A Frenchman in Florida

Edmond Johanet

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol1/iss2/7

This Notes and Documents is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tampa Bay History by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
St. Anthony of Padua must have granted us his unique gift to help us find his colony hidden deep in the woods. However, the kindness and assistance of this saint, probably needed at another point on this earth in more urgent matters, impelled us to invoke an earthly deity, the compass. People who don’t believe in God prayed to him to find a lost bag of coins; thus his attention was diverted from us and at this same time we lost our way.

Here is at last the steeple of the church that is dedicated to him: When I say “steeple” I do not mean to belittle the lantern mounted on a cross and equipped with a bell that served instead. And when I say “church” it is to honor the location upon which would later be erected a basilica instead of the barn that serves the parish of San Antonio. I expected a church whose architecture approached the style of the Protestant churches found in the towns of America, and I did not suspect that the evangelical poverty of San Antonio could be compared to the poverty of the stable of Bethlehem. Such must have been the early churches that Paul and Barnabas visited at Antioch and Tarsus. It is perhaps in imitation of the first Christians that the congregation of San Antonio would lay down the axe, when the Angelus rang, uncover their heads, and recite in a loud voice the “Ave Maria.” Magnificent spectacle of public prayer by which Christians deep in the woods or sailors who pass before the Crucifix on leaving port, or Moslems pride themselves in addressing their Creator.
With the simplicity of the Apostolic times someone asks if we wish to see the priest, then it is suggested that we pay a visit to a Mr. Edmund Dunne, ex-Chief Justice of Arizona. He lives at a good quarter of an hour from the center of the town.

Judge received us graciously. He is a tall man, around forty-five years old, very blond, Irish in origin or perhaps by birth. He had lived in Rome, in Paris, and speaks Italian and French perfectly. He is, one might say, a little weak with German, but having that in common with us French, is one more reason to like him.

Another bond of feeling between the Judge and me was his library. Here was a man who is an out-of-the-way place in Florida owned a study with shelves from floor to ceiling loaded with books. Our great writers Bossuet, Paschal, Fenelon, Montesquieu, Montaigne, the Littre Dictionary. But he is not at all like others—this mortal. Besides, he is a searching person, an inquisitive one, an investigator of manuscripts and documents. You judge him yourself.

“Who directed you in the choice of names to designate your colony, your lakes? For example, what is the name “Jovita” that you gave to that lake that I see from here?” I asked him.

“You would be a hagiographer of great skill,” he replied smiling, “if you knew that St. Jovita is celebrated on the 15th of February, the day when I discovered the lake. All of the names that I have given are Saints’ names whose feasts correspond to the day of my discovery. For a long time I did not know who St. Jovita was. The Bollandists do not mention him. I searched in Rome and in Paris, all through the books and all the memoirs. Nothing. Would St. Jovita be the creation of the calendar makers? One day while in an old book mart in New York I put my hand on the Life of the Saints that you see here. I turned to the 15th of February. What luck! Four pages on St. Jovita! With what joy I gave four dollars for so complete a Life of the Saints!

“I was overjoyed over the fact I had located in New York a French book that was not to be found in Paris.

“The edition is out of print,” he told me, “but that’s not all. When Monsignor Moore, Bishop of Florida, whom you know, complained one day right here of not having been able to locate in New York a Life of the Saints that includes that of a saint whose name escapes me now. Please wait a moment, Monsignor, I told him. We will find it in my precious book.” What astonishment at finding his saint; travel all over literary Europe without achieving your purpose, and then deep
in the Florida woods in the library of a “solitary” you locate, the document undiscoverable elsewhere!

![Black mission at St. Thomas, 1905](image)

Black mission at St. Thomas, 1905

(courtesy of St. Leo Abbey Archives).

In my career of searching among dusty books, I promised myself upon my return to France to unearth St. Jovita from his hideout. He ought to be the patron of the timid.

I was very eager to learn from Mr. Dunne himself what had been the beginnings of his colony.

