A CAMP IN THE FLOODED FOREST

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

By CHARLES T. JACKSON

ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS

BLACKBERRIES AND SNAKES

CHAPTER IV.

Blackberry Romance

YOUNG ROJAS limped down to the beach the next day and confided to me, "Dis spohtin' life, it's too much. But if I was in N'Awlyins I'd be a spoht. I'd like to travel round and spend fo' or five dollahs a day jes' like a millionaire!"

Madame Rojas had, in her room behind the store, a tiny altar and the pictures of the Stations of the Cross about the walls. Now and then a priest called at the Cheniere, she explained, and they had it "fixed up" for him.

The only other evidence of the higher life was the school. It was closed. The two pupils had gone to New Orleans for Easter! The master wandered disconsolately about. He was a querulous and broken-down fiddler, not at all popular because he refused to fiddle for the balls. He told me that the heads of families were supposed to pay a dollar a month for the school, but after the first few months nobody paid, so the school always closed sooner or later.

"Anyhow," he added, "why do they need to read and write? They are the happiest and most ignorant people on the earth, I do believe. When I first landed here I used to scold 'em. But nobody cared. Just listen to those children playing on the beach. Their parents won't pay and I can't make 'em pay. And will you tell me what tongue they are talking? It isn't French—it isn't English—it isn't Spanish, nor Filipino. What is it?"

We left that cadaverous pedagogue bewailing. The islanders looked on him as somewhat "cracked," I believe. We got more insight into social customs. We had wondered at the many Yankee names of the people until it was explained. They—the Browns and Smiths and Baily—were all corruptions from

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some other tongues. "Baronne," for instance, had become "Brown." We were confused also by the island habit of calling all women by the first names of their husbands. The wife of Francisco Vasquez was not only Mrs. Vasquez, but also Mrs. Francisco. And they all had nicknames, too, so when we went to buy bread, or call on some one, we had no end of confusion finding the exact person wanted. Clark Cheniere would drive a census-taker crazy.

The next day a sou'easter blew which mauled the shell beach until it shook. Hen and I had a task holding our tent pegs down. By sunset the whole curve of the shore was a rolling carpet of pink and blue and white shells lifted up and flung musically at our feet and washed back to come in on the next surge. The next morning the shore line was entirely changed, the shells being piled in long reefs far over the green marsh.

It was still breezy. Hen and I had a hard time getting breakfast. There was no fuel except the flimsy weed drift. It kept one of us busy holding the fire down under the irons while the other made coffee and boiled the oatmeal. Half a dozen times we had to chase that fire down the beach, bring back the remnants and start all over again. It enlarged our vocabulary immensely. The sou'easter belied the little tent tight as a drum, and the pegs threatened to pull from the shells. Finally we dropped it, lit our pipes, and wandered up the beach around the oak point to see what our friends were doing.

"Probably making another ball," said Hen. "Balls and turtle eggs—they're getting on my nerves. But what a morning—wow! I feel like my hair was growing in again. Whoof!"

But the festive populace was resting. The schoolmaster was sitting on a crab box gazing northward, whence the school should reappear. Juan Rojas smoked on his sto' gallery and watched his sons paint a boat. The luggars rode at their moorings and the fishers slept under thechina trees. A pirogue man came in from the marshes behind the Cheniere with a few teal and dos gris and turtles, and the children gathered about. But all day the lazy island dozed in the sun and breeze. Hen decided to try his tarpon gear at gar fishing, and this becoming noised about, the entire population gathered at the pier. The Cajuns smiled—catch a gar on that foolish little line and rod? Le nom de Dieu—what would these Yankees try next?

"I'll show 'em," growled Hen grimly, and he cast prettily off the pier head and threshed the surf. He had a rise or two and then, while I was in the sto', I heard a series of wild yells. I discovered Hen

A TIE-CUTTER'S CAMP ON THE BAYOU
fighting his way along the pier among
the natives. He had hooked something
all right. Presently a big gar charged
out of water, then straight seaward.
The line swung out; the natives gazed.
No line would hold an alligator gar!
Hen watched his reel anxiously. Then
finally he turned the big fish, played him
back, stopped a rush or two, and the
islanders gasped. The gar was tiring—
and he hadn't broken the "jigger rod"!

Round about the pier head the big fel-
low threshed, with Hen holding in and
trying to keep him seaward. But finally,
as he was grinning triumphantly at the
astonished natives, the gar made a last
exhausted rush under the pier, whipped
about a piling and—well, Hen groaned!

