

LOUISIANA.

Prof. Alcee Fortier's Scholarly History
in Artistic Setting.*



HE famous purchase by the United States of territory from France in 1803, through which the original area of this country was more than doubled, is just now, for obvious reasons, calling forth a great deal of literature. But few literary enterprises dealing with the subject can claim that the author has spent a lifetime in preparing his work for publication, and that the publishers themselves have spent several years in gathering pictorial material for it. Such, however, is the case with Fortier's monumental work. Patient, critical examination and intelligent study may cause it to take its place among the great sectional histories of this country. Neither critical acumen nor a profound knowledge of history is required to discover that Prof. Fortier has given a splendid narrative of episodes, graphic, well balanced, and of dramatic conclusions, which, with elegant documentary, pictorial, and typographical setting, marks an event in the book year, if not an epoch-making work in the writing of history.

As should be well known to every school-boy, the territory purchased from France for \$15,000,000 included the land between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains north of the then northern boundary of Mexico; the island on which New Orleans stands, and a claim to Texas, to West Florida, as that portion of the present States of Mississippi and Alabama south of 31 degrees north latitude was then called, and probably even to the territory west of the Rocky Mountains. From the discoveries of De Soto and La Salle, of Marquette and Joliet, to the colonization of the Crozat régime, through the vicissitudes that marked land and people as they were ceded back and forth between France and Spain, wonderful stories of romance and adventure have arisen, which, as time went on, losing much of their common character in the varied peoples and civilizations established, ultimately inspired color in widely separated localities. The organization of the territory of Orleans, its augmentation, and its final entrance as a State into the Union served still further to characterize the southern portion of the great purchase from the remainder. From 1812 until 1861 the development of this State was typical of the South. In its war period, its era of reconstruction, its years of later growth, it has again reverted to a characteristic yet not exactly independent manner of life. The elements of Spanish nature soon became commingled with those of the French, but the French have remained what they were at the beginning. Theirs is an influence which has been most powerful when least exposed—in politics, society, and industry. It is a softening, human influence. It preaches the gospel of leisure and domestic tranquility.

Mr. Alcée Fortier, on account of his French descent, his birth in Louisiana, his education in the universities of the South and in Paris, and his historical and folklore works already produced, is peculiarly fitted to write a permanent and authoritative history of his native State. His present position as Professor of Romance Languages in Tulane University has evidently given him the requisite time and inspiration for such a work. His "Sept Grands Auteurs du XIX^{me} Siècle," "Histoire de la Littérature Française," "Louisiana Folk Tales," and his widely diversified editorial work have long since proved him to be a graceful, resourceful, and persuasive writer in two languages. But even these talents are not sufficient to produce a great history. The dominant influence and guide in all preparatory work, research and compilation, and weighing of authorities—in the assignment of causes, the calculation of results, the future perspective—must be the historian's mind. This Prof. Fortier also has. The general plan of his work, its coherence, proportion, and discrimination must pointedly indicate this fact even to the casual reader of ordinary intelligence. But his stage is vast, is teeming with figures, there are legends as well as traditions to dispose of, facts which must be presented in a new light. Two, possibly three, distinct methods of historical writing have been adopted by him. In the first place let it be said that his preparatory work has been entirely modern. He has gone as far as possible to original sources for his material. The facts once digested, he has allowed himself a free pen to present an episode, capable of dramatic treatment, in its most graphic form. Again, where the event itself was sufficiently striking, or important, he has set down its history in a simple, direct, and dispassionate form. And finally, he does not ignore the eloquence of dates and names where, in establishing a conclusion, movement is everything.