Willingly he told me. “I founded it in 1881. I began by getting in contact with Mr. Hamilton Disston of Philadelphia to whom the state of Florida had just sold four million acres. I was commissioned to represent him with the authorities of the state in the choice of lands. I had consented to that mission on condition that I could be granted 50,000 acres for the establishment of a Catholic colony. Supported by my personal experience and that of my partners, I arrived early, and was thus able to make a selection of choice land for the colony. As you see, I planted San Antonio on high land, amid beautiful lakes, among them my dear Lake Jovita. We are here a little to the north of the 28th degree of latitude. From the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean, the Florida peninsula does not extend along this parallel more than 120 miles. As a result San Antonio enjoys alike the Gulf breeze and that of the ocean.

On the 16th of June of 1883 I made a census count of my people and I established the presence in the colony of 130 souls of whom the greatest number had arrived some months earlier. Today, we are 500.
Bishop Moore celebrated the first Mass in our church on the 13th of June, 1883, the feast day of St. Anthony of Padua, our patron. I showed the Bishop the location of the school and the Convent for the Sisters that he had promised to send as soon as possible. Today the school is built but we do not have the Sisters yet. The class is conducted by a lay instructor.” “How many black people?” I asked him.

“No Negroes within the area of the colony,” he answered with some haughtiness. “There are about 800 Catholic Negroes in all of Florida.

“Some of the martyrs of Florida have shed their blood on the site of San Antonio and if we are not called to imitate them, at least to honor them, we have erected a church, built a school, set up an altar and a statue with the hope that we will be rewarded. Finally, only a year ago, we have succeeded in finding a pastor, Father O'Boyle.

“Was the area inhabited when you came?”

“Yes, there were some settlers established around San Antonio. They had planted some oranges in beautiful groves as you have seen on your arrival. Our soil is not so fertile as in the lowlands, but it is very favorable to the culture of the orange and the lime tree. I will take you to see my plantations of limes of which I am very proud because the seed comes from Sicily, so that I am tempted to call our colony, from the viewpoint of cultivation, the American Sicily: our American Sicily.”

"But, what do you mean by a lime tree? Is it not the same as the lemon tree?"

Here the Judge looked at me with sympathy, took out his dictionary, a Napoleon Landais, that had escaped my notice, and proved to me that the lime resembles the lemon but boasts of having...
a more bitter juice. This thought alone made me grit my teeth in a meaningful way. To bring back the sweetness in my mouth he told me he had some plantations of sugar cane that the colonists, whom he had discovered on his arrival in the country, knew how to grow marvelously well. I expressed my satisfaction by passing my tongue over my lips.

“Are these early colonists Catholics?”

“There have been a few, but Catholics and Protestants have a deep religious feeling and live in a beautiful spirit of tolerance, saying grace before meals, keeping the Sunday scrupulously without working, fishing or hunting. The Floridian is faithful to his motto, inscribed in the papers of state, ‘In God we trust.’ The Society of the Holy Name would have a great many adherents in Florida where blasphemy of the Name of God is punished by law.”

“These former colonists? These pioneers interest me. Were there many and were there any French among them?”

“About 20 in all, of whom two were French. I would give you their names but I feel the French would mean more to you. We have here the families of the Gailmards and the Larmoueux as early colonists, but in the area in general around twenty other French have arrived at this colony.”

“They say that you have a good many Germans.”

“Yes, around a hundred. But two hundred Irish or originally from Ireland.”

“Do you sell the lands that Mr. Disston has granted you? At what price?”

“For the most part they sell for $2.50 an acre; these are lands of a poorer quality or farther from the center. At two or three miles from the church, excellent lands for growing oranges are valued at five to ten dollars an acre. A good many of these lands, bought and planted in oranges a year ago, have acquired a higher value of one hundred dollars; but it is easy for newcomers to construct another church after the example of those who founded two settlements in our vicinity, Carmel and St. Philip.

