More than thirty years ago information was brought from France to Louisiana to the effect that a large demand for the skins of alligators had sprung up in Paris. Occasional attempts to utilize this material had been made since the commencement of the century, but the alligator-hide industry had not materially advanced up to a date measured back by three decades.

The demand noted must have been inspired by some new application of the product in question. Whatever its cause, it proved to have been but a passing fancy among the Crispins of the French capital. It suddenly died out after a few thousand hides had been shipped from Louisiana. The alligator hunters, as a class, are not distinguished for their rapid acquisition of information. This fact I mean to demonstrate more clearly further on. They had been slowly convinced of the value of the products to be derived from this new pursuit, and consequently had been dilatory in reaping the harvest before them. Thus, after they had once started to reap it, when occasion required, they were also late in learning, or realizing, that their hard-earned spoils had lost their market value. They finally, under protest, appreciated the situation, and stopped their work of wholesale slaughter after the entirely unnecessary sacrifice of many thousand poor saurians.

During the civil war the supply of ordinary leather in the South was chiefly held by army contractors. Barefooted soldiers marched and fought in the Southern armies. Many of the women and children at home were unshod. There was of necessity another raid made upon the alligators down in the "Gulf States." They were again, by hundreds, slaughtered for their hides. But the alligator has meat, too. Raw, it is of a rich pinkish-white hue; in good condition, it is well streaked with layers of firm white fat. Bacon and beef were even scarcer at that time than leather. Finally those who began by hunting them for their skins actually learned to like their flesh. In Louisiana and the southern parts of other "Gulf States" this meat was, among the lower classes, largely used as an article of diet during the closing years of the late war. In Louisiana the taste then acquired has in many instances outlived the promptings of necessity. There are many people living in that State to-day who consider steaks cut from the thickest part of an alligator's tail as an especial bonne bouche.

With the cessation of hostilities, and the consequent free circulation of beef, bacon, and leather, the saurians were again left to enjoy a period of comparative repose. Their rest was, however, only temporary, as a few years later fickle Paris again called them from the modest seclusion to which they had willingly retired.

The French demand for their hides has grown apace. Now the scaly epidermis of the reptiles is manufactured wholesale into boots, shoes, trunks, traveling-bags, gun-cases, reticules, wallets, portemonnaies, and into every other form of objects in the construction of which leather composes the whole or a part. It seems difficult to understand why this material should supplant common leather except for some unaccountable freak of fashion.

As a matter of course an immense demand for the article has been created, and a large number of alligators are slaughtered every year. The market value of their hides is quoted in the daily commercial reports of the New Orleans papers. It is within bounds to say that, in Louisiana, more than five hundred men are busily engaged in killing and skinning alligators.

Before describing the alligator hunters, it would be well perhaps to give a short account of the habits and habitat of the reptiles themselves. It is probable that the name of our saurian was bestowed upon him by the old Spanish colonists, who termed him "el lagarto," the lizard.

The reptiles are found in every tidal bayou, dead lake and lagoon, and gloomy cypress swamp of Lower Louisiana. Their omnipresence in the region roundabout caused the first representative government of New Orleans to adopt the reptile as the chief figure in the seal of the city. For lack of proper engraving talent in Louisiana the authorities ordered the seal to be executed in Paris. The French artist cut a couchant crocodile basking on a bank, with hills in the background. The alligator is markedly different from his Oriental cousin; and New Orleans is ninety miles distant from the nearest hill; hence the seal was inconsistent. Yet it served its official purpose, and to this day is duly attached to the formal mu-
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Principal acts and contracts of the southern metropolis. Eminent scientists had stated, I believe, that only one variety of the genus alligator existed in North America. It is now recognized, however, that there are two distinct varieties in Louisiana. One of these is extremely thick and stout for its length, smooth on the back, and covered with small octagonal scales about the size of a nickel coin. The other is knobby in the head and neck, with a horny, serrated back and rude diagonal-shaped scales; and its body is proportionately longer than that of the first. Doubting that these distinctions were simply sex peculiarities, in the summer of 1875 I called the attention of the late Professor E. P. Fontaine to the subject. Professor Fontaine was a distinguished student of natural history, having devoted a lifetime to studying the fauna of the Southern States. On being furnished with the two specimens, he immediately pronounced the reptiles as belonging to markedly different classes. He was at that time busily engaged in preparing a work in natural history, illustrated by his own hand. He expressed great pleasure at the prospect of correcting another of the many errors made in the classification of animal life in North America.1

