

STORY OF PIRATE PLUNDER RECALLS DAYS OF LAFITTE

SOME OF FREEBOOTER'S WEALTH RECOVERED

Splendid Gem Now Owned by Brownsville, Texas, Attorney, Was Part of Accumulated Booty—Smugglers' Houses at Matamoros, Mexico, Still Stand in Magnificent Ruin.

Gentleman Instrumental in Discovering Hiding Place of Part of Treasure Believes That Much of It Remains Securely Concealed in the Old Rendezvous of the Buccaneers Who Did So Much to Win the Great Victory Over the British at New Orleans—Mexican Government in the Way.

"Yes, that gem is one of the finest I have ever seen, and its strange history, to me, adds very materially to its intrinsic value."

The speaker was Mr. Pierce, a prominent attorney of Brownsville, Tex., as we sat on the broad veranda at his handsome residence, smoking our cigars, after the most remarkable January dinner I have ever eaten, writes Isaac Kline. On the menu was roast wild goose, which had been shot as it flew over the house on the day before; oysters on the half-shell, fresh from the waters of the Gulf at Point Isabel, 15 miles away; green corn on the cob, cucumbers, lettuce, celery from Mr. Pierce's own garden; oranges, figs and grapes from trees and vines in the dooryard—in January! The gem under discussion was a very fine diamond, whose steel-blue brilliance proclaimed it as having come from the Old Mines, sparkling in an old-fashioned setting on Mr. Pierce's finger.

"If I might have its entire history I should be very much pleased, for it belonged to Jean Lafitte, the pirate. If it could but speak, what a tale it

which he had been subjected. As there was no war between France and England at the time of his release, he obtained a privateer's commission under the Carthaginian government against Spain. I have seen this commission, which is still in existence, in Spanish, and held by relatives of his, near Brownsville. These relatives claim that his only acts of piracy were against British vessels—and he was beyond question a scourge to these. In 1807 he came to New Orleans, and in 1813-14 was at the head of a formidable community of freebooters in Barrataria bay, about 40 miles west of the mouth of the Mississippi. They had many small vessels and the bay afforded them a secure retreat. In 1814 Commodore Patterson attacked their town and destroyed it, but Lafitte and most of his men escaped, returning later on and resuming operations.

Refused British Bribe.

"About the same time the British were maturing their plans for the descent upon the southern coast of the United States, and sent a brig of war, the *Sophia*, under command of Capt. Lockyer, at Barrataria, with a letter from Commodore Percy, commanding the British naval forces in the gulf, and one from Col. Nichols, then in command of the land forces in Florida, offering Lafitte the command of a fine ship and \$30,000 in gold on condition of his assisting the contemplated expedition to New Orleans. The promise of the British commander of "bounty and beauty" to his men in case of victory is a matter of record. Lafitte immediately wrote to Gov. Claiborne of Louisiana, inclosing the two letters, which I have seen, and offering his services in defending Louisiana on the sole condition of pardon for himself and his men. The offer was accepted, and the assistance of the Barratarians under command of Lafitte, who had charge of one of the eight small cannon which constituted Jackson's artillery force at this battle, was an important factor in scoring the great victory of New Orleans, January 8, 1815. From this time the history of Lafitte is involved in obscurity. There was a piratical community formed at what is now Galveston, by a Lafitte, but whether by Jean or his brother Pierre, is now not clear. It was broken up in 1821 by Lieutenant, afterward Commodore Kearney. Lafitte's portraits, of which there are two at Matamoros, show him to have been a handsome man, over six feet tall, with black hair, hazel eyes; and his polished, easy manners and winning address are still remarked upon.

Pirates Were Scattered.

"After the destruction of this rendezvous the pirates scattered. Many of them are heard of afterward and are known in history. They were skilled seamen and bold fighters. Many left the sea and located at Matamoros, just across the river from Brownsville. This was then a great field for all sorts of semi-piratical exploits. Smuggling was prevalent and fortunes were made on all sides. Vessels would unload their cargoes by day or night, and the goods were often

Lafitte's Real Character.

"Jean Lafitte is referred to in the histories as a pirate, and such he was—but from those who knew him, with whom I have talked, I gain the impression that he was not fully entitled to that reputation, though he was a fearless fighter, with a band of freebooters to whom his word was law, whose bravery made them a scourge of the

gold heels on their shoes. They entertained in princely style, giving receptions and banquets which for magnificence were not excelled even in European courts. Kings and queens of England, Spain or France gave nothing more elegant in this line. Nothing approaching them was ever given on this continent in those days, even if at the present time.