“I speak now of those lands included within my reservation, the Catholic Colony Reservation, and one must be a Catholic in order to procure land.

“For the non-Catholic there is no lack of ways to become owners of lands surrounding the colony. At first some owners asked only to buy. It’s true that it's a high price, justifiable by the location, quality, and the improvements. It was necessary to charge from $30 to $50 an acre.

“Besides, there were for sale the lands around the railroad with the condition that to occupy them they must be improved. At six miles from the railroad, $1.25 per acre; at less than six miles, $2.50.
“St. Philip, one of the settlements which I was going to mention to you, is situated five miles north of here. The lands are valued around $5.00 an acre. Within this area is located a lake found to be filled with fish. The settling of this colony having taken place on the feast of St. Philip Neri, I have given it the name of St. Philip.

“The second settlement, situated five miles from here, is placed under the patronage of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. You know that Carmel is a Hebrew word that means ‘field’ or ‘land well cultivated.’ I have reason to believe that the place will justify its name, being already cleared and planted with oranges, limes, and guavas. The lands are the same price as those at St. Philip.

“At a mile from San Antonio, on the road from Carmel, lies a charming place called Villa Maria that overlooks a superb lake, two hundred acres in extent, Lake Monica. It's a little Eden and naturally the area is a little higher priced. It serves some of the more wealthy people looking for a winter residence in Florida with a small plantation. The road from San Antonio to Carmel is one of the greatest beauty, edged with lakes and plantations of oranges almost uninterrupted.

“I had ordered from Egypt some seed of the Palma Christi of which I have first obtained some samples in my nursery, and planted later along the road from Carmel to St. Philip forming thus some magnificent avenues.”

In America they use a great deal of oil of castor or castor oil that's extracted from the fruit of the Palma Christi? We call it in France, castor oil.

“Yes, it's the same thing, and it is a highly profitable product here. I will take you to visit my nursery tomorrow.”

I see that you prefer the Italian names to the English.

“They're more Catholic. Or at least they have that effect. I've lived in Italy and it's as a souvenir of that beautiful country that I surround myself with these Italian names.”

You're decorated with the Order of St. Gregory?

“His Holiness, Pope Pius, IX, made me a commander of that Order and it was his wish to bless the colony that I had founded in 1872. I intend to found another colony in Tampa Bay at a point called Pinellas. There is at that spot a splendid port destined for a great future. I have already established a trading post there.”

Do you know, Judge, that you are a veritable pioneer of Catholic civilization? A lay missionary?

“If in the history of the Catholic Church in Florida I am given credit for having tried to fulfill this beautiful mission, I would have achieved my highest wishes. I would leave to my children the most noble heritage that I aspire to for them. And I would then joyfully rejoin their mother who is in heaven.”
The poor Judge had lost his wife several years back and remained a widower with four children.

“If I had been advised of your coming I would have wanted to invite you to supper, but it is late. We are a little distance from San Antonio and I would have to serve you a meager fare. Would you like to return to rest for the night?

“Thank you,” I said. “Our supper and our rooms are awaiting us at Mr. Carroll’s.”

“And you will be well taken care of there. When will you return here?” Would I be able to come back after supper?

I would leave my companion in the area. He would talk, he would observe, and he would bring back his report. In that way I would learn all about San Antonio in all of its aspects.

“All right!” said the Judge. “This evening then.”

The Carroll family (Irish) had a trading post and a boarding house. On the part of Mrs. Carroll I was the object of the most courteous attention. She couldn't do enough for me.

It is the Eve of Easter. The fast, most rigorously observed, consists first of the classic “red eggs” that are seen all over France, but are eaten only in Florida. I had to eat a half a dozen. Then I had to eat fish cakes and heavy pastry, which was a great imprudence, and the three cups of tea I took did not relieve the effects. Vanier, endowed with a fearless stomach, only regretted that this meal was too light.

As for me, my doctor in Paris having ordered me to take exercise after a meal, especially when eating in San Antonio, I hurried and ran to my next appointment.

