

LETTER I.

Cape Francois.

WE arrived safely here, my dear friend, after a passage of forty days, during which I suffered horribly from sea-sickness, heat and confinement; but the society of my fellow-passengers was so agreeable that I often forgot the inconvenience to which I was exposed. It consisted of five or six French families who, having left St. Domingo at the beginning of the revolution, were now returning full of joy at the idea of again possessing the estates from which they had been driven by their revolted slaves. Buoyed by their newly awakened hopes they were all delightful anticipation. There is an elasticity in the French character which repels misfortune. They have an inexhaustible flow of spirits that bears them lightly through the ills of life.

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Towards the end of the voyage, when I was well enough to go on deck, I was delighted with the profound tranquillity of the ocean, the uninterrupted view, the beautiful horizon, and wished, since fate has separated me from those I love, that I could build a dwelling on the bosom of the waters, where, sheltered from the storms that agitate mankind, I should be exposed to those of heaven only. But a truce to melancholy reflections, for here I am in St. Domingo, with a new world opening to my view.

My sister, whose fortunes, you know, I was obliged to follow, repents every day having so precipitately chosen a husband: it is impossible for two creatures to be more different, and I foresee that she will be wretched.

On landing, we found the town a heap of ruins. A more terrible picture of desolation cannot be imagined. Passing through streets choaked with rubbish, we reached with difficulty a house which had escaped the general fate. The people live in tents, or make a kind of shelter, by laying a few boards across the half-consumed beams; for the buildings being

here of hewn stone, with walls three feet thick, only the roofs and floors have been destroyed. But to hear of the distress which these unfortunate people have suffered, would fill with horror the stoutest heart, and make the most obdurate melt with pity.

When the French fleet appeared before the mouth of the harbour, Christophe, the Black general, who commanded at the Cape, rode through the town, ordering all the women to leave their houses—the men had been taken to the plain the day before, for he was going to set fire to the place, which he did with his own hand.

The ladies, bearing their children in their arms, or supporting the trembling steps of their aged mothers, ascended in crowds the mountain which rises behind the town. Climbing over rocks covered with brambles, where no path had been ever beat, their feet were torn to pieces and their steps marked with blood. Here they suffered all the pains of hunger and thirst; the most terrible apprehensions for their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons; to which was added the sight of the town in flames: and

even these horrors were increased by the explosion of the powder magazine. Large masses of rock were detached by the shock, which, rolling down the sides of the mountain, many of these hapless fugitives were killed. Others still more unfortunate, had their limbs broken or sadly bruised, whilst their wretched companions could offer them nothing but unavailing sympathy and impotent regret.

On the third day the negroes evacuated the place, and the fleet entered the harbour. Two gentlemen, who had been concealed by a faithful slave, went in a canoe to meet the admiral's vessel, and arrived in time to prevent a dreadful catastrophe. The general, seeing numbers of people descending the mountain, thought they were the negroes coming to oppose his landing and was preparing to fire on them, when these gentlemen informed him that they were the white inhabitants, and thus prevented a mistake too shocking to be thought of.

The men now entered from the plain and sought among the smoking ruins the objects of their affectionate solicitude. To paint these

heart-rending scenes of tenderness and woe, description has no powers. The imagination itself shrinks from the task.

Three months after this period we arrived and have now been a month here, the town is rapidly rebuilding, but it is extremely difficult to find a lodging. The heat is intolerable and the season so unhealthy that the people die in incredible numbers. On the night of our arrival, Toussaint the general in chief of the negroes, was seized at the Gonaives and embarked for France. This event caused great rejoicing. A short time before he was taken, he had his treasure buried in the woods, and at the return of the negroes he employed on this expedition, they were shot without being suffered to utter a word.

Clara has had the yellow fever. Her husband, who certainly loves her very much, watched her with unceasing care, and I believe, preserved her life, to which however she attaches no value since it must be passed with him.

