

## Studies in English, New Series

---

Volume 5 *Special American Literature Issue*,  
1984-1987

Article 27

---

1984

### “Triomphe De Villandry”

George W. Cable

*The University of Mississippi*

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV

*The University of Mississippi*

Michael P. Dean

*The University of Mississippi*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies\\_eng\\_new](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new)



Part of the [American Literature Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Cable, George W.; Fisher, Benjamin Franklin IV; and Dean, Michael P. (1984) ""Triomphe De Villandry"," *Studies in English, New Series*: Vol. 5 , Article 27.

Available at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies\\_eng\\_new/vol5/iss1/27](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol5/iss1/27)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Studies in English at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in English, New Series by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

**TRIOMPHE DE VILLANDRY**

**GEORGE W. CABLE**

**EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN FISHER IV AND MICHAEL P. DEAN**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI**

*Introduction\**

*"Triomphe De Villandry" carries with it none of Cable's better known treatment of racial issues that brought down upon him abuse during his lifetime. With its date of 1907 and the yoking of it to **Strange True Stories of Louisiana**, published in 1889, this story may have been an attempt on Cable's part at shifting from volatile issues within the American scene toward the "international story" that brought successes to Howells and James.<sup>1</sup> Although we can attach no certain date to "Triomphe De Villandry," it stands as a turn-of-the-century story, one that, excepting the happy ending Cable effects for his young lovers, might have kept company with those set against a French background in the vein mined by Ella D' Arcy or Ernest Dowson, who were customarily associated with **The Yellow Book**. We may well remember that Henry James was an invited contributor to that standard bearer of decadence, that the periodical was widely read and criticised, and that Cable may, in an experimental tactic, have tried to write his story for a market less troublesome than that linked with his racial writings. Perhaps he recognized, however, that others had more frequently and more artistically trod ahead of him in paths of the international tale, and consequently he withheld "Triomphe De Villandry" from publication. He may also have remembered the controversy engendered because intimations that he dealt unfairly with those who provided source materials for **Strange True Stories** had enlivened periodical columns during the 1890s; and such remembrance could account for this story's never seeing print within the author's life.<sup>2</sup> A slight piece, "Triomphe De Villandry" appears here with no claims for its being a hitherto unattended masterpiece. The love springing between John Whitcomb and Lucie is handled with little subtlety, although such a relationship, during an era when a young woman's chief concern was to achieve a marriage that would bring security and social stability, is not altogether implausible. The Cinderella theme, though, imparts a saccha-*

*rieness that probably would have deterred readers in the age of realism. The red rose called "Triomphe de Villandry," named by the Duchesse de Vauvert, whose gardener had developed it, assumes modest artistic dimension in Cable's hands. Its furnishing a title for the story links it at once with the traditional red-rose symbol of passion. Second, but related deftly, the flower's name incorporates the name of the French setting; for the story overall this locale provides a "world" that is geographically accurate (a known French area) and simultaneously fitting for the enchanting love affecting Lucie and John. For both American John and French Lucie, in other words, Villandry serves as a far-away, romantic spot (she is no native of this region). The captivating and the withered roses respectively represent live, vibrant flowering love in the John-Lucie bonding and the unhappily ended marriage of the Duchesse.*

*As an international story written by an American author, this one typically presents Americans travelling into Europe and then marrying Europeans. Cable structures his story in hour-glass form by intersecting the growing relationship between John and Lucie with the disintegrating marriage of the Duc and Duchesse de Vauvert. That the Duchesse, after her own marriage has dissolved, sends her gift of roses to the young lovers, is reasonable. She has, we learn, been their guardian angel in terms of informing Madame Champeaux (the nurse to this well-starred Romeo and Juliet) of John's true background and prospects.*

*If the circumstances of wealth-poverty and mistaken identity cast amidst misunderstandings seem a falling off in Cable's techniques, the dialogue, time and again, balances such weaknesses with a sprightliness and irony that are true for the ear and the mind of the reader.*

*In many respects, "Triomphe De Villandry" takes a place among other turn-of-the-century stories with surprise endings, such as Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and those made popular by O. Henry. Given its imperfections, it affords us a glimpse at a variety of work that has not brought Cable his greatest acclaim, but that nevertheless is genuine Cable.*