I have seen numerous specimens of our saurian to longer than an ordinary lead pencil; this was in the season of their hatching. I have also seen a few living specimens about sixteen feet in length. In the autumn of 1875 I obtained for the lateEffingham Lawrence, Member of Congress, and Commissioner from Louisiana to the Centennial Exhibition, the dried skin of an alligator which, after at least fifteen inches had been cut from the snout and skull, and ten inches from the end of the tail, still measured ten feet ten inches in length. Allowing more than six inches for shrinkage in drying, this monster of his kind, alive, would have measured more than twenty feet. He was killed in the lower part of Bayou Laboucre. Probably the largest alligator ever seen in Louisiana was killed in a small lake on the plantation of H. J. Felts in Concordia Parish. According to the statement of Mr. Felts, now of Baton Rouge, this specimen measured twenty-two feet in length. The great reptile had, however, a remarkable figure, and was famous for miles around, having destroyed numerous logs and hounds in the neighborhood of his retreat. He had been formerly, from the number of ineffectual shots fired at him, almost unapproachable.

1 The Century Dictionary (1890) says: "A true American crocodile. Crocodylus americanus, long eared with the alligator, has lately been found in Florida and the West Indies."—Extrait.

able. Finally he fell a victim to a long shot fired from a Mississippi rifle in the hands of Mr. Feltus, who had perished several miles away and having been the greatest loser by his depredations. The hide of this reptile was towed to the bank by a boat, and the strength of a pair of mules and a stout rope held it ashore, where the measurement was made with the result noted above.

In the marshes of Louisiana the reptile, before it lays its eggs, scrapes together a pile of dead grass and peaty soil about eighteen inches high, or just high enough to escape tidal flow. On this mound the eggs are deposited, and after being covered by a layer of the same material, are left to be hatched by the heat of the sun. These eggs are a little smaller than goose-eggs, and are enclosed in a tough, leathery, cream-white covering in place of a shell. The female appears to linger near the nest in adjacent waters. A "creole" negro can hardly be induced to rob one of these men as the race seems to have a traditional superstition that one of the eggs contains a small bel, whose sounding will call up the "monster alligator" and stimulate her to acts of unprovoked ferocity and frenzied power.

In the uninhabited wilderness our saurian preys upon any wild quadruped it can catch, swimming in or drinking from the waters of its retreat; or it feeds upon fowl, fish, crabs, or, even at times on the bulbous roots of flags and other marsh grasses. In an inhabited region their taste acquires an Oriental improvement. In a measure they become comparatively epicurean. Once having tasted canary flesh, they prefer dogs to any other diet, indeed alligators are death to hounds across their favorite bayous in the chase. Old houndsmen learn to appreciate at its work a most unmoved partiality, and will never swim a bayou instead by their foes. Young dogs are not, however, always so well served; for their slavery and tameness render them easier to dare the known perils in the case; thus the finest kinds of young alligators in this State have been destroyed by alligators.

It is even alleged that the reptiles have a penchant for negro children. It has been thought a direct proof of this grave accusation; though I have never been a witness of a case that a large alligator did not persistently pursue and drive to the bank negro boys bathing in the waters of this region, and have never seen any such hostilities directed against white youth in the same pandemic. A negro man fishing from a raft of logs fastened to Myrtle Creek during the heat of summer, about forty years ago, while dangling his leg in the current of the Mississippi River, was inflicted, but though his death was charged to the alligator race, no reptile of the kind ever rose to the surface of the water near at hand to confirm the veracity of the report against its tribe. However, in that region its strange preference for colored humanity is traditional among all classes. On the other hand, governed by a presumed law of repulsiveness, negroes are often very fond of alligator. It would be very near the whole truth to state that there is not in Lower Louisiana a "creole" negro of mature age who is not intimately acquainted with the flavor of alligator meat. Many not only deem it delicious, but consider it a panacea for many of the diseases to which humanity falls heir, particularly for rheumatism and cognate affections. Our saurian shows a decided aversion to tainted or pruriat meat, notoriously spurns carrion floating down the currents of the Mississippi, and would probably even despise game mellowed up to the perfection of creole gastronomy.

In the early fall of 1880 I started from the Myrtle Grove sugar plantation in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, on a hunting expedition in the tidewater wilderness of marshes, bayous, and lagoons near the Gulf Coast. The means of conveyance used was a fine Louisiana pirogue, just large enough to hold two hunters and their camp equipage, and light enough for two men to carry long distances when occasion required. When loaded she reared

Landing a Monster Alligator.
one of the numerous race of descendants of French, Spanish, or West Indian slaves so nu-
merous in Louisiana. He was brought from Virginia to this parish in Louisiana when a lit-
tle boy. In 1835 his "apprenticeship" ceased, and Tom now "paddles his own canoe," and
mine too—for a consideration.

