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AUDUBON'S STORY OF HIS YOUTH.

INTRODUCTION.

By Maria R. Audubon.

THE following pages of autobiography of my grandfather, John James Audubon, the naturalist, were found accidentally in an old calfskin-bound volume where for many years they had been hidden. They have proved of so much interest to those who have read them or heard them read, that it is deemed well to publish them unchanged, though in one or two instances paragraphs and names which bear on purely family matters have been omitted. Indeed, with the pictured faces of the father who wrote the sketch and those of the two sons for whom it was written looking from the wall of the room wherein the ancient book lies, it has seemed impossible to make any alteration in the quaint phraseology and rather irregular arrangement of incidents; all, therefore, has been left untouched. Those who are mentioned in the manuscript must long have passed away; and it is hoped, therefore, that there is no objection to be raised as to retaining the few names to be found in it.

That a transcript from these pages was part of the material placed by my grandmother, Mrs. Audubon, in the hands of the editor of her *Memoir* of her husband, is probable from the appearance there of several brief extracts from it, and of a summary of the events here described; but the narrative had never been even privately printed.

Written at a time when the struggle was over, fame and wealth having then come to the man who rose so successfully after such heavy losses and such continuous and unlooked-for misfortunes, the manuscript shows that these things had cut deep into the sensitive heart and mind of him of whom we may surely say

"No bird that cleaves the air
But his revealing thought has made more fair."

MYSELF, J. J. AUDUBON.

THE precise period of my birth is yet an enigma to me, and I can only say what I have often heard my father repeat to me on this subject, which is as follows: It seems that my father had large properties in Santo Domingo, and was in the habit of visiting frequently that portion of our Southern States called, and known by the name of, Louis-

iana, then owned by the French Government.

During one of these excursions he married a lady of Spanish extraction, whom I have been led to understand was as beautiful as she was wealthy, and otherwise attractive, and who bore my father three sons and a daughter, I being the youngest of the sons and the only one who survived extreme youth. My mother, soon after my birth, accom-

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panied my father to the estate of Aux Cayes, on the island of Santo Domingo, and she was one of the victims during the ever-to-be-lamented period of the negro insurrection of that island.

My father, through the intervention of some faithful servants, escaped from Aux Cayes with a good portion of his plate and money, and with me and these humble friends reached New Orleans in safety. From this place he took me to France, where, having married the only mother I have ever known, he left me under her charge, and returned to the United States in the employ of the French Government, acting as an officer under Admiral Rochambeau. Shortly afterward, however, he landed in the United States and became attached to the army under La Fayette.

The first of my recollective powers placed me in the central portion of the city of Nantes, on the Loire River, in France, where I still recollect particularly that I was much cherished by my dear stepmother, who had no children of her own, and that I was constantly attended by one or two black servants who had followed my father from Santo Domingo to New Orleans and afterward to Nantes.

One incident, which is as perfect in my memory as if it had occurred this very day, I have thought of thousands of times since, and will now put on paper as one of the curious things which perhaps did lead me in after times to love birds, and to finally study them with pleasure infinite. My mother had several beautiful parrots, and some monkeys; one of the latter was a full-grown male of a very large species. One morning, while the servants were engaged in arranging the room I was in, "Pretty Polly" asking for her breakfast as usual, "*Du pain au lait pour le perroquet Mignonne*," the man of the woods probably thought the

bird presuming upon his rights in the scale of nature; be this as it may, he certainly showed his supremacy in strength over the denizen of the air, for, walking deliberately and uprightly toward the poor bird, he at once killed it, with unnatural composure. The sensations of my infant heart at this cruel sight were agony to me. I prayed the servant to beat the monkey, but he, who for some reason preferred the monkey to the parrot, refused. I uttered long and piercing cries, my mother rushed into the room, I was tranquillized, the monkey was forever afterward chained, and Mignonne buried with all the pomp of a cherished lost one.

This made, as I have said, a very deep impression on my youthful mind. But now, my dear children, I must tell you somewhat of my father, and of his parentage.

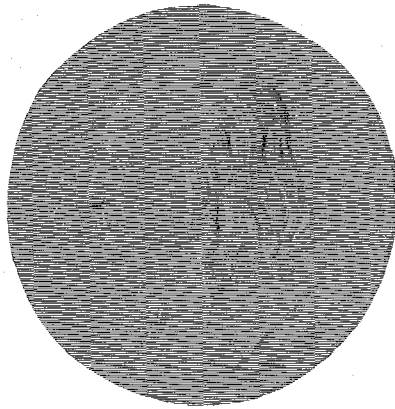
John Audubon, my grandfather, was born and lived at the small village of Sable d'Olhonne, and was by trade a very humble fisherman. He appears to have made up for the want of wealth by the number of his children, twenty-one of whom he actually raised to man and womanhood. All were sons, with one exception; my aunt, one uncle, and my father, who was the twentieth son, being

the only members of that extraordinary numerous family who lived to old age. In subsequent years, when I visited Sable d'Olhonne, the old residents assured me that they had seen the whole family, including both parents, at church many times.

When my father had reached the age of twelve years, his father presented him with a shirt, a dress of coarse material, a stick and his bless-

ing, and urged him to go and seek means for his future support and sustenance.

Some kind whaler or cod-fisherman took him on board as a "Boy." Of his



Profile of J. J. Audubon from his Death Mask.
(Since destroyed by fire.)