I found a young priest visiting Mr. Dunne, whom he introduced to me. Father George Corrigan is a brother of the present Archbishop of New York, and pastor of one of the parishes of Jersey City, a large city that forms one of the suburbs of New York along the North River. He came to San Antonio in the winter for his health and is staying with one of his brothers, Dr. Corrigan, who owns a magnificent piece of property on the borders of Lake Jovita where he has built a veritable castle.

Father Corrigan was taught by the Sulpicians in Montreal and consequently speaks French fluently. He went to school at St. Sulpice in Paris also. All French travelers would know with what joy one meets a stranger who knows France as well as he knows French; all Catholics would understand my feelings in meeting a priest of my religion after six months living in the midst of ministers who did not seem to be more holy than I am myself.

“And we will have two masses for Easter Sunday? Did you ever hear of such a thing?”

“No, it is the first time.”
“You will perhaps have a Mass with music?”

“No,” said Judge Dunne.

“What! Easter Sunday! The greatest Feast of the year!”

“In America it’s Christmas. That day we had a Mass with music. Your compatriots were the stars then. Mr. E. G. Gailmard directed the choir. Miss Marie, his daughter, played the organ, and with her beautiful soprano voice, sang Rossini’s ‘Ave Verum’ in a trio with Messrs. Emil and Paul Gailmard. You see that the French families are always the first when it comes to the arts.”

“I am not going to hear all these artists?”

“Alas. No. Nothing has been prepared.”

“What a shame!”

“Believe me if I had known of your arrival,” smiled the Judge, “I would have had a Te Deum prepared.”

“Would you sing one on the day I discovered a St. Jovita elsewhere than in your Life of the Saints?”

“Oh certainly!”

“Take notice! I make a note of it.”
That night there were dreams and nightmares. I was walking along the shores of Lake Jovita intoxicated by the perfumes of the orange blossoms taming a mother alligator followed with her little ones — all delights at once! — when two fishermen appeared. Their heads shone with the halo of the Saints. They had put their martyr's palms on the ground in order to pull their nets out of the water more easily. The fishing must have been miraculous, judging by the exertion. Finally the nets were pulled up on the shore with their load; fifty-two volumes in folio, bound in calf leather. With the seriousness that describes such fishermen, haloed and martyred, they touched, with their palm one of the volumes that opened up by itself on the date of February 15th. And I read thus:

*Of the holy brothers Faustino, presbyter, and Jovita, deacon, martyred at Brixiae, Italy.*

The Saints, Faustinus and Jovita, for that's who they were, forced me to read to the end — this is the beginning of the nightmare — the six pages in Latin that Bolland had devoted to the story of their life and their martyrdom.

Bolland himself, followed by Heischen, appeared to me, and grabbing the first six volumes, carried them in the flash of an eye to the National Library in Paris. Each one of the followers of Bolland took a volume and flew away with his own work in the same direction.

Indeed, on my return to Paris I found in File E at the National Library the volumes that Bolland and his cohorts had taken away from the shores of Lake Jovita. The Saints, Faustinus and Jovita, are in their place and if nothing is changed in the Church, it is certain that on the next 15th of February all the priests of Christianity will make mention of the two at their Masses and while saying the breviary.

The following day, Easter Sunday, all of the colonists were crowding into the little church at San Antonio in order to attend the two Masses and fulfill their Easter duty. Why should I not admit to my religious emotion in the midst of these faithful ones — a flock, lost in the woods, brought back to the fold by the small bell of their pastor? After six months of wandering across virgin forests and swamps, in company with rough men and wild beasts, some rattlesnakes and alligators, I feel myself drawn from the savage state and brought back to a civilized world, comforted by the joy of living among men whose hearts were beating in harmony with mine. The sanctuary light enkindled from the star of Bethlehem, with its symbolic twinkling light, did not shine anywhere any brighter than in this great solitary land. Its powerful attraction on the believer living in a remote land, far from its rays, explains perfectly well the yearning of a primitive people for the “God Unknown,” whose histories of religion offer the witness. The light reminds the traveler of the soft night light of his far away home. In this order of ideas soon my thoughts led me far beyond the seas and carried me away from this primitive Catholic colony. I saw a hundred young men and young ladies — the young girls' heads covered with a white veil, advancing with an air of recollection and gay and under the direction of virgins with radiant faces and draped in a long white mantle. They knelt two by two and then returned to their place.