But I heard another yell. Out from
the shore charged a swarthy Manilaman.
He carried a club and, dashing into the
surf, he began mauling Hen's gar over
the head. Into the water swarmed every
boy on the island, and when Hen dis-
comfitedly reeled in the remainder of
his line the islanders were carrying a
six-foot gar in procession to the beach.
It was a woeful finish to a gallant fight.
Hen was wrathful. "Confound the
muckers! I'd rather the fish got away
than have 'em club it to death. They're
no sportsmen!"

They were not. Just why a man
should want to catch a gar was beyond
them. "Dat fish no good, M'sieu! He
mek no gumbo, no cou'bouillio n—no
nuttin'!"

"I'm going to fry him!" growled Hen.
They scratched their heads. No tell-
ing what a Yankee would do!

Paul and Otto came with us and we
lugged that hornyhided fish to camp.
The boys spent half a day trying to scale
him and whack off the tough yellow
meat. He was as palatable as a paper
box.

The next morning a shy youngster
clothed in a shirt made of a flour sack
came to camp. He invited us to go
blackberrying. Blackberries! Where?
I gazed about the watery wilderness.
The lad dived off in the bush without
giving us details. Hen concluded he
would stay in camp and repair his tackle
and digestion after that gar supper of
last night. But I went to the village
with visions of wandering down some
bosky dell with a tin pail and a—a girl.
You know, if you're of the North or
East. Sort of a cow-pasture romance
with blackberry flavor.

But when I reached Clark's a good-
sized gasoline stern-wheeler rocked at
the pier, and all the adolescent popula-
tion of the island was waiting for me.
There were buckets all right, and girls,
too—and children and babies and rol-
licking young men, and we chugged
away across the blue water with chatter
and screams, Malays, Filipinos, Cajuns,
and whatnot. In a minute a charcoal
fire was going for coffee on the aft deck
roof, and they got out loaves of bread.
Jo Rojas beckoned me into the tiny pilot
house. He placed the wheel in my
hands and pointed to a dim blur on the
horizon. "Hol' her der'," he announced
and disappeared.

I steered vaguely on, the slap-slap of
the paddle-wheel and the laughter of the
excursionists coming to my ears. A
good-sized sea was kicking up off the
roadstead and presently the spray was
flying over the fore decks and into the
pilot-house windows. She rolled a good
bit on the course, so I held more south-
erly, still keeping my eyes on "der',
" as directed. But "der' " seemed a long
way off. We pounded on half an hour,
and I wondered why I wasn't relieved or
given further sailing directions. I could
see no one. Apparently they were all
below in the freight hold, for the chatter
was more subdued.

The seas pounded up, and presently I
brought about so as to fetch the place
which I now made out as an oak-covered
point with the marsh behind it. I
cleared my eyes of the suds and stared
down. At times the sandy bottom
heaved up uncomfortably near and I saw
a shark or two but no blackberries.

As I fetched up under the lee the
shoals spread wider. I grew alarmed
and began to pound on the rear wall,
for the signal cord did not get response.
And the mauling engine probably defeat-
ed my efforts. Then, when a bar seemed
to shut off further progress, I brought
the tub about and out to sea, dropped the
wheel and ran aft along the running-
board. The hold was battened tight,
but I kicked and scratched at the side hatch.
"Hey, you! What's the matter? Where are we going?"

Then I yanked the door open. I stared down. Honest, every youth in the lot was hugging a girl—everyone in the lot! And every baby had its face smeared with flies and molasses from ear to ear.

"Hey, you!" I roared. "Where the devil do you want this boat to go?"

And while that syrup-smeared court of Venus stared back at me, the boat hit bottom with an awful wallop. It all but put me off. A barrel of water soused over and onto those Cupids and Adonis- ses and Venuses. Jo Rojas floundered over them and to the deck. I was back at the wheel by that time. Jo grabbed a pole and began to swear at the enamored ones who poked their heads out.

"San Sebastino! Push 'er head round! Git 'er round, you-all!"

They heaved and pried while the waves bumped us harder on. But finally we were bumped clear over the bar into better water and Jo threw an anchor. He wiped his brow.

"By Gar, dat some smash! Git yo' buckets, you-all, and git ashoo'."

It was some smash. The babies were yowling and rubbing molasses onto their bumped heads, and the damsels were scolding. But we got ashore with expedition, the skiff taking a load and the rest jumping in and wading. Then, with gurgles and shrieks of joy, they fell
on the blackberries which grew in a half curve under the scrub of oaks, latanier palms, and alligator pears. They were big and black and luscious. Once in a while some busy picker would yell and we would assemble to kill a black moc-casin. Once a small boy disappeared from sight in the thicket and after much trouble was pulled out of a deep hole.