STRICTLY, this is not my story. But I have printed others in this same way before. In one whole volume of "Strange True Stories of Louisiana," not one of them is wholly my invention, nor any two of them mine in the same manner or degree. This one is not even of

Louisiana but of France, and all I can plead for it is that the modest French gentleman and friend from whom I have it asks me to tell it for him. Says he:—

These incidents took place one summer when I had just finished my third year at the Superior Normal School, in Paris, and while awaiting my appointment as professor was spending my vacation in Touraine, at the home of an uncle, hard by the city of Tours, in the delightful village of Sainte-Radegonde.

In Tours, one afternoon, I was in an apothecary's shop, when a tall man whose strong, sweet smile won me on the spot entered and addressed the druggist in English:—

"Good-afternoon, sir. My name is Whitcomb. I am from the United States."

His bearer bowed and he spoke again: "While I spend a few weeks here in Touraine I should like to stop with some family in which I may improve my French. Do you know—?"

The druggist looked from him to me. The stranger pointed to a gilt sign on the door: *English Spoken*. "Don't you speak my language?" he asked in French.

"Oh!" cried the apothecary, with unblushing amusement, "Not I, sir! The customers, if they wish!" He waved the inquirer to me: "This gentleman will converse with you."

Meantime a lady had entered and he turned to her. "Madame la Duchesse!" he called her; a young and beautiful woman, dressed in the height of the fashion, yet visibly sad and careworn.

After a brief conversation Whitcomb and I walked out together and sat down to a glass of wine in a neighboring café. "That lady we saw," I presently found myself remarking, "is your countrywoman."

"Yes," was his only reply, and before long I was further explaining unasked, that she was the daughter of a New York millionaire, had been married only six months, to the Duc de Vauvert, and was dwelling in the chateau of Villandry, about twelve miles away southwestward.

"I know," he said; "I see by to-day's *Figaro* she is suing for a divorce." He showed a kindly, man-of-the-world smile.

"The same old story," we agreed.

"Some of you American boys," I went on, "ought to play us tit-for-tat and take wives from France."

He smilingly shook his head: "Entangling alliances, I am against them all. I've never yet found my ideal, but I am sure she is in America."

It was good to hear the tall, strong fellow speak of "ideals." It chimed like sweet bells from a fine spire. We talked on other themes, mostly mine chosen as tests. "As to boardinghouses," I said—

But he broke in: "I prefer a private family. I have letters—my father is a well-known banker—I am a graduate of Harvard." And so we walked again together until, on the little terrace of my uncle's villa we found my kinspeople.

With them was a former neighbor, Madame Champeaux, who lived now beyond Tours the other way, in Villandry. This good lady was accompanied by a Mademoiselle Lucie Duchesne, a beautiful girl of, say, twenty, with black hair and eyes, who seemed very distinguished, and who, by her fair complexion, I saw was no Tourangelle. "My near neighbor in Villandry," Madame said as we were presented.

Our jolly Madame Champeaux quite appropriated my Yankee. "We have a lovely American lady in Villandry," she said to him, "married to the Duc de Vauvert. Lucie has made her acquaintance, through the sisters in the convent. She—ah," she broke off, "there's the car! Come, Lucie!—I was only on errands, but I longed to see you all."

"Then come again Sunday—for the day," cried my aunt, hurriedly explaining that it would be the votive fête of Sainte-Radegonde. "And bring Mademoiselle Lucie!"

Not many moments later my aunt, who had read my wish, was offering Mr. Whitcomb a room with us. He accepted it with his favorite word, "ideal." At supper, on the terrace, he prompted us to speak of the girl who had hurried away with Madame Champeaux. "Mademoiselle Lucie," replied my aunt, "is from the north of France and has lately lost a beautiful home and both her parents. She lives now with a neighbor of Madame Champeaux, in Villandry, by name, I believe, Blanchard."

The remaining four days of the week we employed in seeing Tours and its vicinity. Soon we were the best friends in the world, while as for my aunt she quite made John one of the family.

