiversity loss and ecological disruption that was quite unusual in his time. As early as the 1860's he was warning of the dangers to ancient forest ecosystems in North America. He points to the tragic destruction of "colossal" and "noble" trees like the sequoias of the west coast, and judges this "perhaps an irreparable loss" in view of the "hundreds and thousands of years" that will be necessary for their regeneration.<sup>9</sup> He also discusses the damage produced through the introduction into ecosystems of exotic plants and animals without consideration of their effects on the balance of nature.

A related issue that Reclus considered to be of great importance is our treatment of other species. He was quite unusual for his period in combining a passion for social justice with a deep concern for the humane treatment of animals. He decried the fact that so many social influences "work together to harden the character of the child" and destroy our sense of kinship with a being who "loves as we do, feels as we do, and might also progress under our influence, if it doesn't regress along with us."<sup>10</sup> He thinks that raising animals for food has been both an ethical and an aesthetic disaster. "And such regression is indeed one of the most deplorable results of our carnivorous practices, for the animals sacrificed to man's appetite have been systematically and methodically made ugly, weakened, deformed, and degraded in intelligence and moral worth."<sup>11</sup> For Reclus, the issue of the humane treatment of animals was important not only for the sake of these creatures, but also for our own sake. In his view, our

appreciation of our kinship to other life forms will help us to delve more deeply into the life sciences, increase our knowledge of the nature of things, and expand our love.”<sup>12</sup>

Throughout his life, Reclus stressed very heavily the importance of comprehending our place in the geography and history of the earth. Toward this end he proposed that an enormous globe with a network of surrounding walkways be constructed at the center of Paris, so that people could pass at various levels, examining the details of the earth, and begin to grasp this vast interconnected whole. He also proposed a new calendar with a beginning point of universal significance: the first solar eclipse recorded in human history, 13,447 years before his own day.<sup>13</sup> In beginning with the first recorded eclipse, his calendar would recognize an event that was important in general human history, and which would also relate to the place of humanity and the earth in the larger cosmos.

If a holistic view of humanity’s place in nature is one pole of Reclus’ social geography, the other is his focus on the quest for human freedom. As he once proclaimed, “Yes, I am a geographer, but above all I am an anarchist.”<sup>14</sup> And his anarchism is indeed a key to understanding his life as both a scholar and a revolutionary.

The libertarian and communitarian ideas that guided his theoretical and practical work began to develop early in his life. In a manuscript written while he was still a student, he asserts that “laws must appear before the tribunal of our conscience and we must not submit to them except when they are in perfect accord with the moral law that dwells within us.”<sup>15</sup> He judged obedience to the state in disregard for the moral law to be a capitulation to brute force or social pressure, no more than “moral cowardice.”<sup>16</sup> And this was a form of cowardice to which he was never willing to succumb.

What then, is the “anarchy” that Reclus places higher than any human law or established social institutions? By this term he means a free society founded on natural and moral laws rather than the oppressive laws of the state. It is a form of social organization that arises out of mutual aid, cooperation, solidarity, and compassion. With Proudhon he considers anarchy to be the highest form of order. The state, on the other hand, is the lowest form of disorder, the destruction of true community, and the replacement of free association by external compulsion and domination.

Such anarchy for Reclus is not a utopian world of the distant and perhaps unattainable future. Rather, it is a reality that already exists and can be continually expanded through the efforts of those who work for mutual aid, freedom, and justice. He states that “anarchistic society has long been in a process of rapid development,” and can be found “wherever free thought breaks loose from the chains of dogma; wherever the spirit of inquiry rejects the old formulas; wherever the human will asserts itself through independent actions; wherever honest people, rebelling against all enforced discipline, join freely together in order to educate themselves, and to reclaim, without any master, their share of life, and the complete satisfaction of their needs.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the entire history of the struggle for freedom and human self-realization has been the realization of anarchy in concrete social practice.

