

1881
June 17

PERSONAL LETTER from Edmond Jabet in Limoges, France, to his
cousin, Alexander Declouet, Jr., in St. Martinville.

Limoges, June 17, 1881

My dear Cousin,

By the same mail, you will receive an announcement of the death of my dear brother-in-law, Leonce de Salles, carried away by a tumor in the abdomen, leaving his dear wife, his children and all of us in a terrible despair. He spent his life doing good work and God calling him gave him the reward saved for a chosen few. Perhaps, my dear Alexandre you will remember him although about twenty years separate us from the time you gave us the pleasure to come to visit us at Limoges. It is in this same hotel that our poor sick man died after being ill for two months.

What happened to you since that time, my dear Cousin? August Declouet (our cousin) who corresponded with you occasionally gave us some of your news. Your excellent father (Alexander Declouet) sent a little letter to my mother (Clarise Declouet Jabet) in 1872 giving good news about all of you. He had had the good idea to join to his letter his photograph that we keep carefully. Although August in his correspondance with you kept you in touch with all of us, I shall tell you briefly that since 1860 many things happened in our family and our country. During this terrible war of Secession, our thoughts often crossed the Ocean toward the United States and toward this French land of Louisiana embroiled into all the horrors of a fratricidal war, the most frightening war of modern times. Our wishes and prayers were with you but Providence's decrees are mysterious and we must accept them.

A few years later, our poor France, who had been victorious in the

Speaking about more personal affairs, I shall tell you, my dear Alexander, that in 1872, I married my cousin, Miss Chatard, whose mother was my father's (Joseph Jabet) younger sister. After a voyage of several months in Italy and Sicily, we returned to the fatherly home that we never left except for a trip each year. We live in Limoges for 5 or 6 months and the rest of the year the country where my father built a large house, large enough for all of us and where we can receive all the Declouet's from Bordeaux who come yearly to spend a few weeks with us. My wife and I had the happiness to keep our fathers and mothers and we have two little girls, 6 and 8 years old bringing plenty of noise in the house but my father and my mother do not complain about it. Tell your
(your father's first cousin)
excellent father that my children's grandmother is still the same good Clarisse / as in olden time. If her beautiful black hair has changed, her heart remained the same and years have not diminished the treasure of kindness filling her soul. For about 15 years, my father retired from business, he became a farmer. The spinning mill he owned on the banks of the river Vienne made up part of my dowry and I rented it in order to live with my parents in their property located 8 kilometers from Limoges. I think I had the pleasure to take you there when you came to Limousin. Since that time and before my marriage I was very busy with trips to Europe and above all with hunting chase. Our section is filled with boars and wolves and for the last three years I led a war against them. I gave up this

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sport because of my health, after a congestion, I have been rather ill and my sight was impaired. I hope that God will save my eyes so that I can use for my studies the time formerly spent in strenuous riding. Because, I should tell you, my dear Alexandre, that although I used to be a very mediocre college student, following some voyages, I was caught with such a violent passion for studying that now I devote to it most of my time. However, you would be mistaken a great deal if you came to imagine that I am a scholar. I like to travel so I study the countries I visited in our little Europe and my mind leaving our old world, I read works published about America and especially about North America where memories dear to a French person are not lacking. I own many of the books about Canada and it is really for me a good fortune to see, thanks to Catholic priests, customs and language of our country still kept alive, in spite of more than a century separation from this beautiful colony.