Sunday came, a perfect day. At eight, fire-crackers, drums, trumpets, bands and street-organs raged and every house was decked with tricolor flags, bunting and garlands. In the midst of the tumult arrived Madame Champeaux in full glory: a huge hat trimmed with big roses and pinks, and a florid face that radiantly belied a full third of her sixty years.

Lucie was in black even to her parasol, but the morning air had

colored her cheeks too, and her attire, no less than her bearing, bespoke a life habituated to refined elegance. Her hair and eyes, so soft though so dark, were a subduing wonder, and upon John, I saw their effect as he talked with her.

After a *déjeuner á la fourchette* we went to mass in the parish church; a quaint eleventh-century edifice which gave John and Lucie a theme for converse all the way. He and I taking seats directly behind the three ladies, Madame Champeaux's vast hat eclipsed, for me, both altar and priest, and left me to observe how John followed Lucie's every movement.

I began to be filled with a bitter anxiety. Not as a rival. I was already in love with, and engaged to, the sweet maiden who no great while after became my wife. My distress was that I could not believe this rich young man would genuinely seek alliance with an orphan girl in staring want, dependent for her very board and bed on the charity of social inferiors.

At the conclusion of our indoor lunch John sang for us, at the piano, and presently Lucie asked him for a "song of home." She even played its accompaniment. In a rich tenor voice he sang a true hymn to hope as well as home, and when he ended, her smile was bedewed with frank tears of sweetest gratitude.

Then they sang together! The theme was love and the words were still English, of which Lucie's too strict pronunciation made sweet ruin. Yet I never had dreamed the English tongue could be so bewitching, and still less, I think, had John. But, alas! what a cruel snare for a French girl reared in convents! I was glad enough when my aunt proposed that we go out again and ascend the abrupt cliffs which overlook the valley of the Loire between Tours and Vouvray, and soon we were climbing. The young pair being next behind me I now and then overheard their conversation, and already they had got to where they were talking about each other! From the frequency of John's laughter I perceived he had found a vein of humor in his companion of which none of us had been aware.

We ended the day on our terrace, viewing the fireworks on the banks of the Loire. When about nine our visitors took the Villandry car the merest "good-evening" was all John and Lucie said; but I saw, and they knew I saw.

"I kill a turkey next Thursday," was Madame's last backward call. "The young gentleman must come help me do it justice. It is as big as an ostrich!"

All travellers in Touraine visit Azay-le-Rideau, that chateau of Francis I, "a glimmering pearl. . . turned into a king's house." It lies but a step beyond Villandry, and on Thursday, Ostrich Thursday, John and I started for it early on our bicycles, purposing to go there at one stretch and on our return to stop and dine with Madame Champeaux. But the day was hot and we made no haste. At the cross of Taconiere, we took an old road winding up to the plateau of Azay. Halfway up the hillside we came to a small white house over the door of which hung a branch of juniper. At one side, under a broad apple-tree, sat an old man and two elderly women.

"You keep this inn?" I pointed to the juniper.

"If we may call it one, messieurs," said the man, "since the new road has supplanted this old one."

In a clean little dining-room with roses and honeysuckles at its windows, "Give us," I said, "the regular courses; at fifty cents to each of us."

After twenty minutes the two women brought a repast so decently varied and abundant, and served with such grace, such good wines red and white and such coffee, that John and I looked at each other!

"A dollar each," said John, "Let me pay."

The old gentleman reentered, "Messieurs," he flatteringly said, "we trust you are pleased. The bill, altogether is fifty cents."

John stared at me again. Then to the landlord he said, "Take these two dollars, monsieur."

The good soul protested vehemently, but in vain:—

"Then, messieurs, come under our apple-tree! I have an old bottle of Rochecorbon, 1874; the last one. We shall have no better occasion to uncork it!"

With the two old ladies we sat down at a small table, and our host had just opened the treasured bottle and filled the glasses, when who should appear, from the village, but Lucie!

"Then," cried I to our entertainers, "you are the Blanchards!" We were in Lucie's home.