"Yo' be careful of dem hide-ups," warned Jo. "Dem ol' pirates done dig this beach all to pieces."

"By Golly," he commented, "if I'd been there I'd have wrecked the whole smear! They wouldn't have spooned on me!"

There is a man with no poetry in his soul. Sto' balls, girls, turtle eggs, love, blackberry jam—nothing touched him. It will be a long back-track to the Fountain of Youth for him, I'm thinking. But for me—why, I felt appreciably more hair than I had had in the morning. Hen, with his sardonic levity, concluded that what I felt was molasses and blackberry smear. However, I let it go. There is little use in arguing on the higher things with a man who will try to eat an alligator gar.

We inquired further into local history. In the last yellow fever epidemic—1904—fifty-five of the ninety-two inhabitants of the Cheniere had it. It
scourged every house in the village, but only three had died. A beach character called "Red" had a peculiar story to relate of one instance he knew. "Der' was wan bad modder. She had feveh and she let her baby suck dat poison all out from her breast. Dat baby, he die, but dat modder, she get well. I sho' wouldn't be any modder like dat."

The Hazel boat brought two more men down for Gyp Baily's crew that day. We talked with them and found spread discontent among his crew if he kept them, granting that they might be induced to work. I met them lonesomely sitting on the beach at dark, slapping mosquitoes. They asked what we were doing down in Barataria, and when we said we were on a pleasure trip they roared with laughter.

"Pal, you got some new ideas of pleasure! I never see such a layout since I been on the road. These greasers ain't human!"

THE TRAPPERS' HUTS ON THE SHELL BEACH OF LITTLE LAKE

they were typical" 'bos" who had beat their way to New Orleans by rail and had taken a leveecaptain's word that wondrous riches were to be made in the shrimp fishing. But they stood on the wharf that first day and eyed the seine company struggling with its net out beyond the gentle surf with great disfavor. The men were warily dodging the great stingrays that had become entangled in the seine, and the hungry sharks following to seize the dead and escaping fish made the water boil around the luggar. One of the 'bos had gingerly tried to assist hauling, but hastily clambered out, despite the seine captain's swearing.

"I don't cotton to this game a whole lot," he remarked. "I never did love fish, anyhow."

Gyp told me later he would ship the 'bos back to the city. They would only
to a bit of Eden in lower Barataria. Allesjandro was his major-domo, and a more loyal never served. He couldn't say enough about the Baron, the garden, the oysters, the fishing at Cutler's, and wound up with a profound bow and an invitation to visit his master's domain.

Hen looked up with the first show of interest since he ate the alligator gar. "Some class! Us for Cutler's!"

"But we started for Florida," I argued—"and the Fountain——"

"Right-O. But we can't walk. I've given up the canoe—the railroad people are hopeless. There's a Manilaman up the beach who offered to sell a pirogue. Let's buy it and start somewhere and wind up at the Baron's."

That seemed uncertain enough to be enticing. We had heard a deal about the country across the chain of lakes to the west. Clear days a dim line of forest showed above the water. Allesjandro offered to take us over in the sloop if we bought the pirogue. We all went to see it. Allesjandro knew the former owner—one Juliano, also a Manilaman. He vouched that it was a bargain at ten dollars.

We looked it over. It was sadly unlike the beautiful seagoing canoe we had ordered from Old Town, Maine. Thirteen feet long, twenty-eight inches wide, hewed from a single cypress log, yet it was a deal more seaworthy than the usual trapper's dugouts. It had a decked space fore and aft and a bit of coaming to ward off the splash. We looked at it, estimated our pile of dunnage, and then tried it out and was swamped trying to get about the point to camp. Hen ran along the point yelling advice, which was good, seeing that he had never been in a pirogue in his life. But Allesjandro was full of praise. I pounded up through the surf to camp.

Juliano, Allesjandro, and Hen formed a reception committee and shook my dripping hand.

"Good old scout!" congratulated Hen—"you only capsized once, didn't you?"

That was unnecessary. However, Juliano and Allesjandro made it up. I was "wan great beeg pirogue man." I could go anywhere in safety—around the world, or to Mawgan City, or any-

Old Juliano was touched at the thought of parting with his lake pirogue. It was named Bantayan, after his native town in Mindanao, and positively he must weep when he thought of selling it. Yet he would—for ten dollars. But only to distinguished strangers like ourselves.