From the back of the plantation, going south-
est through a three-mile canal, we quietly paddled into a still bayou in the great tidewater
wilderness, on our way to a large stream called Bayou Gros Loure by professional hunters.
This is a large, deep "dead bayou," about ten miles from Barataria Bay. It is a part of the
chain of the Bayous Dupont and Barataria leading from Barataria Bay up to the old
"Portage" of the Lafitte Brothers, in Jefferson Parish on the Mississippi River, four miles
above the New Orleans of 1812.

There are several bayous leading from the
numerous bays and inlets on the Gulf Coast
up to Barataria Bayou, fifteen miles below New Orleans; hence the difficulty of the
revenue officers intercepting Lafitte, or his asso-
ciates, who brought their contraband goods
in small boats through any one of the dead
waterways of this labyrinth. They were thus
safely delivered near the "Portage," or scat-
tered among the confederated smugglers along
the river below the city; for all of the exten-
sive plantations in this region were, and are,
connected with the noted bayou system by their
large drainage canals. In fact, many of these
same plantations thus obtained a con-
siderable part of their slave labor from the
enterprises of Lafitte and his band. When
unmolested Lafitte carried his goods up from
Barataria Bay, first to the westward through
Bayou St. Denis, thence through two lakes
and an unnamed bayou to the Bayou Du-
port, and from this into the Bayou Bara-
taria, and up that stream to the place of
debarkation above the old town. Rigoal,
Jean Lafitte's principal lieutenant, was often
in charge of these small cargoes of contraband
goods.

The writer has hunted in these same tide-
water bayous with Rigoal, a grandson, and
with other descendants of the veteran smuggler
and gallant warrior of 1800–15. I believe Ri-
goual lives today on Grand Isle, near the
mouth of Barataria Bay.

The sun was fast descending in the mellow
October sky when Tom, tired probably of the
monotonous though melodious "drift" of his
paddle, pointed some distance ahead a spa-
cially promising place on the banks of the bayou
as a very convenient place to camp. These
mounds are peculiarities of the region, and its
most striking feature. They are composed of
immense piles of small shells shaped like clam-
shells, but it is not now possible to find in these
waters a living mollusk of their apparently de-
parted kind. The mounds rise like cases in a
desert waste of reeds and rank grasses where
growing from a marsh periodically submerged
by the tide, reach on every side in limitless beds
of faded green and yellow to the distant hori-
zon. This mound was densely shaded by a
group of live-oaks festooned with pendent
Spanish moss. Beneath the oaks was scattered
in clumps and clusters, a grove of stunted
palmettos, some of whose trunks were gin-
tequally human in shape, and whose fronds
of dark-green foliage, reaching out broad and
stiff, resembled leaves of painted metal. As
the sun was setting, the dewy waste around
this mound seemed more desolate than a sea
without a sail.

When the boat's bow grunted on the sloping
shells at the shore we jumped out, fastening
her light painter to the gnarled roots of an
isolated live-oak standing near the water's
edge. The bank of shells ascended in an even
incline, about a hundred feet broad, up to the
main group of live-oaks and palmettos. Be-
tween these and the bayou the mound was
white and bare of herbage. Near the center
of this open space there was a dark spot, where
a few charred fagots and a little heap of ashes
and calcined shells remained from a fire which
had apparently done out a long time since. A
few yards to the left of the remains of this fire
appeared a deep excavation in the mound, with
no expected heap at its edge. About twenty
feet to the right of the charred sticks were
seven or eight long skeletons laid in a row.
They were the bones of dead alligators, picked
by buzzards and marsh-rats, and finally
published by ants. I turned to Tom, asking
him what it meant. He paused in his silent
work of unloading the camp equipage, looked
first at the charred fagots and the row of skele-
tons, then absently gazed for a longer time far
down the bayou. He then answered.

"Well, you know, sir, 'fore de war, when I first
seed such a sight, after I come back home and
tole it, dey say dat was an alligators' buryin-
place; dat when dey knowed dey was done
t' die dey would be crept out de water, and
crawled up on one of den big bones. Shell mounds
and died peaceful-like. I di'n't re-
pire but I studied on it, an' dar I sead
what it was for myself. I comed up on a camp
of alligator catchers, and seed what dey was
doin'. Yes, sir; I tell you de alligator catchers
done camep here bout two months ago. As
the excavation, Tom explained that shell
mounds are carried away, more than thirty
years ago, shells dug from the ground to pave
the roads around the of the "Gret House"
on the plantation, "in Mr. Theodore Pack-
wood's time." These replies being satisfactory
to all parties, Tom pitched camp, and after-
ward quietly cooked our supper.