Our honest shame made her laugh, while their tender and happy surprise was to us, in turn, delightful. A flock of birds could hardly have made the old apple-tree more vocal. Presently, telling us we were to meet her and the Blanchards at the ostrich dinner, Lucie left us with the old man. To him my straight-forward John eagerly turned: "How is it, monsieur, that Mademoiselle Lucie lives with you?"

"I was her father's foreman, messieurs, for twenty-five years. The

Duchesnes were the leading manufacturers in wool of northern France. I saw little Lucie in her blue cradle the day after her birth. Her father and mother were the providence of Etréaupont—a small town, messieurs, but the glory of the Oise valley. They had but this one child, but her mother was incomparable, and with all the daughter's education and talents she is an admirable housewife. And her fortitude!—it is without a flaw."

"How came adversity?" persisted John.

"Destiny, messieurs! Who can prevail against destiny? Her father was defrauded by a partner. His aged mother, his two brothers, his wife, all, died within a few months and Lucie was left alone."

"But with wealthy relatives, one may hope?"

"Oh, monsieur, you are young!"

"Or suitors?"

"Ah!—while there was a dowry."

"Of course," mused Whitcomb.

"Coming to your senses!" thought I with grim joy.

More than once I called his attention to the beauties of the chateau, but—"It doesn't interest me," he said, privately, "except as a warning."

In Madame Champeaux's garden we were welcomed by Lucie. I talked with the old man and let the young one who was coming to his senses walk with the dark-eyed girl "to enjoy the landscape."

Alone with her, John boldly asked what plans she had for the future.

"Monsieur," she quietly replied, "I have found a place as a teacher."

He started with pain and could only ask, "Where?"

"At Guise, near my native Etréaupont."

"But will it not distress you to be so near—?"

"Ah, no! Rather I shall delight to see often the town of my birth."

"A table!" cried our hostess; the feast was served, a lovely sight. Our converse held us at the board until ten o'clock. Lucie, in view of her own early departure, offered her adieus to John as final. But he would say only "au revoir."

"But you will soon be in America, monsieur!"

"There will still be ships, mademoiselle."

"Well, then, au revoir!" she yielded, with a change of eye and a lightening of the bosom, which the very Blanchards might have seen.

Mounting our wheels we returned to Sainte-Radegonde in an



evening of stars and nightingales. In days closely following we rode much together, but the charms of Touraine seemed to have palled on my friend, and of Lucie there was never a mention.

Presently, receiving my appointment at the Lyceum of Bourges, I had to go there for a time, and John went to Paris, promising to return for a last day or two with us "before leaving for America."

"Yes! before Lucie leaves for Guise," thought I.

One afternoon what does he do all unaccompanied but bicycle into Entreaupont. Strangers, possible buyers, daily visited the Duchesne manufactory, and he was little noticed. From the huge buildings came no sound. The gates stood ajar, weeds grew in the yard, the window-panes were shattered.

"And where are the owners?" he asked of a sad women who kept the workmen's inn.

"In the cemetery, monsieur! Their twelve hundred operatives had to leave town. Ah! had you beheld those scenes! See that noble mansion. It was bought for a bagatelle—and by a retired butcher!"

John tarried there several days. I was already back in Sainte-Radegonde when he returned to us. As we sat alone in the terrace after supper he asked me if Lucie was still at Villandry. I said she was.

"Mon ami," he suddenly exclaimed, "do you think she would accept my hand in marriage?"

The question seemed so cruelly unfair that I broke into laughter: Ho, ho-o! Out of any hundred Frenchmen ask ninety-seven. My dear sir, she could not *possibly* decline!"

"Then, my dear sir, I cannot *possibly* make the offer!" He sprang to his feet. The smothered [feeling? Cable dropped a word] of weeks of anxiety and incertitude set his heart ablaze. "That's what I was afraid of!" He turned on me: "Is it she, or I, whom you regard as an article of commerce?"

While I stammered, the distress of his doubt quenched his resentment. "Can you suppose," he pleaded, "that *my* offer would give *her* dreams of carriages, gowns, balls, travels, automobiles?"