"Well, I don't think we can lose—for ten dollars," said Hen. "Only we'll be taking some awful chances with all our duffle on that thirteen-foot coffin. But we can't stay marooned here all summer."

So we bought the Bantayan—with misgivings, I assure you. That was the beginning of many episodes. We had much to learn. There is much to relate. We never dreamed that this little green, red, and yellow painted log of cypress was to be our home for close to four months, nor that we should come to love it. I shall tell of just one instance of that. I recall that over in a Belle river camp Hen and I thought of renaming our dugout. Hen said Bantayan was barbarous. So we thought and thought. Once I had a girl named Ethel. Once Hen had a girl named Sadie. That was long ago, when we had more hair.

So I proposed that we christen the pirogue Ethel.

"No," said Hen, "Sadie."

I insisted on Ethel. Hen stuck out for Sadie. And we wrangled all day and all night and some the next day. We were amazed at our chivalry. I had never imagined it in a man who would turn up his nose at turtle eggs as Hen did. But, as I said, we quarreled over the christening, with a little pot of black paint there all ready to slap on, and a bottle of beer to break over her bow, first carefully removing the beer from the bottle.

Finally we hit a happy compromise. The Bantayan was a boat with her stern just like her bow, low, sharp, rakish. A stranger could not have told one from the other, for she would paddle either way. So I named the bow end, where I paddled, "Ethel," and Hen named the stern "Sadie." Ethel was painted on her port bow and Sadie on her starboard quarter. She was Ethel to all the folks
on the left bank, and Sadie to all those on the right.

That was fine, I recall, for a time, until once we got into a walloping big whirl that took us around and around so that we couldn’t tell whether it was Ethel going upstream or Sadie coming down. That rapid gave us such a scare that Hen proposed we recant and go back to our original name.

"Say," he began when we had got

But to go back. Allesjandro said the seas were too big to tackle in our craft. When we had loaded our stuff on the sloop and got away from the roadstead, leaving all the islanders staring amazedly at the celerity with which Yankees did things when they made up their minds, the lake was rolling with whitecaps. The little pirogue floundered and filled at the towline and Hen and I looked down at it with some misgivings.

ashore and in camp, "I never was so much gone on that girl, anyhow. I just stuck out for Sadie because you said Ethel. Darn their pelts, let’s cut ’em all and be virtuous and refined."

"Old top," I rejoined, "I'm right with you. One girl is bad enough, but two! How could that boat get through without being wrecked? She's a fine little scow, and Bantayan's her name!"

We went right down there to the bank with brotherly accord and scraped those two girls off, for’ard and aft, with our pancake flipper. So Bantayan she was once more, and we breathed freer, and sailed gayer, and slept sounder, and our hair grew quicker, taller, bushier—it was fine spring weather for hair.

"Brilliant idea number twenty-two," murmured Hen. "Did you propose this or did I?"

Allesjandro added the comforting after-thought that the Cheniere people all said we would certainly be drowned if we tried to cross to Bayou des Amour-eaux with such a load in our pirogue. However, with the public eye on us now we wouldn’t have backed out if we could. We arranged to send that borrowed johnboat—we had kept it now quite a month—back to Harvey. And the next day the doughty little Manila man towed our pirogue across the lake and up under an oak-grown point of the far shore. The short, choppy seas of the great, shallow lake were mean to
handle in getting ashore with our luggage. It took two loads to make it, and then Allesjandro waved adieu from his sloop and left us. We sat down on our stuff piled on the beach, looked at that gay red and green and yellow log which was to transport us through the coast wilderness and mentally asked: "What next?"

The lake shores were entirely impassable. Everywhere from the narrow shell reef the bottomless salt swamp hemmed us in. On the other side the seas pounded, the sou'easter eating large holes in the shell bank and rushing through in threatening fashion.

"I'm not sure that this looks good," said Hen. "Which way do you think is the best out of this hole? Did you find out just where the bayou ran out of the swamp?"

"No. I thought you did that."

"Blessed if I did! Man, we've got to get over this habit of merely going somewhere without any idea of how we can get out of it."

"If this sea keeps rising," I retorted, "I know blamed well how we'll get out of it. We'll shin up one of these dinky oaks and hang on for a week—and there isn't a camp or a human being on this side the lake, they said; or a foot of safe land till we hit Bayou La Fourche."

"It's fine weather," murmured Hen —"for ducks."