Entertained Prominent Men.

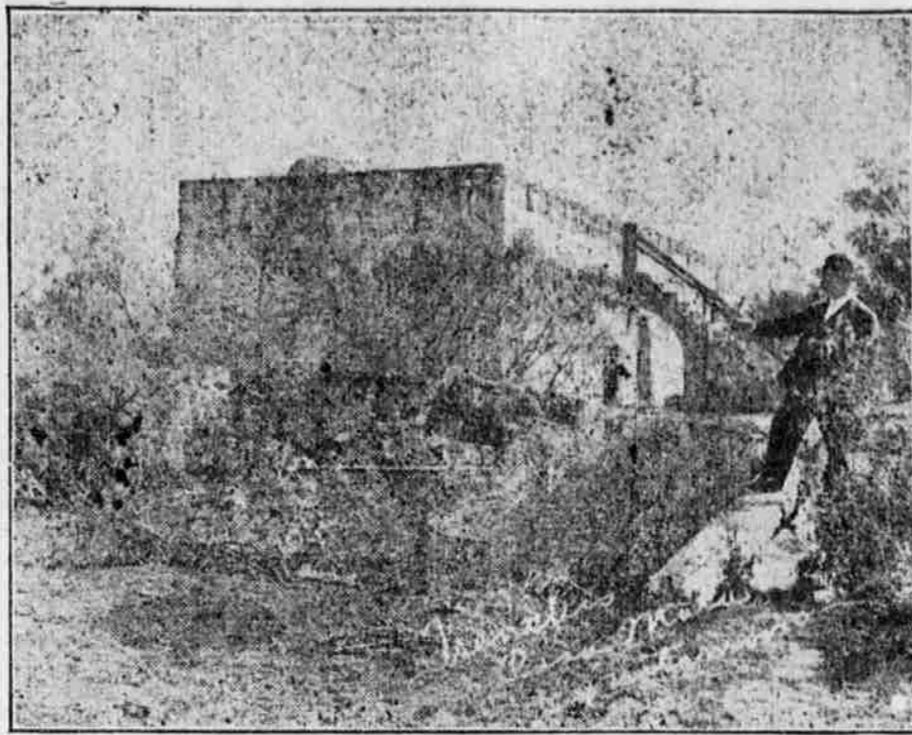
"All prominent people who came to Matamoros were received and entertained by them—Gen. Lawton, Gen. Corbin, the McCooks, even Gen. Sheridan—have been their guests at these receptions. Among their visitors occasionally was seen a man of magnificent bearing, great manly beauty and carriage. He wore jewels of extraordinary splendor, and always carried a court sword with embroidered belt blazing with jewels. I was a boy then, and remember these things well, for they were to me like a dream of the Arabian Nights. The man had with him on these visits a Spanish lady of great beauty who was always at his side. None except the Tarnava family ever talked with her, but it was a current belief among us children that the man was Lafitte and the woman a lady whom he had captured in some of his sea fights, killing her male relative, taken her to Barrataria and still held her as his wife. She was even supposed to bear a title. She attempted to escape from him twice, but

was. There was no railroad to Matamoros or that locality, and neither of them ever expected to get there. Since the completion of the new St. L. & M. railway, however, he concluded to go down on one of the Homeseekers' excursions. The existence of the map recurred to his mind and he brought it along, though with little faith in its having any foundation in fact.

Found Chest Well Hidden.

"We visited the ruined house. The map was very accurate as regarded the apartments with the exception that the room marked with the cross did not seem to exist. By measuring the walls, however, we found an inside wall of brick—all the inner walls in this building are of brick—near a stairway, was much thicker than the others, and cut into it—and there was the treasure room. It had been built into the wall in such a manner that its existence would never be suspected. Though four feet square, the stairway at the side, running to the second and third stories, prevented the extra thickness of the wall being noticed, part of the width of the room being taken off the width of the stairway. The only entrance was through the floor in the top story, the place being practically a dry well in the wall reaching clear from the top floor to the basement.

"The treasure chest, of old wood, with brass bindings and peculiar locks, remained, and we smashed it open. It



"House of Death."

did not succeed. Her people no doubt mourned her as dead.