"No!" said I, putting on the superior air he had cast off, "not at all! But she was reared in luxury, and—"

"Oh! is no one ever so reared in luxury as to be able to live humbly yet happily?" He dropped to a seat: "Until I know she loves me for myself and would take me without a dollar, she shall never again see my face."

"And how are you ever to find it out?"

"My dear boy, *you* are to find out. You French people—I am a stranger to your manners and customs. You must go, for me, to Villandry!"

We stared at each other and I spoke: "You will be trusting a rotten plank."

"Then you will go?"

"Yes, John, you're a grand fellow!"

"Bah! I have only found my—"

"Oh, yes, I know!"

Promptly after breakfast next morning I mounted my wheel for Villandry. As I passed through Tours I bought a copy of an American paper, Paris edition. This day was fine. The world knows that a Frenchman with a chivalrous idea is ready to storm all the capitals of Europe. Yet out in the open country my valor began to leak away appallingly. What, after all, was my plan of strategy? Clearly I must get that from Madame Champeaux. And what if she were not at home? Slow and slower ran my wheel, and at last I sank into the turf to rest.

While I lay heartily wishing myself back in Sainte-Radegonde I felt in my pocket, and drew forth the American newspaper. On its third page an item brought me to my feet in sad amazement. Yet only by littles as I again moved toward Villandry did this piece of news take on all its weight and value. With it and Madame Champeaux I might hope to win out. Yet poor John Whitcomb! Poor John!

But at Madame Champeaux's door I was told she had gone home for a day or two. Sick at heart I faced about for Sainte-Radegonde. Going by the iron gate of the convent, who but Lucie should issue from it! She had been telling the sisters goodbye; she said: "Do you come from Madame Champeaux's? But she is away."

"Well, I am now returning home."

"Ah! but first come and have lunch with us."

I lifted my eyes to my good stars. We walked back side by side. "Yes," she ran on with a lightness my gloom resented, "I go tomorrow." And just then drove by, giving Lucie a faint preoccupied bow, the Duchesse de Vauvert.

"I was at the chateau the other day," said Lucie, "with the Sister Superior. Madame de Vauvert had invited her to see the 'Triomphe de Villandry', a wonderful red rose lately developed by her own gardener. With such roses I can fancy I should never be unhappy."

Her lovely bouyancy contrasted so cruelly with the mood of her

absent lover that I felt angered.

"Do you know John has returned to us?" I asked.

"No!" Her cheeks became rivals to her "Triomphe de Villandry" and the smiling words caught in her throat: "I thought—he was to go to Switzerland and th—thence to America!" Our conversation died and it was a relief to reach the home of the Blanchards.

There, at table, the talk was of Whitcomb. I said he seemed under a faint cloud of gloom and mystery.

"Can he have received bad news?" asked Lucie.

I passed her the newspaper. She glanced through a line or two, gave me a wild look, and in an agitated voice began to translate:—

*R. J. Whitcomb, the Wall street banker who lately lost his entire fortune in wild speculations, committed suicide yesterday at his Broadway hotel. His only son is said to be touring in Switzerland.*

A harrowing silence followed. Then in deep emotion yet with splendid courage Lucie asked, "Are you sure this is our friend?"

"Ah! who can doubt it?" was the general sigh.

"I must ask him!" I said, rising to go. "But it may take time to ask. We are not in his confidence, you know."

"Except me!" broke in Lucie. "My like fate puts me there. Oh, I know what it is to fall asleep in luxury and awake in want and bereavement. Monsieur, "—to me—"I have a thousand francs in savings-bank. I have my mother's jewels, left me after all was paid. He shall have both! Tell him so! He shall have all!"

A parting word was on my breath, when the mayor of the village called and the old people hurried out to negotiate with him for a bit of vineyard. Lucie sat down near a window and offered me a chair.

"Have you told all you know?" she demanded.

I had to droop my head.

"You have, then, the assured fact!" she gasped. "He has lost his father and is also ruined!"

"Really, mademoiselle, all I know is—is—"

"That he has—?"

"A thorn in his heart."

She gazed at me.

"He loved a young girl."

"Oh-h-h! And she is rich, and now—"

"She is far from rich, mademoiselle."

Lucie's breath stopped. We arose. I had presumed too far, yet I stood my ground.