CHAPTER V

The Snakes of Bayou L'Ourse

We made a most beautiful camp in the oak grove, and when the moon drew up above the dancing waves and struck that curve of shells, and we had supped on coffee and blackberry smash spread on our hot biscuits, and had had a smoke, lying on our blankets, we felt fit for any game. We were hungry after that hard day's work, and still more tired, and slept like tramps. The gale blew all the next day and we could see nothing except a luggar hauling up from the great bay into the lakes for safety behind the points. We had planned to start at dawn along the west shore, but it was another day before we made it.

There was a deal of trouble packing the pirogue. We had two duffles, the tent roll, a general plunder sack, the kitchen kit and reflector baker, camera, guns, and tackle, besides our blanket rolls and bars, and to batten all this down below the coaming of the thirteen-foot dugout took a lot of compromising. We threw away some stuff, but kept the sail poles and canvas that we had bought.
with the pirogue. Just what use we would make of them was uncertain, for when she was loaded and we paddled out of the cove, there was not two inches of freeboard, and we had to sit high on our luggage to work her along. I was bow stroke and Hen was steering. It was gingerish picking for a few miles, as the seas still flung up along the marsh shore, but by ten o’clock we turned into a broad bayou which we concluded was Des Amoureaux and was supposed to take us to La Fourche woods.

We drew on into a brilliant prairie covered with yellow and white and purple flowers, out of this into a swampy little lake, into another bayou, another lake, and on another slow-moving stream. The banks of the whole country were barely above water, and it was five o’clock when we neared the blue wall of woods. At sunset we were paddling through the big cypress with here and there a cane brake, which made it hard to follow the channel. The channel, in fact, began to shoal off into mere mud flats of lilies and scrub palmettoes, and we looked anxiously for a camping spot.

It had been a fine day’s paddling and the Bantayan had stood up nobly. A canvas canoe would have been ripped to pieces by the needle-like spikes of the cypress through which we shoved the pirogue without danger. But the prospect of spending the night in the swamp was not pleasing. The gloom of the forest brought the nightfall quickly. But presently a light showed under the heavy festoons of the moss.

Hen gave an exultant yell: "Land-Ho! And I smell coffee!"

We drew up beside a palmetto shack. A Cajun woman came around the mud-walled chimney with a frightened glance at us. But we reassured her and asked the way. Her husband was a hunter of wild cattle and was off in the lower swamps. She said it was three miles to Bayou La Fourche, where there were plantations, but we could not get there by water. Des Amoureaux lost itself in the cypress hereabout. We made a hasty camp, hanging our bars to a broken-down wagon tongue, drank fresh milk with our cold biscuit, and rolled in. Crepelle, the cowboy, was home for breakfast, and a most excellent breakfast he asked us to—braised duck, rice and sour cream, and bread. His wife was a Portuguese, he told us. We had added another to our polyglot collection of the nations of Barataria!

As Crepelle was sure we could not get through the swamp, Hen decided to go out with him in search of some way of portaging our dugout to La Fourche. His father, a genial old alligator hunter, came to camp later. He thought we
might follow a stream that led to Bayou L'Ours and get to open water some miles below. The Gulf was rising, he said, and on a good tide the big woods might be traversed. On his advice we waited over a day, anxiously measuring the black water as it crept up to the rude little wharf of poles in front of the palm hut.

The Crepelles told us many stories of alligator hunting and of the raids against the wild cattle of the swamps. They had never been able to reach many of them until this spring, with its unusually high tides, had let the water-cowboys into their haunts. This was the highest land we had seen since leaving the Mississippi, and when a wagon and ox team jogged in over the trail along the ridge it was really a novelty after wandering in the wet forests and sunken lake shores of Barataria.

The elder Crepelle had a never-ceasing child’s wonder at our stories of the world outside, and at our patented camp paraphernalia. He was full of "Mon Dieu!" and "Eh-Hos!" and "Ho-ees!" and comical but pathetic apologies for the rudeness of their living. But never did we meet more genuine hospitality. In fact, the finest memory of all our sojourns is the unfailing courtesy and shy but eager welcome with which the swamp Cajuns met us everywhere. It was very different from the sharp thrust with which the small town Creole trades with the stranger.

The next morning's tide had risen little. Hen set off on the ox trail with the younger man to reach the plantation country and bargain for some means of portage to Bayou La Fourche. I slept in my blankets an hour longer and then, while waiting for Crepelle's breakfast, concluded to take the pirogue and see if I could not really shoo her into the forest and explore the waterway. It was a fool idea. I paddled on nicely with the lightened dugout for a mile, entranced by the morning beauty of the wet woods, the singing birds and flowers. When the cypress thinned a bit I discovered that Bayou L'Ours led into a glade of sawgrass and wild hyacinth, and I thought I saw a ridge of higher land beyond. I congratulated myself. When

Hen came back with his nigger cart I would have the Bantayan all loaded and ready to start for a paddle through the swamp.