Among them, I recognized four . . .
Preserve me
Oh Lord, from ever seeing a summer without
bright flowers,
A cage without red birds,
A beehive without bees,
A house without children!
God is everywhere!

It is time for high Mass. A crowd of faithful
have assembled. The non-Catholics themselves
have found a place in the church, numbering
around 60. Not having a church of their own
creed, these Protestants chose to come to a
Catholic Mass rather than not to attend any church
at all on Easter.

I have already noted that among them, to a
Protestant, the Catholic cult is not more nor less
valuable than other sects like the Methodist, Baptist, or Puritan — all affiliated to the great
Christian family. Such, in general, is the spirit of Protestantism. However, certain doctors
consider Catholicism like a heresy while, according to them, the above named sects and
hundreds of others not mentioned here, are all orthodox, although not seeing the truth in the same
way.

After lunch I visited in detail the monument of the town — the one and only monument, the
school — under the direction of Mrs. Morse the lay teacher. She is disappointed in not being able
to show off her smartest little misses and small boys, but these correct or proper little people
would not think seriously of going to class on Easter, Sunday. There are 35 scholars,
representing France, Germany, and Ireland. The curriculum includes reading, writing (Spencer
System), Catechism, Bible History, arithmetic, geography, composition, history of the United
States. Mrs. Morse complains of having no blackboard, no maps, no globe, but she hopes that her
pupils' parents will supply these generously to her class.

She showed me the Book of Rules for a Young Lady:

A young lady ought to know how to sew. She should appreciate the value of time, avoid
idleness. She must know how to cook. She must know how to make good bread. She must know
how to keep a proper house. She must be able to mend. She must dress with care. Be charming.
Have an equal disposition, be stable. She must be patient. She must know how to hold her tongue
and how to keep a secret. Always she must sweep down the cobwebs. When she marries, she
must choose a man for his character and be a constant helper to him. She must take care of the
sick. Appreciate good reading. Have trust in herself. She must exercise. She must respect the
aged. She must be generous and walk lightly. She must keep her home happy. She must wear
shoes that do not hurt her feet or cramp her. This last item seems to be aimed at laziness.
Such is the *nec plus ultra* of feminine perfection in America. These wise precepts include everything even the sweeping of cobwebs, omitting nothing whatsoever. Everything is anticipated, and the woman who puts into practice these reminders will hardly ever be reprimanded by her husband in respect to the law of conjugal obedience. Indeed, what could a husband demand of his wife that is not included in these wedding commandments?

How many women in the world would have gained from having been brought up in San Antonio?

I do not fail to go back to visit the Judge whose conversation furnishes ample material for my observations and for my notes. I found him in his lemon grove, a plantation of lime trees where he explains to me that as far as income is concerned the lime groves are far superior to the orange groves. Indeed, so many oranges are being planted in Florida that the selling price of the fruit will soon go down. This cannot happen to the lime because it is very much in demand in pharmacies as well as for its use among Americans as a condiment for drinks. Advice to inexperienced planters. The palma Christi whose seeds have been brought from Egypt were spreading their leaves with a vigor that gave promise of a rich harvest of fruit whose oil would attack the diseases of the colonists.