"In love with a poor girl!" she murmured. "And this *poor* girl"—her rising voice quivered—"Now refuses him—because—?"

"She never really encouraged him, mademoiselle. While he was rich he forebore to ask her, for fear—"

"Ah! naturally and right! His family—"

"No, not his family. He feared she—she might—"

"Ah-h-h!—might care most, or too much, for his riches! I see-ee! And has it so turned out?"

"Mademoiselle, how is he to know?" I held her gaze: "Having feared to ask her then, how can he now when he has only poverty to offer?"

Her eyes escaped out of the window, and standing with her back to me she presently said;—

"The girl is American, of course?"

She is a French girl, mademoiselle."

I heard a deep sigh. Lucie leaned weakly on the window-frame.

"Sit down, mademoiselle," I urged, and she did so. "Mademoiselle!" I murmured, my prudence all gone. Mademoiselle! If that girl—were you—?"

She rose and whirled upon me; then she laughed scornfully, though her eyes were full of tears. "I must not keep you longer," she kindly said.

"Ah, but—but—Oh, let me send him to you!"

"Send him?" She kindled again, but again softened: "It is quite too late, monsieur; to-morrow Monsieur Blanchard conducts me to the Tours station to take the eleven-thirty train for Paris and Guise."

"Monsieur Blanchard—assuredly! Yet can you not be there in time to give John half an hour?"

Her smile grew bitter: "Oh, monsieur! how can he, who has just lost everything, want half an hour for a parting already spoken?"

"Mademoiselle! For pity's sake! Have I spoiled all?"

"All what, monsieur?" She nervously laughed. "Make no apologies. But!—she flashed—"on my honor!—never repeat what I have told you about my money or jewels! Yet—present my sincerest sympathies."

On the way home I broke my wheel, and arrived by the car only at dusk. John was out—to meet me on the highroad. As I lay on my couch in the twilight his returning tread came up the staircase.

"Are you ill?" he asked in the doorway.

"I hope so."

"Have you met a repulse?"

"Repulse? I have met Sedan-Waterloo-Trafalgar! Go away! Go! Never again will I attempt—"

"You disheartened Frenchman!" gently said John. "You sink straight to the bottom."

He pressed his inquiries with courageous meekness but I gave him only crumbs of information. How could I do more and be fair to her? "At any rate," he urged, "tell me this: When you asked for the half-hour did she imply say yes, or no?"

"Yes!—No!—Both!—I—I—don't know which!" He sprang up and paced the room.

"Well, that is success enough for one day. Come, let us go to bed happy."

"Happy! With her refusing to see you, and with transatlantic news so dreadful that I cannot press you to speak of it? John Whitcomb what are you hiding from me?"

His tender dignity utterly melted me. "I am in great sorrow," he said; "but you who know that great sorrow and great happiness can fill the same heart at the same time, must not ask me to explain just yet. Good-night. Get your rest."

Next morning we started for Tours, and before eleven o'clock we were there. But when the Villandry car was overdue it had not arrived. Instead, came rumor of an accident to it and of one or two persons injured. Full twenty minutes passed and more, the twenty-eighth, the twenty-ninth and—here came the car! Our two friends stepped from it unharmed but with not an instant to give us. Lucie had barely time to spring aboard her train and the next moment it had disappeared round a curve. The old gentleman broke down and sobbed.

"I fear," he said, "I shall never see her again."

We tried to comfort him, gave him coffee at a hotel near by and conducted him to the Villandry car. Then we strolled along toward Sainte-Radegonde. We were silent long, till John laid a hand on my shoulder: "Mon ami, you have done me a priceless service."

"I have shipwrecked your cause!"

"No," he replied, and by and by added, "I wrote about her last night to my mother."

"How does your mother bear up, John?"

He answered tardily: "Very well. Very bravely." And then he said, "You must let me stay with you till I get her answer, by cable, next week."

Toward the end of the week John and I called one afternoon on Monsieur Blanchard. The branch of juniper was gone. The place was no longer an inn. We found him in an arm-chair under the apple-tree. His face showed suffering and his handgrasp was clammy. He handed us a letter received that morning from Lucie.