Nothing amuses her. She sighs continually for the friend of her youth and seems to

exist only in the recollection of past happiness. Her aversion to her husband is unqualified and unconquerable. He is vain, illiterate, talkative. A silent fool may be borne, but from a loquacious one there is no relief. How painful must her intercourse with him be; and how infinitely must that pain be augmented by the idea of being his forever? Her elegant mind, stored with literary acquirements, is lost to him. Her proud soul is afflicted at depending on one she abhors, and at beholding her form, and you know that form so vilely bartered. Whilst on the continent she was less sensible of the horrors of her fate. The society of her friend gave a charm to her life, and having married in compliance with his advice, she thought that she would eventually be happy. But their separation has rent the veil which concealed her heart; she finds no sympathy in the bosom of her husband. She is alone and she is wretched.

General Le Clerc is small, his face is interesting, but he has an appearance of ill health. His wife, the sister of Buonaparte, lives in a house on the mountain till there can

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ST. DOMINGO.

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be one in town prepared for her reception. She is offended, and I think justly, with the ladies of the Cape, who, from a mistaken pride, did not wait on her when she arrived, because having lost their cloaths they could not dazzle her with their finery.

Having heard that there were some American ladies here she expressed a desire to see them; Mr. V— proposed to present us; Clara, who would not walk a mile to see a queen, declined. But I, who walk at all times, merely for the pleasure it affords me, went; and, considering the labour it costs to ascend the mountain, I have a claim on the gratitude of Madame for having undertaken it to shew her an object which she probably expected to find in a savage state.

She was in a room darkened by Venetian blinds, lying on her sofa, from which she half rose to receive me. When I was seated she reclined again on the sofa and amused general Boyer, who sat at her feet, by letting her slipper fall continually, which he respectfully put on as often as it fell. She is small, fair, with blue eyes and flaxen hair. Her face is expres-

sive of sweetness but without spirit. She has a voluptuous mouth, and is rendered interesting by an air of languor which spreads itself over her whole frame. She was dressed in a muslin morning gown, with a Madras handkerchief on her head. I gave her one of the beautiful silver medals of Washington, engraved by Reich, with which she seemed much pleased. The conversation languished, and I soon withdrew.

General Le Clerc had gone in the morning to fort Dauphin.

I am always in good spirits, for every thing here charms me by its novelty. There are a thousand pretty things to be had, new fashions and elegant trinkets from Paris; but we have no balls, no plays, and of what use is finery if it cannot be shewn?

The natives of this country murmur already against the general in chief; they say he places too much confidence in the negroes. When Toussaint was seized he had all the black chiefs in his power, and, by embarking them for France, he would have spread terror throughout the Island, and the negroes would

have been easily reduced, instead of which he relies on their good faith, has them continually in his house, at his table, and wastes the time in conference which should be differently employed. The Creoles shake their heads and predict much ill. Accustomed to the climate, and acquainted with the manner of fighting the Negroes, they offer advice, which is not listened to; nor are any of them employed, but all places of honour or emolument are held by Europeans, who appear to regard the Island as a place to be conquered and divided among the victors, and are consequently viewed by the natives with a jealous eye. Indeed the professed intention of those who have come with the army, is to make a fortune, and return to France with all possible speed, to enjoy it. It cannot be imagined that they will be very delicate about the means of accomplishing their purpose.

The Cape is surrounded; at least the plain is held by the Negroes; but the town is tranquil, and Dessalines and the other black chiefs are on the best terms with general Le Clerc.

We are to have a grand review next week.

The militia is to be organized, and the general is to address the troops on the field. He has the reputation of being very eloquent, but he has shocked every body by having ordered a superb service of plate, made of the money intended to pay the army, while the poor soldiers, badly cloathed, and still more badly fed, are asking alms in the street, and absolutely dying of want.

A beggar had never been known in this country, and to see them in such numbers, fills the inhabitants with horror; but why should such trifling considerations as the preservation of soldiers, prevent a general in chief from eating out of silver dishes?

We have neither public nor private balls, nor any amusement except now and then a little scandal. The most current at this moment is, that Madame Le Clerc is very kind to general Boyer, and that her husband is not content, which in a French husband is a little extraordinary. Perhaps the last part of the anecdote is calumny.

Madame Le Clerc, as I learned from a gentleman who has long known her, betrayed