An interesting chapter is that of the price of cattle and other produce. A horse would sell from 375 to 750 francs; a mule, 500 to 850 francs; a donkey, 100 francs; a cow, from 75 to 125 francs; a sheep, 12.50 francs; a pig, five francs; a chicken, one franc, 25 centimes; eggs, 75 centimes a dozen in summer and one franc in winter; country butter, one franc, twenty-five centimes a pound of 450 grams; imported butter, two francs, twenty-five centimes; country bacon, 75 centimes or the imported bacon, one franc to one franc, twenty-five centimes; sugar, 40 centimes; cane syrup, two francs, fifty centimes per gallon. Wages for farm workers five francs per day without lodging or food. Beef, fifty centimes a pound. The rainy season lasts three months, from June to September. At times it rains every day for a week or two, then the following week there is no rain. It is rare that it rains before noon.

September is the warmest month of all.

In October the temperature becomes milder and stays so until about March or April. Sometimes in summer the thermometer can reach 96° Fahrenheit or 35° Reaumur or more. The average in the spring is 20°; in summer, 25°; in autumn, 21°; in winter, 16°.

During all seasons the nights are cool, a condition “sine qua non” for sleeping well. The atmosphere and the peace of Florida calm the nerves. Here no rheumatism, no coughs, no sore throats. The handkerchief is a luxury item.

“Do you Floridians replace a handkerchief then by one supplied by nature?”

“Sometimes.”
Really, Florida is the land of Eden, the promised land of the sick. Far from being a country of terrible fevers as has been insinuated by calumnious people, Florida fears nothing more than to have its swamps contaminated by sick people with fevers and rheumatisms.

Don't we have fevers around our ponds in Sologne?

Judge Dunne went on to say: "We have a judge who also fulfills the duties of a notary public. His name is John S. Flanagan. Mr. Paul Gailmard, your compatriot, is a photographer. You saw his gallery. In the colony itself, medicine is practiced by Dr. Corrigan; in Ft. Dade, not far from here, there lives a physician-surgeon who can cut off your leg as easy as an alligator can. If you like, when passing through Ft. Dade, ask for Dr. A. S. Alexander — 35 years in practice.

"This year, I have established here a newspaper, The San Antonio Herald, appearing from time to time, which doesn't really make it less interesting as you can judge for yourself by the collection you see here.

"The subscription is five francs a year.
“The editor of the newspaper is G. M. Jordan. He is also the writer. We have two editors and two printers.

“That’s, in all, four too many,” I said. “They would have to consume the furnishings and equipment to survive.”

“Of course they don't make a living only by their craft right now, but later...”

Pursuing the accounting for his subjects by professions, Mr. Dunne went on to identify the presence in his colony of a civil engineer, of a customs inspector, an architect, a glass worker, a superintendent of streets and roads, a carriage maker, an organist, countless carpenters, and a professor of Latin and Greek.

“Ah! As for this last one, my dear sir, I am advising him to prepare for another trade if he doesn't want to starve.”

“Why is that?”

“Well, it seems to me that in this desert were he to teach these dead languages to the crocodiles up to the point of bringing tears to his eyes, he would never be troubled by having the presence of another pupil.”

“Right!” The Judge said that his main job is that of a cook.

“Is he French then?”

“Of course. You must find that these two professions do not work well together, or don't you say in French that the Latin of a certain poor quality is that of a kitchen Latin?”

“Noble stranger, I see that you like to laugh. But who governs all these people?”

“The State, it is I,” replied the grand king of San Antonio. “I am everything except the Pope. At certain times I consult the civil officers. I get them together for some great occasions.

“When the colony will be larger, I will establish a municipality and I will no longer be responsible.”

I asked him whether in the state of Florida the Homestead Law was as liberal as it was in all the other states.

“Oh certainly,” replied this ex-Chief Justice. The Homestead or the property of 160 acres granted freely to an American citizen is free from being taken back to protect the wife and family. All the improvements made on this property such as buildings, fences, groves, and so on, cannot be attached nor can the furniture be repossessed, that is anything valued at less than 5000 francs.”
I said, “This is a good law which should be adopted in other countries. I do not know of anything more disagreeable than this violation of a home by the law that allows a family to be dispossessed of everything except their bedding. Indeed, the rights of the mortgager should be respected, but could they not in Europe, as in America, in your opinion, stop at the door of the home, of the dwelling, and leave the family certain pieces of property and reserve at least enough resources for the family to continue to survive its disaster. I understand that luxury furniture could be taken, but not the household furniture. The American law has proved wise to fix the value of furniture that cannot be attached to under 5000 francs.”