John read it to me. She had—"seen once more her dear Entréaupont. I dared not pass near the blessed home," she wrote. "The present owner, no one has learned why, is negotiating its resale. Poor home! . . . But that is all one," she cheerily concluded; "I shall soon be at work," etc.

"At work!" moaned the old man, "for her living! The daughter of my old master!"

"Monsieur," said John, "may I answer this?"

"Ah, have you not trouble enough of your own?"

John admitted he had, but we went to the post-office and he wrote and then read to me,—

*Mademoiselle:—I make myself secretary of all of our friends to tell you there is sore need that you leave your work permanently and return here at once. If you do this brave deed Monsieur Blanchard will owe his life to your goodness. Were other reasons needed to move you I could readily give them, but our knowledge of your noble heart forbids us to suppose this, and we trust you to trust us for the final issues of your self-sacrifice.*

There was more but he stopped. "It sounds absurdly cold and stiff," he said, "doesn't it?"

I thought not, but he would read no farther, and so it went.

In the evening of the following Saturday came the joyous word that Lucie had returned. Sunday, wrote Madame Champeaux, was the fête votive of her village and she invited us all to lunch with her at the Blanchards'.

We found the old man reading his newspaper under the apple-tree, marvellously restored in mind and frame. Lucie, he said, had gone to church with Madame Champeaux. Wherefore as soon as John and I could slip away we strode thither, determined to give our piety full swing.

We stood at the end of the nave, among peasants in blue blouses chatting about their vineyards. Lucie was in a pew near by. A golden sunbeam from a stained window formed a halo about her head, and she wore a face serene with inward joy.

We were back at the Blanchards' when she and Madame Cham-

peaux arrived. The lovely girl was more lovely than ever. She bowed to me with particular kindness, as if she saw I needed her smile. The older ladies went into the house. Monsieur Blanchard and my uncle drifted to the kitchen garden. I ascended to an arbor at a corner of the vineyard, not guessing that thence I could still see John and Lucie under the apple-tree.

There they sat, this golden September morning, whispering together—if the ear of my fancy told me true—the immortal song of love. More than once Lucie dried her eyes; but John, in an attitude of loving reverence, seemed to say,—

“My own, these are your last tears.”

They arose, and while Lucie entered the house he came slowly up to meet me. But down, down sank my heart as he came, for not a smile shone from him. Was it only his rayless Yankee way of taking unspeakable joy? I tried to hope it.

“Come to the telegraph office,” he murmured.

We went in silence. I secretly prayed he might be about to cable home, but he wrote only,—

*Raquin, Notaire, Etreaupont: Agissez promptement.*

Returning, we found Lucie under the apple-tree, charming, lustrous, yet wearing a maiden inscrutibility as baffling as his. At lunch Madame Champeaux and Monsieur Blanchard sat at either end of the table, and Madame, as usual, did most of the talking. John and Lucie, on the host's right and left, were but two of us, and a serene vivacity was the rule until, with the dessert, the gladdened old man prepared to open a bottle of sparkling wine. Then John laid a touch on his arm and we all looked that way.

“Are we to have a toast?” my uncle inquired.

“Oh! if Monsieur Whitcomb will propose it?”

John gratefully bowed; then drew forth one, two, three documents, dropping slow speeches between them: “I cannot, dear friends, offer this toast until I—make evident certain facts of which,—as far as I know, even you, mademoiselle,—are ignorant. I wish the more to do this,” he went on, “as of late I have let mistaken inferences distress you—and even you, mademoiselle, to my advantage.”

“Blessed be God!” cried my aunt across to her husband, “that means John is not, then,—”

But Lucie fervidly broke in,—“You are not, then, in affliction?”

“I am. My only sister, the angel of our home, died four weeks ago. But here is a letter”—he passed it to her—“from a lifelong friend of

both my parents, Chief Justice of our state, naming my father as one of its most honored citizens."

We sighed our compassion; but Lucie, with eyes deep in the document, gave a start, read aloud, "Ralph H. Whitcomb!" met John's gaze and blushed.

"Not R. J.!" cried two or three of us.