So I worked on through the grass and cane. The sun was up and burning hotly down on the muddy margins of the bayou, which was now hardly more than a shallow ditch. And snakes! I began to see them lying within paddle reach, lazy and lethargic, big black moccasins, cottonmouths, and now and then a red-dish copperhead. As I dug on through the mud I mauled them over the head, killing eight in as many yards. But the farther I went, the shoaler grew the water and the hotter the sun. The gnats began to dance over the evil-smelling mud and presently I felt rather sick. I glanced ahead and then back. Snakes everywhere. I stood up and counted twenty-nine.

Then I realized that it was the indescribable odor from this snake den that was sickening me; that, and the sun and the three hours' labor without breakfast. I concluded to turn about, for there was no navigable water ahead. But that gave me no end of difficulty. I couldn't drive the canoe around in the mud, and I could not step out, for the mire was bottomless and the three and five-foot moccasins were everywhere. Sick and hot, I worked at it and at the end of an hour had not back-tracked twenty yards, when I heard a "Ho-ee!" back in the cypress.

Old Man Crepelle was standing in his runnin' pirogue staring at me. "Man, wha' yo' goin'?"

"I don't know. Some snakes, aren't they?"

"Snakes! Worse hole in dis swamp fo' snakes. Dey got me cowed! Yo' betteh git out a-deh! Dose big ones larrup right into yo' pirogue if dey gits mad!"

I larruped another one over the head. They were too somnolent to attack one, I imagined, but Crepelle was badly frightened. He would not budge from the shade of the cypress, and I had to work back alone, with the old swamper scolding me every yard. When I got to the timber I was about done up. Crepelle let out another cry of dismay when
he discovered I had piled three of the biggest snakes into my pirogue.

"Mon Dieu! Skin 'em! Dat's bad luck, M'sieu! Don't bring dem snakes to my camp!"

And when I approached he sat hastily down and paddled on ahead. His light shell went over flats that our heavy canoe would not take, and when I reached his camp his voice came excitedly as he told Hen: "Yo' partner, he out deh bringin' in a load o' snakes! Dey sho' got me cowed!"

compensation for the mule cart, and told the hands to see us off safely on Bayou La Fourche. We paddled on in a stiff headwind until dark, and made camp on the ancient levee. We could see nothing but the greensward, with a cow grazing here and there, and it was a pleasing surprise to climb the levee and look down on a smiling country of small farms stretching to the swamp woods three miles away on either side.

The people were all Creoles, truck-raisers and storekeepers, while along the

UNDER THE PALM THATCH THEY HEW THE PIROGUES OUT OF A CAREFULLY SELECTED CYPRUS LOG

I was too sick to skin my snakes when I got back. Anyway, Hen had a nigger cart waiting and we lifted the Bantayan into it, piled the camp stuff on, and set out. Mid-afternoon we came out of La Fourche woods into the narrow strip of cultivable land fronting the bayou. It was green with young sugar cane. Down the long rows a line of darkies, men and women and children, hoed the black earth, while the mounted overseer rode behind and jacked up the laggards. He was very courteous, but mystified at us appearing from the swamp, refused any slow-moving bayou came red-sailed luggars, the Italian crews poling them against the failing breeze. It was an interesting country. We made Lockport the next morning, dined at the hotel, got directions as to how to reach Bayou Terrebonne, and set off down a weedy canal southward. But it came on to rain before the first mile and when we saw a large, dirty tent on the bank by a lumber pile we went ashore. There were two men inside, sitting by a smoky stove, and at first glance we knew they were "Yankees."
They were from Kalamazoo, and they were trying to reclaim three thousand acres of wet land along Field Lake. As it blew and rained harder, we accepted their invitation to make camp with them. They helped us put up our little silk tent, and we all dined on fried trout, tea, and macaroni. Our hosts were wet but hopeful. They were waiting for the cattle which they were going to run on their holdings to kill the "piene grass" for a year or two, until they began cultivation. Several other Northerners had settled about, and the company was working to drain the small lakes to make available the land beyond "the forty-arpent line," the historic demarkation beyond which the Cajun farmers would not venture. The Cajuns shook their heads at all this foolishness. Their fathers and their fathers' fathers had never gone beyond "the forty-arpent line"; why, therefore, should they?