"After the Tarnavas left the house it was never again occupied and so far as I know has not been entered for 50 years until about a year ago. The entire premises are in ruins, as you saw, but in its prime it was as handsome as any residence on this continent. The slate roof is falling in, though the brick walls will probably stand for a century, as they are very thick and solid. The rotting balconies look down into an inner court still full of orange and fig trees laden with fruit—but I have seen this garden and the balconies lighted up at night, filled with the handsomest women wearing the finest dresses the world then contained. The high ceilings, magnificently proportioned rooms, carved spiral stairways of mahogany, large arched windows, mahogany floors—all indicate the taste of the occupants. The pigeons of the town now make it a roosting place, entering through the falling roof and the broken windows, but in its day it was a magnificent home, such as few ever enter even in this era of wealth, except the most exclusive and aristocratic. Now to the story of this ring:

Had Treasure Chart.

"In June, 1906, a gentleman from Chicago came to my office soliciting my assistance. He had a map or chart and a letter, of which he gave the following history: His mother, a widow, kept a boarding house 26 years ago in Matamoros. Among her boarders was a man of about 60 years, who was a sailor on the lake. He had evidently cruised on salt water for many years, in fact the other sailors often talked of that, and the fact that he seemed to hold himself aloof from them; that while mixing freely with them, he would never relate any of his experiences in the past, as sailors generally love to do. This man's name was Porfirio LaFon. One night he was drowned by the wrecking of his vessel, the *Irene*, of Sandusky. His effects lay about the house for years in an old sea chest, all efforts to discover any relatives being ineffectual. In the bottom of the chest was the chart and letter, the latter stating that LaFon had been a pirate under Lafitte previous to coming to the lakes, and had, with his companions, buried a very large treasure in Matamoros. There was also some fine jewelry and a beautifully decorated dagger in the chest, and the chart. The latter I at once recognized as a partial map of the city of Matamoros in the vicinity of the Casa Tarnava or "house of the pirates," as it is now called, and the street leading to the Casa Mata, or "house of death" in the outskirts where the prisoners were executed in the early days.

"A smaller chart on the same parchment gave a complete map of the rooms in the Casa Tarnava. In one of these rooms a spot was marked with a cross near the wall; a similar mark was placed in the basement of the house, and also in a place in the outer walls at the Casa Mata. The Chicago man, whose name I do not give for professional reasons, said that the map had never received any attention from his mother or himself because they did not really know where Matamoros

was practically empty. There was a handful of Spanish and English gold coins and several jewels of which the one I wear is one, in the box and on the floor. We searched thoroughly. What we found was valued at \$4,300. The balance of the treasure, which the letter stated to be over \$75,000, had been taken by some one, possibly some accidental discoverer. The other places indicated to contain treasure we did not find. The descriptions were imperfect or else the places were too well hidden. Our time was limited, since it soon became noised about what we were doing and we were stopped. You know what the Mexican government is.

Believes Treasure Still There.

"I feel certain that the treasure is still there, if the places can be located, but do not see how that can be done without plenty of time and possibly pulling down the house. The outer walls at the Casa Mata are now obliterated and it would require a great deal of digging to locate the treasure indicated to be buried there. The letter gave the value of one as \$100,000 in jewels and the other as \$125,000 in gold. I have full belief that there is much treasure buried in this locality, by the pirates, the smugglers, the revolutionists and even those who operated here during the civil war when this was the only port the south had open for many months. The sunken place in the brick pavement of the basement at the Casa Tarnava, I think, indicates a secret passage from the well in the court to the street; but it may just as well lead to a treasure chamber.

"The cannon shot over the door in the second story? Oh, I don't know the history of that. It is my impression that it was shot in there during some of the many revolutionary fights which took place in the streets of Matamoros. It may have been planted there during the bombardment of Matamoros by Gen. Scott, and I sometimes think it was."

Elephants as Laborers.

Most amusing is it to see one of these working elephants tackling a huge squared log and placing it on the stack. First of all he estimates its length and weight as it lies on the ground. Then he digs his tusks under it at one end, curls his trunk over and tries to drag one end of the log on to his tusks. Should he find the task beyond him, he will give a queer little trumpet note, and up comes a colleague to help him at the other end. In a moment the two elephants have swung the big log between them, walk in step to the pile, and then one of them, apparently by preconcerted agreement, places his end in position on the stack, while the other rams home the log.—The Circle.

Will Collect Southern Birds.

Frank M. Chapman, a curator of the department of ornithology of the American Museum of Natural History, has left New York to make a collection of southern birds for the institution. He will try especially to obtain white herons in various stages of development, for it is feared the species, owing to activities for the millinery trade, will become extinct.