How many memories are awakened in a French heart by the name of Denys who, in 1524, visited the St. Laurent, de J. Cartier who took possession of it, of Laroque who defeated Charlebourg, of Champlain who founded Quebec and finally the name of Cheroque Montcalm who while giving his life for his country could not preserve its colony. Through the mist of two centuries, I see Jolliet and Marquette leaving Quebec and reaching the Arkansas's junction and a few years afterward, the courageous La Salle, leaving Canada, reaching the Gulf of Mexico and amidst a thousand of obstacles following the great river Mississippi. The bold traveller must have passed quite near the plains where, later on, St. Martinville rose. It is with a certain pride that one observes, while crossing Canada from East to West, according to Milton Cheadle and other contemporary travellers that only the French metis could serve as guides to

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explorers through this vast territory where four fifths of the population speak French although having been separated from their homeland for 120 years. It is believed at large in Europe that this province is destined to be part of the States of the Union after its conquest, then, the North and the South of your huge country will be occupied by provinces having a French origin, from the banks of Hudson Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. I told you that I was reading many publications about America. I shall end this too long letter by telling you that my mind always followed the North Pole's expeditions of Tyson, of G. Nares, Markham arriving on l'Alerte 399 miles and a half from the Pole.

Going back to the American continent I went across it in every way with de Lamothe, Hubner, de Beauvoir, Claude Janet and newspapers and reviews. I visited Cuba with H. Piron and finally recently followed an adventurous Yankee McBishop. I embarked in a paper canoe to go from Quebec to the Gulf of Mexico after having rowed for 2500 miles. You must understand the interest I take to the United States where so many memories of my dear mother's family are attached. So, I have made up my mind if our republic's regime continues to oppress and attack the good Catholics and deprive them of their dearest rights and liberties I have made up my mind with my family to cross the Ocean and go to be naturalized American of the United States.

My cousin, Ernest Jabet, son of Victorine (Declouet), my mother's younger sister, from the ages of 15 to 30 went across the five parts of the world. He admires a great deal the United States and wants to settle there with his wife and four children; unfortunately, he had neither father nor mother to keep him on the old continent.

How many apologies I have to offer you for such a long personal letter

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which has no interest for you! How much time I lost before asking you, your excellent parents, your brother and your sisters' families and all our relatives and connections in Louisiana. Once a year, we go to spend a few days near our uncle (Joseph Alexander) Declouet in Bordeaux. They return our visit and quite often our relatives from the bank of the Mississippi are the subject of our conversations on the banks of the Vienne or the Gironde. During our trips to (your mother's first cousin) Paris, we see Miss Claire Nee/who lives retired in a convent. Please, my dear cousin, let me hear from you. I shall read with the greatest interests all details which might seem insignificant about you and yours. Tell me about your occupations, your life, about all the persons that compose your family. I shall take a great interest about all you will tell me, especially about your health and about the managing of your fine properties you may not have been able to cultivate completely since the War of Secession.

Speak to me about the last elections, your State's rule and its civil servants, of the crops, presented as beautiful through correspondence, especially cotton. What do they think in your section about the opening of Panama Isthmus undertaken by de Lesseps. Will your country get some benefits from this? Has Chinese immigration entered much into Louisiana? Can it replace the former black population?

Cayol, near Limoges, June 21. My lengthy scribbling begun at Limoges is ending in our property where we are settled until Christmas. The countryside is fine and fresh in this region where there is so much water. I do prefer this sojourn to the city, so I say with an English author: "You seem to acquire a new life when after several months residence in town you find yourself in the midst of fields..."

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Excuse me if I do not write correctly in spite of the English governess who supervises my young daughters and teach them the language. I have only elementary notions.

At the present time, they are organizing in France subscriptions to help Quebec's fire victims as a large part of the French Quarter has been destroyed.

The newspapers must have told you about the American horse, Foxhall's, victory in the Grand Prize of Paris. I applauded with enthusiasm.

I am leaving you, my dear Alexandre, renewing my apologies for having taken too much of your time making you decipher my scribbling. My father, my mother, my wife and my poor sister (Marie Jabet de Salles), a widow since last month, join me to send to all of you our very affectionate and devoted feelings coming from the far away old province of Limousin.

Your affectionate cousin,

Edmond Jabet

P. S. Write to me: Limoges, 3 Place des Bancs or Chateau Loyal, near Limoges.