Reclus himself worked tirelessly to actualize this anarchistic society in his own time. He was very active in the First International,<sup>18</sup> which he saw as an advance of historic proportions toward unifying humanity in the pursuit of justice and progress. He contends, in a statement that seems perhaps a bit extravagant, that “since the discovery of America and the circumnavigation of the earth, no achievement was more important in the

history of man.”<sup>19</sup> His point was that for the first time in history, human beings had established a universalistic association based on ideas of justice, equality, and solidarity, and created a practical program for transforming into a global social reality a “unity of humanity” that had previously been no more than a dream of philosophers. In pursuit of such ends he also participated in Bakunin’s Alliance for Social Democracy, in the International Brotherhood (a secret society of dedicated anarchist revolutionaries), and in anarchist efforts to radicalize the liberal, bourgeois League for Peace and Freedom.

For most of his life Reclus was a fierce opponent of parliamentary politics of any kind. He argues that reformers who propose to fight oppression and exploitation through the exercise of power within a centralized nation-state are inevitably integrated into the very system of domination that they oppose. He says of such officeholders that, “raised above the crowd, whom they soon learn to despise, they end by considering themselves essentially superior beings; solicited by ambition in a thousand forms, by vanity, greed and caprice, they are all the more easily corrupted.”<sup>20</sup> At best, he says, politicians succeed because of irrelevant qualities such as personal popularity, oratorical ability or organizational skills. At worst, they attain their offices on the basis of the wealth, power, and influence that they or their backers can command. The greatest danger is not the incompetence of the legislature but the fact that it is “inferior in moral qualities, since it is dominated by professional politicians.”<sup>21</sup> He thinks it obvious that the supposed “representatives of the people” will make far worse decisions for the people than the people would have made for themselves.

If Reclus is harsh in his criticism of legislative power, he is no less scathing in his attack on bureaucracy and administration. He

contends that even though a bureaucracy may be established with supposedly benevolent ends, it only serves to aggravate social injustices. As a product of an unjust, hierarchical system, it reflects this prevailing system of power. Whatever “noble ideals” might be used to legitimate their existence, the bureaucrats “consider above all their remuneration and the continuation of their employment.”<sup>22</sup> While bureaucratic rationality claims to maximize efficiency, in fact it does the reverse. It destroys individual initiative, multiplies the number of useless bureaucrats, complicates all tasks, and causes endless delays. He is particularly scathing in his attack on the pettiness and abusiveness of bureaucrats. He notes that the egoistic, domineering personality fostered by authoritarian institutions gains a multitude of outlets in the bureaucratic labyrinth. The minor officials’ insolence is proportional to the insignificance of their power, and such a system tends to decline into a petty despotism.

The topics of patriotism and nationalist ideology are also areas in which Reclus’ critique of the state is particularly acute. In every nation state, he observes, there is a latent “primitive morality of force” that can be aroused whenever the leaders find an enemy against whom they can direct malignant passions and murderous fantasies. He notes that once deceived by its leaders into conflict, the nation unites in patriotic hatred, and then “delights in ravishing, killing, and then singing of victory over the sprawling corpses. It glories in all the evil that its ancestors have inflicted on other peoples. It gets carried away, and wildly celebrates in verse, in prose, and in triumphant depictions, all the abominations that its own people have committed in foreign lands. It even solemnly invites its God to take part in the general intoxication.”<sup>23</sup> Reclus is fully in accord with the famous diagnosis made by a later libertarian, Randolph Bourne: “War is the health of the state.”

As devastating as is Reclus' attack on the state, it is economic power that is the object of his most far-reaching critique. In his view, capital is the supreme power in modern society, and the major obstacle to social emancipation: "one overriding fact dominates all of modern civilization—the fact that the property of a single person can increase indefinitely, and even, by virtue of almost universal consent, encompass the entire world."<sup>24</sup> He observes that the ability of capital to transgress all boundaries of state and nationality gives it a great advantage over political power. He notes that "the power of kings and emperors has limits, but that of wealth has none at all. The dollar is the master of masters."<sup>25</sup> Reclus may rightly be seen as a prophet of the coming globalization with all its unprecedented dangers.