SEE WHAT YOU BUY

DO NOT TAKE THE CATALOGUE STATEMENT FOR IT.

CASE OF A MAIL-ORDER BUGGY

The Purchaser Was Ashamed to Use It and Sold It to His Hired Man—It Pays to Buy at Home.

(Copyright by Alfred C. Clark.)

The East End of London is an example of what the city does for humanity in creating poverty, misery, disease, drunkenness and crime. Jefferson was right when he said: "Great cities are great sores upon the body politic." Is it any wonder that lovers of their kind are horror-stricken at the grinding of these gigantic mills whose grist is the bodies and souls of men?

But there is another movement connected with this current setting cityward which, like it, is full of grave menace to the welfare of humanity. This is the dry rot now invading thousands of villages and towns. It is not lack of capital or business energy in the towns, or discrimination in freights or exhaustion of the soil in the surrounding country that is bringing about this change, but a new and dangerous form of competition, and the caprices of those who buy. Go into these towns and you will find them at a standstill or going backward. Inquire of their business men or commercial travelers and you will learn that business is not as good as formerly and that the prospect is for a continued shrinkage in trade. An observant commercial traveler said to the writer: "I believe the day of the village and town is over. The big fish are everywhere eating up the little fish. A few small lines of business that cannot be done by mail, such as

know that he could have bought as cheaply and selected much more satisfactorily at home. On a rural route with which I am familiar and over which most of the incoming letters are from mail order houses and the outgoing ones carry back money orders, lives a friend of mine who bought a watch from the catalogue at what he considered a rare bargain. The watch came, to be sure, but it did not go, that is at the right speed, and, although money enough was spent on it to bring the price up to a good figure, it was no better as a timekeeper than that famous watch of Capt. Cuttle's. Another friend bought a buggy at \$34 and was elated over his purchase until it came and he saw that the top was a very ordinary article of oil cloth, instead of leather, and he was so ashamed of it that he sold it at a loss to his hired man and bought a better one in a neighboring town. A lady and her two daughters bought shoes from the catalogue and when asked why they had trouble with their feet said it was because of ill-fitting shoes. But such instances of the bad effects of buying "sight unseen" are daily occurring all over the country. It is only natural and inevitable that such things should happen.

Let us see what will be the effect of this formidable diversion of trade, if carried to its logical conclusion. Nearly all the business houses of the smaller towns will become bankrupt, the value of town property will decline, churches and schools will receive a feeble support and the towns, instead of being centers of business and social activity, will almost cease to exist. The country in general will become like many portions of the south where the large plantations, by getting their supplies in the cities, have kept the neighboring towns down to the cross-roads type—dreary, unpainted little places of a half dozen ramshackle houses. The evil effects of this loss of trade and destruction of the value of town property will re-



The mail-order habit will cut the limb of local prosperity from the tree of national life and drop you and your community into the bottomless pit of business stagnation. Are you wielding the saw that means certain disaster to you and your community?

barbering, blacksmithing or the serving of soft drinks and ice cream may survive, but such lines of trade cannot sustain a decent town." The cause of this widespread loss of business is the aggressive and destructive competition of the catalogue houses in the big cities. It has been possible for 40 years or more to buy of some houses in the cities, if one felt that the merchants of his town were exacting too much profit, but this effort of the mail order houses to cut the retailer altogether is a new thing, the growth of the past few years. Starting with a few lines of trade, this form of competition has come to cover almost everything that can be sold in a country town and it is even asserted that a savings bank department is to be added by one of the catalogue houses.

The claim that the mail order houses of Chicago are doing an annual business of over \$200,000,000 may seem large, but one house alone has sold goods to the amount of \$29,000,000 in the past six months and is now incubating a new plan to increase its enormous business by selling shares of stock to thousands of people in the hope of making them regular customers.

The skillfully worded advertisement and the big catalogue, with its pictures of articles in a hundred lines of trade, are very alluring to buyers, most of whom are not familiar with prices and qualities. Some of the articles below the usual prices are of an inferior quality, while the average price is usually fully up to what would be paid to the home dealer. As was shown last winter in a speech in congress, articles for the mail order trade are often misbranded at the request of the mail order people with deliberate intent to deceive. One of the instances given by this congressman was of some thousands of finger rings stamped "fourteen carats" when they were in reality only ten.

