

Le Havre, France  
June 12, 1830

*PERSONAL LETTER from Alexander Declouet in Le Havre,  
France, to his aunt, Mrs. Christopher De l'Homme*<sup>12</sup>

My dear and good aunt,

At last, I have arrived! How pleasant it is to take a pen to write to you! My heart is filled with joy, I am bursting out with gratitude (and although I am not very pious) I cannot refrain from thanking God for having protected me and having guided me safely and soundly in the midst of so many dangers and over bottomless abysses which seem to threaten a man with swallowing him at any moment to punish him for his boldness. Oh! How many emotions did I feel when after a 35 day crossing, I put my feet on the ground for the first time. I was dizzy, I could hardly believe my eyes, wherever I turned some new object came into view. Finally, I thought it was a delightful dream. I believed I was being carried away into a new world where everything for me looked different. But so many attractions dazzle you only for a moment. A thought came to trouble this enchantment. I thought of you, my dear aunt; if she knew I thought, that I have arrived, she would be very happy, but perhaps in the very moment when I am in the height of happiness, she believes that I have been swallowed by the sea, perhaps her imagination pictures me in her eyes like a miserable shipwrecked man tossed by winds and tempests, perhaps she mourns over my death, the memory of a beloved person or perhaps, finally, she is the prey to the anguish of sorrow or illness. Such thoughts, dear aunt, followed me everywhere. I know you too well, I know your motherly love for me, your anxiety when I am far from you and your extreme tenderness and I am quite sure that you have spent more than a day and a night giving way to the saddest and the most somber thoughts. I love you so much more for this, my dear aunt. I do not believe that you have such a bad opinion of your dear nephew. What! You who cherishes me, who adores me, who lives only for me, how could I not love you? Oh! Great God, what a monster I would be, I would not deserve to be alive! But God knows

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<sup>2</sup>Original letter on file at the Louisiana Room, University of Louisiana at Lafayette

my heart. You also know it, but you don't know it well enough. You cannot know all the friendliness, all the tenderness it contains for you. I am not demonstrative, I look cold and indifferent, but, my dear aunt, a smoldering fire is often the most burning and lasting. It does not sparkle, it does not evaporate into flames and smoke, but it continues always to burn. Its heat is concentrated and for this reason is stronger and more fiery. But I realize that I am on my third page and I have not given you yet any little detail in reference to my voyage. I already wrote to you when I was on the ocean through the intermediary of a ship we encountered which was going to Philadelphia. I could write to you then only two or three lines. It seems to me that I was speaking to you about the ship's captain and the passengers' list. I have only to repeat what I already told you. The Captain is remarkable for his navigation's skill but it is not the only thing which distinguishes him the most. His kindness, obligingness, his amiability for us during the crossing deserve praises to such an extent I do not feel myself able to do justice. All the passengers had a proper attitude and a spirit of harmony reigned among us during all the voyage. Mr. Tessier, my Mentor, had for me kindnesses you could not imagine. The more I know him, the more I like him. We had an almost miraculous crossing considering the season. We left the Balise May 6 at 8 in the morning and we entered Le Havre June 9 at 10 in the morning. I would give you a little description of that city if I had more time and more paper. It will be for some other time. Once in Paris and quite settled, I shall write to you letters which will bore you because of their length. I want to relate to you all my little adventures and all that I saw taking the chance of making you yawn. I am at the Hotel de l'Europe, it is one of the best in the city. On the subject of hotels, I shall tell you more another time. We are leaving tomorrow at noon for Paris. We will go by steamboat up to Rouen where we will spend a few days and from there to Paris by coaches. I have only a little piece of paper left to tell you goodbye. Dear aunt Catiche <sup>3</sup> must consider the letters written to you as if they were written to herself. I am kissing you and also all my dear little cousins. Remember me to dear uncle and also to Mr. Lastrapes. I shall write to Sinclair and to Catiche when I reach Paris.

Goodbye, my dear aunt, forgive this school boy's letter as it looks like one, my scribbling can hardly be forgiven. Please, do not show my letters to strangers.

Goodbye again, believe in the eternal attachment of your nephew.

Alexander Declouet

I forgot to tell you that I went to Bordeaux with Mr. Tessier. I think of spending there

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<sup>3</sup>Declouet Lastrapes

about three weeks. Greetings to Clere, uncle Neuville <sup>4</sup>, Benoit <sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>Declouet

<sup>5</sup>St. Clair