I had to say good-bye. I had to leave these brave people, this colony, its Head, to say a last prayer, and to return to the wild life. We had tears in our eyes.

After a half day’s journey we arrived toward six o’clock at Ft. Dade, a new town but already well built up, situated in an area surrounded by a good many lakes. Building was going on full force.

The inhabitants say that the railroad is dying to lay a course to Ft. Dade. I astonished them greatly by telling them that if they built a railroad I would be dying to go somewhere else. When I asked them to show me where was Ft. Dade, the place named after Dade who fought in the War of the Seminoles, they gave me to understand that they had no intention of wasting their time to satisfy my curiosity. This Fort meant nothing to them.

That’s what I got for being interested in old history, and not being able to understand that the progress of Florida is intimately concerned with the coming of the railroad to Ft. Dade.

I yelled to my mules, “Come on, rascals, let’s go,” and I whipped them, but this did not seem to change their slow pace. I was curious to see if the railroad would be built in my absence, if they would build a magnificent railway station at Johanetville, where if they understood their best interests, all the railroads of Florida would come and become the crossroads of the state.

Vanier shakes his head.

Lots of water would pass under the bridge before your dream would come to pass.

We are following a monotonous road. For two hours we climb always going upward. The land appears to be of a better quality here for oranges. All is thus in Florida. All the richness or poverty of the sun is not appreciated except as it is suited for oranges. Good land or bad land for orange groves; that's all there is to it.

Soon I uttered my usual warning.

“If you do not wish, my dear Vanier, to sleep under the beautiful sky you will have to search for shelter in the nearest house we come to, inhabited or not.”

“But look, there is a small group of houses right up there and I believe,” he said, “there might be people living there.”
“Yes,” I said, “I see some smoke. Move on, mules.”

Soon we get there and we are welcomed by a middle-aged Floridian with an honest face. We ask him for shelter for the night as well as for our mules and he gives it to us immediately.

As we were cooking our meal, always Indian fashion, outdoors, our host left us for a moment leaving with us as hostage his little nine-year old son who we found too skinny to be cooked for a meal. Our cooking interested him immensely. The following day, perhaps after our example, he tried the same thing on some small pieces of sappy (or resiny) wood, and found it better than his mamma’s cooking.

Wonderful mother! She sent word to us, through Papa, that she could give us a bed but no sheets. How spoiled we are! To find here, deep in the woods, the last word in comfort. Besides, we are invited to spend the evening with the family. A Godsend to everyone. We will be blessed here to study the inner life of a Floridian while our hosts at the same time satisfy their curiosity to see a European, a Frenchman.

We are being led to a bedroom which serves also as a living room. It is clean. The furniture is almost delicate for the country. Two young girls with pleasant faces and dressed all in white muslin and their mother, with gray hair, very charming, older than the father, are rocking rhythmically on three rocking chairs.

As the French do, we bowed before these three rockers who returned our salutation in rhythm. For nearly an hour they continued rocking, all the while saying nothing. This made me dizzy, so that after a while I caught myself rocking in their direction. Never had I had such a “rocking” evening.

Of course the conversation turned to France, the difficulties of the French language and the ease of the English language, and of European customs. The rockers expressed their surprise that a young woman is not sought as much for herself as for her dowry. The father and an older son — for besides the other little one, there was an older son of fifteen or sixteen years — were less ignorant or more up-to-date perhaps about the customs of Europe.