"No," was his quiet reply. "In America we have as many Whitcombs as in France you have Duponts or Durands. With the unfortunate Wall street banker we were neither related nor acquainted. We are under no financial stress. This, Monsieur Blanchard, is a letter from my banker, stating that in my own right I have—you see the figures—a competency."

The aged reader's gasp, and his widening eyes, provoked our tearful smiles and we did not at first observe that Lucie's gaze was resting steadfastly in John's with her tears pouring down unhindered.

"And here, mademoiselle," he said with a hint of tremor, "is my father's own letter saying that he and my mother lovingly trust all to me in a matter of which they seem to have given, as well as got, information in advance of mine, through some source un—"

"Monsieur!" called Madame Champeaux as she rose. "Unknown, yes! unknown to all this innocent company. I am that source, thanks to my blessed friend—and yours if you but knew it—the Duchesse de Vauvert! Ah, had it not been for her, my beloved boy, you never should have come here a second time!"

Lucie was on her feet aghast, but her words and the glowing apostrophe with which her lover claimed her were drowned in our mirth and applause. Then John rose and bade us drink—"To Lucie Duchesne, my promised bride if this good man consents."

With one note of approval all our glasses went up save two. A hand of the old man lay on the fair wrist that held Lucie's uplifted cup, and one of hers rested on the hand that held his. He spoke:—

"Is it thy whole heart's glad choice?"

"Only if it be thine!" Ravishingly she held his look. His glass rose trembling, and again she went blind with tears. Yet her glass followed, and we drank.

We had but half relaxed into gaiety when John's voice again commanded: "One toast more! Many a happy year yet to Monsieur Blanchard, henceforth life-custodian of my love's first wedding-gift, just purchased by telegraph, her childhood's home at Etreapont. If she wills it our wedding shall be there."



Even after the overwhelmed old man had beautifully responded, our hearts were too big to make merry at once. Even our valorous Madame Champeaux sobbed amid her laughter.

“Stop!” she cried; “hear, all of you!” and we pledged a long life, ever brightening, to Madame de Vauvert.

When John and Lucie took ship at Havre, whose name should we find on the passenger list but Madame de Vauvert’s! She had obtained her divorce.

A fortnight later, by a letter of arrival, I learned that the winds, though fair, had been a risk enough to excuse the weary lady from table and deck, but that on the final morning, in the harbor of New York, while John was explaining to Lucie the chief landmarks, a steward came saying there was a pot of roses in their room. They found a “Triomphe de Villandry” in full bloom and with it these lines:—

*To both of you my tender congratulations. I beg Mrs. Whitcomb to accept this souvenir of my garden. I had another quite as fair; but yesterday it was broken and to-day is withered because headlessly I had failed to provide for it the right kind of stay.*

“Tarryawhile,”  
Northampton, 1907.

## NOTES

\*Generally we have allowed Cable’s original spellings and syntax to remain untouched. We have, however, silently emended certain accent marks for consistency’s sake, and in one spot where he or his typist omitted a clarifying phrase we have supplied a notation.

<sup>1</sup> Interesting glossing of Cable and the international story appears in Edward Eggleston, “Old Creole Days,” *North American Review*, 129 (1879), 516-517; rpr. *Critical Essays on George Washington Cable*, ed. Arlin Turner (Boston, 1980), pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Arlin Turner, *George Washington Cable: A Biography* (Durham, N. C., 1956), pp. 237-242; Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *George W. Cable: The Life and Times of a Southern Heretic* (New York, 1969), pp. 194-197.

Cable’s manuscript (actually a typescript of forty-five pages) for “Triomphe De Villandry” is held in Special Collections, Tulane University, whence comes permission for using it. Courtesies permitting publication also come from George W. Cable’s heirs: William H. Cary, Jr., Bolton; and Anne Cary Harkless, Newton Highlands, Massachusetts. We owe thanks as well to Wilbur E. Meneray, Head of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Tulane University; to his predecessor, Ann S. Gwynn; and to Thelma S. Turner, Durham, North Carolina. Professor Fisher wishes to acknowledge special gratitude to Steve Rayburn, Kelly Cannon, and Harry M. Bayne.