The four volumes of the work are tabulated as follows: I. "Early Explorers and the Domination of the French, 1512-1763"; II. "The Spanish Domination and the Cession to the United States, 1763-1803"; III. "The American Domination, Part I., 1803-1861"; IV. "The American Domination, Part II., 1861-1903." It will thus be seen that the author's division is logical and comprehensive. A large but not disproportionate part of the work deals with the

heroic efforts of Frenchmen like Iberville and Bienville to colonize Louisiana, and with colonial history and life under French and Spanish rule. Another large but not disproportionate part deals with the development of the territory and State until the outbreak of the civil war. The achievements of the State and her sons during that war are told with a thoroughly National scope of subject, but with a sectional sympathy of treatment, which is natural, sincere, and entirely free from subterfuge and cant. The later history of the State—the period of reconstruction to its readmittance to Statehood in 1877 and on down to the present day—is analyzed as well as narrated in a somewhat more popular and unacademic form than the preceding pages had led one to expect. But when once his authorities are accepted and his facts found incontrovertible, it is very easy to excuse the enthusiasm of this Franco-American writer who here relates the events which have come more or less pertinently under his own observation. His sympathy for the past and his hope for the future are natural. With a genuine Gallic hatred for weak finales he brings his work to a graphic and dramatic end.

The setting in which this history is presented to the public is magnificently suggestive of Prof. Fortier's theme—and we believe of his treatment thereof. A mere tabulated list of the features of this setting would consume more space than is at our disposal; but some of them should certainly be described. The mechanical scheme of the work was planned by the famous art publishers of Paris, Goupil et Cie, who stand pre-eminent as engravers and binders. Hence beyond the artistic appearance and the scheme of mechanical construction, this also means that the pictures employed have an extrinsic value aside from the excellence of reproduction. Public and private galleries have contributed to make "The History of Louisiana" a collection representing the history of events as depicted by the greatest artists. Canvases are reproduced directly from the originals in the possession of the Duc de Bailen of Madrid, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; Comtesse de Clermont-Tonnerre, Dowager Lady Longford, Louvre Museum, Musée Condé at Chantilly, National Portrait Gallery, London; Prado Museum, Madrid, and half a hundred other personages and museums here and abroad. These pictures, which include 86 portraits, 6 scenes, and 4 maps, are distributed as follows: Volume I. has 13, Volume II. 21, Volume III. 29, and Volume IV. 33. The frontispieces of the volumes, which are hand colored, well indicate the general character and the historical and artistic values of the illustrations—T. de Thulstrup's "La Salle Taking Possession of the Territory in the Name of Louis XIV, April 9, 1682"; Meng's portrait of Charles III. of Spain in the Prado Museum; de Thulstrup's "The Transfer at New Orleans, Dec. 20, 1803," and a portrait of Jefferson Davis after the original by W. G. Brown in the Westmoreland Club, Richmond, Va.

The maps should also be enumerated; the first volume contains a reproduction of Father Hennepin's "La Louisiane," first published in 1683; volume two, a map of the territory from Le Page du Pratz' History, edition of 1757; the third volume has a plan of the city and suburbs of New Orleans from an actual survey made in 1815, and the fourth a map of the territory included in the Louisiana Purchase, specially redrawn and engraved from the United States Land Office Map of 1899.

The press work has been performed by Theodore L. De Vinne, who has employed a large Scotch type of exquisite impress; the paper, which bears a distinctive watermark, was specially manufactured in France, Holland, and this country. In speaking of the typography of the work it is also worth while noting that the initial letters for every chapter have been made from eighteenth century drawings, which, in the three editions presented, are colored so as respectively to recall the French, Spanish, and American ensigns.

Aside from the historical narrative element per se, it seems proper to add that the work contains several features which make it valuable for reference. Among them are the original texts of the various treaties relating to Franco, Spanish, and American occupation or possession, together with translations and explanatory notes, convenient synopses of chapters, text and date headings, and a complete index of names, places, and events. Notes with textual references are placed at the end of each volume.

"The History of Louisiana" by Alcée Fortier represents the working out of an intelligent and comprehensive historical scheme, magnificently planned, and carried to successful completion through knowledge, skill, and energy of a high order. It comes to the public in a setting worthy of this knowledge, skill, and energy.

*A HISTORY OF LOUISIANA. By Alcée Fortier. 8vo. In Three Editions: Edition de Bibliophile, limited to 50 copies, four volumes intended to be extra-illustrated to eight, \$300; Edition Royale, limited to 200 copies, four volumes, \$200; Edition de Luxe, limited to 1,000 copies, four volumes, 96 photogravures, four of which are colored by hand. Full levant-morocco. Paris: Goupil & Cie, New York: Manzoni, Joyant & Co. \$60.