One of the most striking passages in the "Voyage" concerns the insidious effects of commerce on the American character and the growth of the economic ideology. In the United States "not a single superstition is attached to the past, or to the native soil, and the population, moving like the surface of a lake seeking its level, distributes itself entirely according to the laws of economics."<sup>26</sup> One finds intimations of the coming "throw-away society," in which everything falls quickly into obsolescence. He notes that "in the young and growing republic, there are already as many ruins as in our old empires."<sup>27</sup> Writing before the Civil War, he warns of the coming triumph of economic values over all others. "For the masses," he observes, "all feelings merge more and more with pecuniary interests."<sup>28</sup>

Reclus also deserves recognition as an early critic of modern technocracy. He warns the agricultural workers that "we are in an age of science and method, and our rulers, served by an army of chemists and professors, are preparing a social structure for you in which all will be regulated as in a factory. There, the machine controls everything, even men, who are simple cogs to

be disposed of when they take it upon themselves to reason and to will.”<sup>29</sup> In order to illustrate the process of mechanization, Reclus points to the example of industrialized farming in American West. The criteria for the organization of production, he notes, are the reduction of everything, including human beings, to quantifiable and manipulable resources, and to the efficient use of these resources, with minimal investment and maximum return. “Machines, horses, and men are used in the same manner: they are viewed as so much force to be quantified numerically, and they must be used most profitably for the employer, with the greatest productivity and the least expense possible.”<sup>30</sup> The system of technological control expands to the point that “all of the workers’ movements are regulated from the time they leave the communal dormitories.”<sup>31</sup>

Another form of domination that concerned Reclus very deeply throughout his life is racism. This evil became a matter of intense personal interest to him when his stay in Louisiana gave him direct experience with a racist, slaveholding society and required him to undergo the personal crisis of breaking with a community to which he was developing a certain attachment. His marriage to Clarisse Brian, a woman of mixed African and European ancestry, further intensified his personal involvement in the issue. While nineteenth-century radical theorists in general tend to focus their critique on economic and political issues, Reclus always identifies racism as one of the most pernicious forms of oppression and domination. He believed that the problems of social conflict and exploitation stemming from racial oppression could only be solved ultimately through the intermingling of races. In his view, society is always strengthened by the creative diversification resulting from the interaction between cultures and peoples. To Reclus, racism reflects a hierarchical ranking of human beings and groups that outraged his sense

of human solidarity, his belief in social equality, and his respect for the achievements of all cultures.

Reclus was particularly interested in the condition of black people in the United States, a topic which he analyzed both before and after slavery. In his two impressive essays on "Slavery in the United States,"<sup>32</sup> one finds many acute insights and fascinating historical observations. He was well aware of the fact that the abolition of slavery did not eliminate the system of racism and the brutal exploitation of black people in America. He notes that after the nominal "emancipation," capitalist entrepreneurs found ways to exploit the freed black labor-power at the lowest possible cost. New discriminatory laws and biased enforcement of existing ones segregated blacks in areas near plantations and other workplaces, and disenfranchised them politically. In some areas, imprisonment for minor infractions was commonplace, allowing entrepreneurs to take advantage of forced prison labor. He notes that some towns, consumed with "pure, brutal and instinctive hatred"<sup>33</sup> merely expelled blacks and forbade their reentry. Finally, he recounts the harsh punishment, tortures and murders committed against blacks who offended the mores of racist communities, noting that such "horrible practices" were so common that they had taken on the force of "local law."<sup>34</sup>

Reclus is quite exceptional for his time not only in his acute awareness of racism, but also in his forthright stance against sexual inequality and the oppression of women. He rejected the traditional system of marriage as an institution based on power and coercion rather than personal feelings and freedom of choice. He states that "matrimonial trafficking" should be replaced by "free unions, based only on mutual affection, self-respect, and dignity of others."<sup>35</sup> Traditional marriage, he says, had its basis long ago in the use of force against women in order to reduce them to the status of property. He believed that a free and just society could



only be attained if changes in practice, in the most basic areas of personal life, begin first. He comments that “it is above all within the family, in a man’s daily relationships with those close to him, that one can best judge him. If he absolutely respects the liberty of his wife, if the rights and dignity of his sons and daughters are as precious to him as his own, then he proves himself worthy of entering the assembly of free citizens. If not, he is still a slave, since he is a tyrant.”<sup>36</sup>