The buyer who orders from his catalogue, or from an advertisement, does not see the articles till they come and is often disappointed in the quality of the most of them, but there is no redress as there would be if he bought at home. He does not like to own that he is disappointed, so he makes the best of it and tries to persuade himself that he has saved money. In many instances he is not well enough informed in values to

act upon the value of farm property by cutting off the home market. They will add to the taxes on lands by reducing taxable values in the towns. Surely it is not to the interest of anybody, except the bloated corporations carrying on the mail order business, to see the towns and villages fall into decay. A live town is not only of value to the lands surrounding it, but its well stocked business houses are a convenience and a benefit to the buyer. Even if money could, in the long run, be saved by ordering everything from the city, the inconvenience and uncertainty of it would always make such shopping unsatisfactory. Ordering from a catalogue is a leap in the dark, except in the case of a few articles whose color, shape and quality are always the same.

To the man who can soberly look on both sides of the question and who can put himself in the place of "the other fellow" the query will come: Is it best from mere whim, or even for a certainty of saving from one to half a dozen dollars in a year to turn my back on the old, convenient ways of doing business, and to do my part toward ruining the business of my old acquaintances and friends, and of destroying the value of property in the town where my friends live?

F. B. MILLER.

Didn't Suit Him.

People who patronize the cars running out to Forest Hills are familiar with Conductor Crowley, the man who wears six service stripes on his sleeve, says a writer in the Boston Herald.

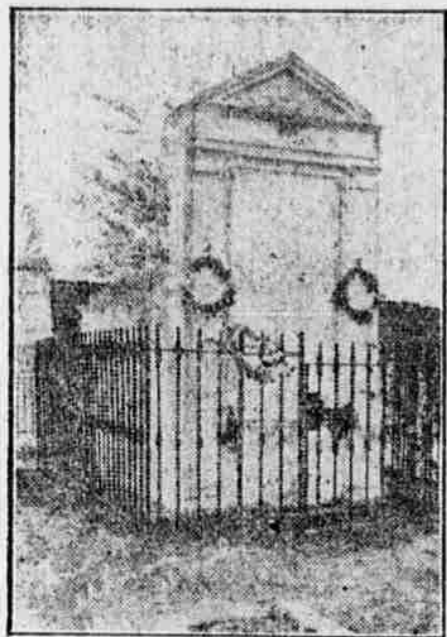
On the afternoon of election day in November one of his passengers was an old man who had been imbibing enough to make him go to sleep in the corner of the car.

Just before it reached Dudley street the conductor announced with his usual rich roll of the r, "Cit-re-cut and Guld."

"Yer a liar! It's John B. Moran!" shouted the sleepy one, waking up suddenly.

New Metric Chart.

A new metric chart representing geographically measures of the international metric system of weights and measures has been prepared by the bureau of standards of the department of commerce and labor, and will be furnished free to any school teaching the system.



Grave of Adrian Vidal.

American Who Espoused Losing Cause in War, and Was Shot.

might tell of former ownership by some Spanish sonnetists, of the bloody sea fight which terminated in the sinking of a ship with its crimson deck burdened with the corpses of its defenders; of murder done afterwards in disposing of the wounded by the piratical custom of walking the plank; of drunken outrage and orgy at Barrataria following the piratical victory, in which very likely the fair owner of this very ring was one of the prizes. There is certainly a romance connected with this stone, and it attracts me the more for the reason that I know so little of it.

Lafitte's Real Character.

"Jean Lafitte is referred to in the histories as a pirate, and such he was—but from those who knew him, with whom I have talked, I gain the impression that he was not fully entitled to that reputation, though he was a fearless fighter, with a band of freebooters to whom his word was law, whose bravery made them a scourge of the



"House of Pirates."

sea 70 years ago, in these very waters. He was a Frenchman and began his career as a lieutenant on a French privateer, was captured by an English man-of-war and thrown into prison at an English port, where he was kept for many years and so barbarously treated that his resentment had a large bearing in shaping his subsequent pursuits.

"It is asserted by old residents at Matamoros who knew him that his action in betraying the English in their attempt to capture New Orleans was in retaliation for the brutalities to

smuggled or worse—blood stained fruits of piratical cruises. Of these followers of Lafitte, the richer, more prominent—captains and lieutenants—settled in the same row of houses. Among them were Constantino Tarnava and Ramon LaFon. These people had in great splendor until about 1850, when they gradually disappeared, leaving the houses they had occupied, about as they are to-day. They were extremely lavish in the use of money, which seemed to flow through their hands like water. It is related that their women even wore