However, Yankee capital was doing wonders on the black, rich swamp soil. The gentlemen took us in a launch the next day to show us how their pumping plant worked to drain the lowlands. It would remove the rainfall at the rate of two million gallons an hour from the main ditch. Into this the field laterals led the water, and we were told that the pump would drain off a four-inch rain in twenty-four hours and leave the prairie dry enough to plow the next day. Anyhow, the contrast of this black humus with adjoining areas of wild ne, infested with alligators and snakes, was refreshing.

The newcomers had great hopes of peppermint as a crop. Potatoes, corn, onions, tomatoes—all were flourishing fabulously on the Raceland prairies. But the April rainfall was something big. It fell upon Hen and me that night in our tent, the wind howled and snatched at the silk, and by midnight we were lying in a pool of water. But we refused to be routed out, although dawn came on us soaked and sleepy. We breakfasted and dried out our camp. But, glory be to the duffles and piffles! Not a drop had gone through the paraffin bags to our grub.

We paddled on the next day—a most beautiful one—through Field and Long lakes, then up Bayou Terrebonne, through another miniature farming country of the Creoles, and came to the little French town of Houma at night. Next day was Easter, and we idled in the plaza and watched the churchgoing folk. It was all clean and sweet and sunny after the swamps and snakes of
La Fourche. Round about were sugar plantations, and motor cars rolled out the white shell roads to the great houses. We liked Houma immensely. Little boys came to our camp, all quiet, respectful little chaps, who answered "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," and volunteered to carry water. They had never seen a tent and thought we must have a "show." We had got quite used to that by now. All down Terrebonne the darky women came to the bank to ask if we were selling anything, and neither white nor colored could make out that two men would paddle that dugout around just for "pleasure."

We had a call from the sheriff of the parish the next day. He just dropped in "to see what we were about," he explained. The big plantation owners had no liking for strange white men to be about their negroes. The sheriff said that employment agents were forever trying to lure hands off the plantation to work in the lumber camps and towns, and itinerant peddlers swindled the negroes, getting good money that, of course, by all that was just and holy, the plantation stores ought to get. But when the Terrebonne planters could once understand that we desired no further business with the hands than to photograph them they were hospitable.

Our Easter dinner was a big mulligan of steak and vegetables, rice and blackberry jam, for the blackberries literally enrobbed Terrebonne on both banks for miles. And the storekeeper where we made a few purchases sent us a fine banana cake, and another man sent us oysters. We couldn't help liking Houma.

Houma was a great oyster-pack ing point. The streets and roads were all white shelled; and one oyster house had a pile of these in its yard estimated to be worth two thousand dollars. The oysters came up the bayous from Grand Caillou, Tambalier, and all the south coast reefs, the red-shirted luggarmen lending an ever-picturesque color to the green-banked bayou. We regretted to leave Houma. Not that we knew yet where we were going. Not a word from that canoe. Hen yawned when I mentioned it. He gaped wider when I reminded him of his digestion and the Fountain of Ponce de Leon.

"Oh, yes—that old party! He made a mistake in going to Florida. He should have come to Terrebonne and had the natives feed him banana cake."

"If we're going to Florida in the Bantayan," I answered, "or Yucatan, or wherever it is, we ought to turn around. It's about twenty-four thousand five hundred miles in the direction we are paddling, and my hands are a bit blistered."

"Suppose it is twenty-four thousand? We're in no hurry. Let's wander on to the Atchafalaya country and see that oak under which Evangeline sat and waited for her Gabriel."

"Girls?" I roared. "Thought you came down here to forget girls and table d'hôtes and all that sort of thing?"

"Yes," he murmured, flicking a fly off his ear. "But I want to see that oak. I want to know how Evangeline could sit under a Louisiana oak without the red bugs getting her. And if they had, there wouldn't have been any poem. No one can sigh for love with the red bugs on 'em. You can't mix girls and red bugs and then expect any poetry out of the combination—no, sir!"

So we went on lazily. Hen's automatic rifle was getting rusted and his scientific fishing kit was unpacked. He didn't seem to care. He had no interest in his stomach any more. Or his hair. He was getting almighty lazy. The way we slept nights in that silk tent was a caution. It was the hardest sort of work to be under way in the Bantayan before nine in the morning. And at eleven o'clock Hen invariably proposed we go ashore and eat something. But we managed to paddle on into Bayou Black, past some very fine plantations, into a region of tiny farms between the bayou and the blue wall of the swamp forest which was always in sight beyond. One morning we awoke to discover three dark-eyed children gazing at us.

"Bon jour!" they hailed us smilingly, and then disappeared to come back with hot rolls and some dry kindling, having watched our efforts to start breakfast with wet sticks.