Reclus was a fervent advocate of the feminist cause, stating that “obviously, all of the claims of women against men are just: the demands of the female worker who is not paid at the same rate as the male worker for the same labor, the demands of the wife who is punished for crimes that are mere peccadilloes when committed by the husband, and the demands of the female citizen who is barred from all over political action, who obeys laws that she has not helped to create, and who pays taxes to which she has not consented.”<sup>37</sup> In short, women are oppressed in the economic, social and political spheres, and complete justice and equality must be achieved in all these areas before society can claim to be just and free.

Such views reflect Reclus’ deep belief in the central importance of the personal realm, which he believed to be crucial to any possibilities for progress and social transformation. When he was still in his twenties, he wrote to his sister Louise: “Let us found little republics within ourselves and around ourselves. Gradually these isolated groups will come together like scattered crystals and form the great Republic.”<sup>38</sup> Late in his life he still held the same view. The anarchist, he says, should “work to free himself personally from all preconceived or imposed ideas, and gradually gather around himself friends who live and act in the same way. It is step by step, through small, loving and intelligent associations, that the great fraternal society will be formed.”<sup>39</sup>

The entire life and work of Elisée Reclus are a testimony to the enduring hope that this great and free Republic shall one day encompass all human beings, and, indeed, all of life on earth. As he wrote in the conclusion of “A Voyage to New Orleans”: “For those who are noble of heart . . . there is no country other than liberty.”<sup>40</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 It is not without reason that a perceptive work on Reclus is entitled *Elisée Reclus: Geographer and Poet*. See Joël Cornuault, *Elisée Reclus, géographe et poète* (Eglise-Neuve d'Issac, France: Fédérop, 1995).
- 2 “Du sentiment de la nature dans les sociétés modernes” in *Revue des deux mondes* 63 (May-June 1866), p. 379.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 379–380.
- 4 *The Ocean, Atmosphere, And Life* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1873), p. 526.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Reclus, “Du sentiment,” p. 379.
- 7 Elisée Reclus, “The Progress of Mankind,” in *The Contemporary Review* 70 (July-Dec. 1896): 782.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Reclus, *The Ocean*, p. 51.
- 10 “A propos du végétarisme” in *La Réforme alimentaire* (March, 1901), p. 38.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 “La Grande Famille” in *Le Magazine international* (Jan. 1897), reprinted at : [http://melior.univ-montp3.fr/ra\\_forum/reclus/textes/grandefamille.html#Anchor-11481](http://melior.univ-montp3.fr/ra_forum/reclus/textes/grandefamille.html#Anchor-11481)
- 13 Elisée Reclus, “Nouvelle proposition pour la suppression de l'ère chrétienne” in *Quelques écrits* (Paris-Bruelles: Pensée et Action, 1956), p. 31.
- 14 Quoted by George Woodcock in “Introduction” to Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom: The Odyssey of Elisée Reclus* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1988), p. 20.
- 15 Paul Reclus, “Biographie d'Elisée Reclus” in *Les frères Elie et Elisée Reclus* (Paris: Les Amis d'Elisée Reclus, 1964), p. 51.
- 16 *Ibid.*

