

Paris, France  
June 27, 1830

*PERSONAL LETTER from Alexander DeClouet to his aunt,  
presumably Josephine DeClouet de l'Homme*

My dear and good aunt,

I have been in Paris already for a week and it is the first time that I take my pen to write to you. Perhaps, you may think that I am indifferent and I admit myself that remaining 8 days in Paris without writing to you is delaying too long. I do not see how I could have done that and I am ashamed to admit it. However, my dear aunt, if you knew how Paris is, I do not believe that you could blame me and you are not blaming me either. I am almost sure of it, you are too good, too kind for you dear nephew, you love him too much to be able to blame him and reproach him for such a failure. Charge me with a little laziness, if you want, but do not go any farther. You would reach an oversensitive point. You know what I mean, I already spoke about it in a letter written to you from Le Havre. I will not bring that subject any more, I don't think it is necessary.

And now, I will speak about other things. I believe that you must be curious to find out some details about my voyage and the places I have seen. And as Le Havre is the first city I have seen, I shall start from there. Before beginning, I must be allowed to go back about two leagues at sea as it is from far and when entering it that this port offers the most beautiful sight. I do not know if it is the joy one naturally feels when seeing land after having been over a month without seeing anything except the dome of the sky above one's head and the abysses of the sea below one's feet which caused an illusion in me but it seemed to me that this land of France was an enchanted land. What from far appeared like a mass of clouds, as we were approaching, unfolded into gracious hills covered by the richest greenery. You can imagine with what sensations I came down on such a land. But soon, my sensations changed. As soon as we touched the ground, we were met by waiters and porters rushing to us, each one more eager than the other to offer his services, bringing such a confusion as to make your head spin. Then came the policemen asking for passports

and the custom-house officers to examine your trunks; there was no end to all that and I assure you that it takes at least two days to get rid of such people. Although you may be in a hurry, you may have to wait two or three days on account of Messieurs the custom-house officers, but such details must not be very interesting to you. In France, like everywhere else, there are pleasant and unpleasant doings. However, on the whole, you should not complain. One is served like a prince and with money you can obtain anything.

My first dinner gave me a great deal of pleasure. I ate the most delicious dishes accompanied by soft music. The minute we sat at the table, a well-dressed young girl entered the dining room with a harp. She played and sang several tunes. Then, she walked around the table holding a little plate for each guest to deposit an offering. This is usual in France, but it was new for me and I enjoyed it. I am almost at the end of my second page and I told you practically nothing. I will end as soon as possible speaking about Le Havre as I guarantee you it is not the most beautiful sight in France. However, many things deserve the traveller's attention. First, the women are horrible looking. How many times when I saw those frightful faces and huge paws did I not think of the beautiful Creoles I left in my dear homeland. The comparison I established between them and French women made me very proud to be Louisianian. But, let us leave aside the poor Havraises and let us see if we cannot find something more beautiful and more interesting, this, I assure you is not very difficult. The Ingouville hill which rises above the city of Le Havre is of a rare beauty. I even doubt that anywhere in France one can find a place which offers a more lively view and presents sites and points more picturesque and romantic than this one. It is there at sunset that all Le Havre society comes promenading, it is there also that on holidays peasants and workers come for a diversion from their tasks, animating each landscape by their rejoicing and by a thousand different games they invent for their recreation. You cannot imagine the beauty of this hill, I wish I could describe it to you but it would take a poet to do so and I am very far from being one. This hill, which everyone admire is about all the beauty to be seen at Le Havre. However, there are many other things which (although not being very fine) attract the stranger's attention. The fortifications, for example, are curious. They are very thick stone walls which surround the whole city, at their foot a thirty feet wide by twelve feet deep canal has been dug. The basins also are curious as, because of the tide when it is low, all the ships are on dry dock which looks most extraordinary. After this, I believe I would be at a loss to find anything else in Le Havre worth mentioning. I remained there only three days and, on June 14, Mr. Tessier and I left on a steamboat for Rouen. Any foreigner travelling through France ought to take this trip. I don't think anyone can find anything more beautiful than the banks of the Seine from Le Havre to Rouen. Nature and art united to ornate and embellish the banks. On each side, you see well cultivated rich lands, old castles of ancient lords, superb antique churches which are an evident and permanent witness of crimes and abominations of former priests. I am saying this because I noticed that all the private houses which were rather old had an awful structure while churches were built of carved stones and showed an elegance proving they had been raised at the expense and sweat of the poor unfortunate who hardly had a miserable roof to protect

them from the summer's burning heat or the winter's biting cold. But I am entering here a discussion which must not please you. Mr. Tessier is asking for my letter to send it to Le Havre and I must leave you. Another time, I shall continue the description of my trip up to Paris. I arrived there in June 17 and the day after tomorrow I shall leave for Bordeaux. I am sorry about my uncle Brognier's <sup>1</sup> absence but, at least, I shall see his family. I shall stay in Bordeaux until September, then, I shall return to Paris to start studying. In order not to waste my time, I shall take in Bordeaux, music, fencing and dancing teachers so that, once back in Paris, I shall be able to pursue the study of such talents with more ease and pleasure.

I have seen Mr. Lanoix and his wife. They were very friendly. I also saw Mr. Ferry and his son. Mr. Ferry is still the same. Ferry grew up but he will be a small man. Goodbye, my dear aunt, remember me to my dear uncle <sup>2</sup>, to Mr. Lastrapes <sup>3</sup> and to Sinclair. A thousand kisses for my dear Catiche <sup>4</sup>, she must not be angry if I do not write to her. When I am well settled, I shall try to satisfy everybody. Every other week, I shall write to one of you.

Farewell, I hardly have the place to tell you I love you and cherish you with all my heart. Farewell, farewell, write to me often,

Alexander Declouet

---

<sup>1</sup>Declouet

<sup>2</sup>Christopher De l'Homme

<sup>3</sup>Charles Henry

<sup>4</sup>Declouet Lastrapes