We are like actors on tour in a strange land. They prevail on Vanier and me to speak French for a few minutes. We comply with good grace and for about five minutes we win over our hosts, especially the mother who, pulls out an enormous pipe of wood and lights it, still rocking. “This French is very funny,” they seem to say. Smiles appear on their faces, the silly smile of a people listening to an unknown language and enjoying its sound.

Then they made us sing. After the Comedie-Francaise, the family wanted us to perform an opera. Vanier excused himself on the grounds that he was already fifty-six years old. I had too much fun studying their manners not to comply, and I was rejoicing in advance at the effect I might have on these children of nature while I sang such new songs as “Au Clair de la Lune” and “Malbrough s’en va-t-en guerre.” I started with those pieces. To them it seemed like masterpieces of sentimental melodies. The mother seemed to rejoice that the two young ladies
did not understand the word which, as she judged the words from the nature of the music, might inflame the hearts of her young girls.

For them “Souvenir du jeune age” and “Laisse-moi contempler ton visage” seemed to be more like songs or even church songs, which was a happy mistake. Church songs have been adapted from them and seem less suited to such use.

Suddenly I assumed the posture of Rouget de l’Isle. I sang the “Marseillaise” with such fire that the fire in the mother's pipe went out. The rocking of the three girls took on great speed and the father and the two boys assumed the air of the God of Mars himself or his aide.

So Jupiter and Mercury condescended to sit on the chair of Philemon and Baucis, and change their cabin into a temple and themselves into trees after their death. As a reward for their hospitality we could predict for the Millen spouse, if not a temple for her, at least a final metamorphosis. What else could happen in Florida to bodies dying in the forest, unless they were changed into oranges or pitch pine? Tobacco, perhaps? Mrs. Millen would deserve that. Alas! after smoking the pipe she put into her mouth a bonbon so dear to an American, a piece of chewing tobacco, the gingerbread of the country. Oh, lady, lady!

Thank goodness the beautiful mouths of the young ladies had not tasted this ambrosia. That will come later.

I said to them: “Young ladies, since you are not busy would you sing some of the songs of your country for your part?”

I did not have to beg them, and I for my part heard more Methodist hymns than I would have wished, besides the mother even joined them.

The evening ends with an exhibit of the youngest daughter’s work: some hats made of palm leaves, very beautifully woven and adorned with flowers and ribbons, also made of palms. It was explained to us that the leaves and stems of the palm are first dried, then bleached, and finally painted before they are braided by the hands of the young lady. Miss Millen sells her hats at a good profit at Ft. Dade. Her sister is happy to wear them. They want to put these hats on our heads although vain apparel hardly suits our sex. In order to escape them we return to our apartment, a nice attic room situated directly above the bedroom where so many interesting events have just taken place, and the rocking. Through the openings in the floor we are given a delightful spectacle, truly familial. The father reads a chapter from the Bible and the whole family gets down on their knees while they recite a prayer.

We sleep like a log in this holy house.

The following day at dawn everyone is up and outside. The young ladies go to the cistern to draw some water and bring it up on the porch where shining clean white basins are put. They wash, comb, “coram populo,” and they invite us to do the same. Quite primitive. The mother arrives. She begins by washing her mouth. I approve.
Father now grabs us. The more a country changes the more it remains the same. We are taken on a tour of his property. We admire his cultivation, oranges, naturally, a magnificent view and well cared for.

His son wants to sell us his orange grove, but we do not give in. Vanier, who is pushing sixty and still a bachelor, is afraid that the young man is making plans for him and his young sister, the lovely maker of palm hats.

As in America one must always settle accounts with his host, so we asked what we owed him. He asks only fifty cents for a bed without sheets, a woman who chews tobacco, a daughter who makes hats, and another who does nothing. This is quite inexpensive.

As for us we do not ask any return for our conversation and our songs.

Millen left us to take his little son to school in town. After having shaken hands with the head of the family, we expressed our appreciation and our gratitude to the ladies and we took our leave.

In the evening we arrived at Brooksville around 6 p.m. after having traveled thirty-five miles since that morning.