- 17 From the "Preface" to the 1892 French edition of Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread*, quoted in Max Nettlau, *Histoire de l'anarchie* (Paris: Editions du Cercle, 1971), p. 156.
- 18 The International Workingmen's Association was an international labor organization established in 1864 to fight against and overthrow capitalism in order to establish a new society that is free of exploitation and is managed by the producers themselves. The International ultimately became a battlefield for Marxists and anarchists and was dissolved in 1876.
- 19 Elisée Reclus, *L'évolution, la révolution, et l'idéal anarchique* (Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1898), pp. 249-50.
- 20 Elisée Reclus, "Anarchy: By an Anarchist" in *The Contemporary Review* 45 (Jan.-June 1884): 630-31.
- 21 Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre* (Paris: Librairie Universelle, 1905-08), VI: 195.
- 22 *Ibid.*, VI: 193.
- 23 *Ibid.*, V: 304.
- 24 *Ibid.*, VI: 256.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Elisée Reclus, "A Voyage to New Orleans," p. 59.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 29 Elisée Reclus, *A mon frère, le paysan* (Genève: Imprimerie Jurassienne, 1893), p. 11.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 "De l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis: I. Le code noir et les esclaves," in *Revue des deux mondes* 30 (Dec. 15, 1859), pp. 868-901; and "De l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis: II. Les planteurs et les abolitionnistes," in *Revue des deux mondes* 31 (Jan. 1, 1860), pp. 118-154.
- 33 Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, VI: 107.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 Elisée Reclus, *L'évolution, la révolution, et l'idéal anarchique*, p. 155.
- 36 Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, VI: 174.
- 37 *Ibid.*, VI: 214.
- 38 Letter to Reclus' sister Louise (no specific date, 1859) in *Correspondance* (Paris: Librairie Schleicher Frères, 1911), Vol. I, p. 238.206.
- 39 Letter to Clara Koettlitz (April 12, 1895) in *Correspondance* (Paris: Alfred Costes, 1925), vol. III, p. 182.
- 40 Elisée Reclus, "A Voyage to New Orleans," p. 60.

John Clark teaches philosophy and chairs the Environmental Studies Program at Loyola University New Orleans. He has written and edited a number of books on anarchist thought and ecological philosophy. He has long been active in the Green Movement and is the co-moderator of Research on Anarchism, an international discussion list and archives. He also works on the ecological restoration of an 83-acre tract along Bayou Laterre in southern Mississippi.

Camille Martin is a poet and translator who lives in New Orleans. Her collections of poetry include *sesame kiosk*, *magnus loop*, *rogue embryo*, and *Plastic Heaven*. Her poems and translations of French poetry have appeared in numerous journals. She recently completed a Ph.D. in English at Louisiana State University and teaches English at Loyola University New Orleans.

Clark and Martin also co-edited and co-translated *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: The Radical Social Thought of Elisée Reclus*. This work includes newly-translated selections from Reclus' social and political works, along with extensive commentary on his thought.

## **Glad Day Publishing Collaborative**

(After an engraving by William Blake)

Book publishing is now in the hands of a few media conglomerates whose concern is not books, certainly not with literature or social change. With the elimination of independent bookstores and distribution through the chains the promotional lifetime of a book may now be measured in weeks.

Our particular purpose is to bridge the gap between imaginative literature and political articles and criticism which have been fixed under the labels of "Fiction" and "Non-fiction." But the split has diminished literature and its usefulness to society. The hope of a literature that is positively useful has inspired us to call our publishing imprint GLAD DAY. With these constraints writers find themselves engaged in self-censorship that has to do both with artistic and formal considerations and with what can be said.

The aim of GLAD DAY is the restoration of a political literature. Members of our writers' editorial collaborative have no other criteria than this and hold diverse views.

## Other books published by Glad Day Collaborative:

*History and Spirit* by Joel Kovel  
An enquiry into the philosophy of liberation.

*The Loggers of Warner* by Roy Morrison  
Poems

*Serious Kissing* by Bárbara Selfridge  
Stories

*Travels in Altai* by Robert Nichols  
Stories

*Girl in Movement* by Eva Kollisch  
A memoir

*Teacha!* by Gerry Albarelli  
Stories from a yeshiva

*Ecological Investigations: The Web and the Wheel* by Roy Morrison  
Speculative essays

*Big Bust at Tyrone's Rooming House* by James Gallant  
A novel of Atlanta

*Swords that Shall Not Strike: Poems of Protest and Rebellion*  
by Kenneth Rexroth  
Edited, with an introductory essay, by Geoffrey Gardner

To order:

GLAD DAY BOOKS  
Enfield Distribution Co.  
P.O. Box 699, Enfield, NH 03748  
Phone: 603-632-7377  
Fax: 603-632-3611

Editorial Office  
P.O. Box 112  
Thetford, VT 05074  
Phone: 802-785-2608