Then they sat about us, smiling si-
We had bought a new and small coffee "dripper" some time back and now the Bodin children proceeded to show Hen how to make real "Cajun" coffee. Hen sat patiently through breakfast while our small hosts pressed the black powdered coffee in the "drip" and slowly, drop by drop, added the water.

"Now, when do I get my coffee?" demanded Hen, time and again.

"Oh, M'sieu, afterwards!" Robert assured him. And from that time on, coffee via the slow drip methods of the Cajun pot was "afterwards coffee" with us—we never could get it concocted in time for breakfast.

Three colored lumbermen also stopped in to find amusement over our breakfast efforts. The Bodin children explained that they were not in school because the "Yankee" schoolma'am had resigned. She could not find table board to suit her, demanding canned peas and baker's bread and wanting her room calcimined. The bayou people couldn't understand this, so she quit and there was no school.

The three swamper's "sorteh lazied round all day," as they put it, watching us dry out our stuff from the night's rain. When we lit our pipes and strolled over to talk to them one said: "Do Ah onde'stand you-all a-paddlin' that lil' boat round fo' pleasua?"

"Yes."

"Pleasua?"

"Yes. Pleasure."

He looked at us and then broke into soft, inward regurgitations of laughter. "Pleasua! Some folks is got some quee' ideas o' pleasua! Ah'd rather done go to N'Awlyins and see a pictu' show."

None of the people here had ever seen a camper or heard of anybody traveling through the bayous on "pleasure." The Bodin children had never seen a tent; they examined and discussed ours with curiosity.

But never such kindly, lively and wideawake youngsters. Alcide and Antoineau said they would bring us some milk, but at supper time came back mournfully abashed to relate that there was no milk. The cows had refused to come out of the deep swamp back of the fields, and when the cows wouldn't come home no one could make them. We all went blackberrying the next day in the swamp edge, and the disgraced cows booed from the cypress woods, but still refused to come out.

It was on Bayou Black, in our Arcadian leisure there, that Hen had his celebrated case of the Nigger from Grand Caillou. I have told of our hypodermic syringe and stuff for snake bite. Hen was ever aggrieved at me because I refused to get snake-bitten and let him practice on me. The Nigger from Grand Caillou was hanging around camp one day and heard our never-ending discussion of the hypo cure for snake bite. Now, that nigger needed fo' bits. He needed fo' bits the worst way. So happy thought—Hen offered him fo' bits if he would get snake bit and let Hen practice. The nigger said he 'lowed he would. Fo' bits is a lot of money.

So the Nigger from Grand Caillou went off in the swamp and came back snake-bit. He showed the hole. It was a round sort of hole in the nigger, right on his forearm, and it had some blood. "Excellent!" said Hen and proceeded to pump the nigger full of dope. The nigger's eyes stuck out, but he said he didn't mind if he got the fo' bits. Well, after the operation Hen gave the nigger his fo' bits. Then we sat around waiting for something to happen to the nigger. Nothing happened. We gave the nigger his supper and Hen told him to report in the morning. He did so—before breakfast. He reported for dinner, he reported for supper. He hung around all the time we camped at Bodin's with Hen anxiously inspecting the hole and examining the nigger.

Hen was hurt because the nigger showed no symptoms of any sort. He neither would die nor would he get any better. He just hung around and had a whale of an appetite. I grew suspicious about that snake. Hen had asked him if it was a mocassin or a copperhead, and the nigger assured him that it was one of the worst snakes for niggers ever seen in these parts. The nigger stayed to supper and breakfast again and borrowed Hen's pants to go to a "ball" over near Mawgan City. Hen laid a strict injunction on him to report next day. The nigger did—before breakfast. He was a
woebegone nigger now. He had become infamous overnight. The story had spread of how the Yankee doctor had used him for experimental purposes.

"Boss, I done come back hyah to ax yo' to tak dat stuff outen mah system," he said. "All dem fool niggehs at de ball dey wouldn't have nuffin to do wid me. Dey said Ah was changin' coloh lak Ah was purple now. Gin don' seem to make me feel drunk now, an' mah girl she won't have nuffin to do wid. me. I hatter sit round dat ball all alone jes' lak a poisoned pup!"

Hen couldn't take the stuff outen his system. He was aggrieved that nothing outwardly happened to the nigger. As for myself, I was cynically minded as to the snake. But when we paddled away from Bayou Black the Nigger from Grand Câillou still sat on the bank, gazing sorrowfully after us. He was the poisoned pup. We had totally ruined his social position.

(To be continued)