As the night advanced the darkness almost
dded a sense of oppression to the surrounding
desolation. The sky was moonless. The low
horizonome of the surf beating on the beach at
Barataria, miles away, heightened the effect
of the solitude. Occasionally the endless moan
of the distant sea was interrupted by the mel-
anchoy whoop of the great blue night-heron,
sound in the bird's larynx, unseen flight to
some favorite lagoon; or by the sudden gling plunge of a garish in the waters of the
still and deep bayou. These waters, smooth
and black as the darkness itself where they
remained unraffled, blazed with their charac-
teristic weird phosphorescence, that shone yet
and gave no light, when disturbed. The ripples
and waves left in the track of large fish glowed
with this light, that flashed forth so strange yet
borne no reflection. The fading embers of our
fire brought out in pale relief, from the dark-
green foliage above, the long trepess and loop-
feetoms of gray moss hanging on the live-oaks;
while their dull-pink glow touched up with a
copper tint the broad, pointed, metal-like
paddles of the palmettos, and made their
contorted trunks assume more fantastic shapes
against the background of black darkness be-
and he held in his mouth a cigarette wrapped in brown paper, whenever relaxation from rowing permitted him to roll one.

On one of their singular excursions Colonel Anster, in a mixture of English, French, and Creole, "Ford, de'at' (kah-ew-mar)—which meant in

That was a night scene worthy of the pencil of Dörr! A dim, desolate waste of marsh; dark and still waters, glowing here and there by a buck's muzzle, or dotted with streaks of pale phosphorescent light, where the diamond brilliance of reflected stars; a silent, indignant, gliding boat, rowed, with

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yond. The sense of loneliness is so great when camping out at night in the midst of this comparatively limitless and uninhabited waste, that, by most people so situated, the hoot of an owl would be hailed as a sound of mirth.

However, we did not hear the bird of Minerva; but I started at the crack of a distant rifle, Tom, without turning from his seat, or rather squat, before the dying fire, whose embers he was then raking to get a coal for his pipe, said, "Darn yallerigger catchers, way down de bayou." It was easy to distinguish the report heard as that of a rifle, for the boom of a duck-gun would have gone reverberating and re-echoing over these marshes several seconds after the first detonation, while the small grooved bore fails to awaken an echo with its sharper report. After listening some time vainly for another shot, I proposed to Tom that we should paddle down the bayou to meet the "alligator catchers." Without having much choice in the matter he quickly stopped pulling his successfully lighted pipe to give this proposition his eager consent. Soon the little boat, burdened of all its load of "plunder except a 'ten-gauge' breach-loader, was swiftly clearing the waters of the winding bayou.

Two miles to the rapid and silent travel brought in view a distant light hovering near the edge of the water. This mysterious yellow light grew at one moment into a circle half the size of the full moon when in the zenith; then it dwindled the next minute into the shape and appearance of a very small half moon, with a broad, clearly marked band of light, like the tail of a comet, reaching out in the darkness. Afterward, for a time it would disappear altogether, and yet soon as a crescent with a glistening comet's tail, going out at once or growing again to its full circular shape, losing its tail and gradually chiaroscuro of the dark and light, would be a conspicuous object. The reason for this extreme extent and especially for night-hunting, may be better understood when it is stated that the modern demand for alligator-skins has so stimulated the pursuit of these reptiles that, in many of their haunts, they have become wary and unapproachable by day.

I entered the skiff, taking a spare bench immediately behind the old alligator hunter. Tom, by request, remained in the prow, which was towed astern by a short line. The young oarsman resuming silence, as if by an effort, and vigorously pulling at a new cigarette, rolled during the interlude of conversation. At length, lowered his oars in the water, and the long skiff crept slowly ahead, propelled by a noiseless power. The only indication that she moved at all was heard in the scarcely audible gurgles under her bow, or seen in the reflected stars dancing about where the blades of her ruffled oars disturbed the water.

out the sound of oars, by a figure speechless as the ferryman of the Styx: a tall, gaunt form standing in the bow, from whose head reached forth, far out over the black waters, a sharply defined beam of ghastly light, which alone made the surrounding darkness darker. The only sound heard was that endless moan of the sea, rolling its long, ceaseless waves on the sands of Barataria Island.

"Coutez done!" exclaimed Paul; we all listened, but I could hear nothing except that hoarse boom of the distant surf.

"Cayman est çà," muttered the grim old riflemen. "Mons énta il," ejaculated Colon. A few moments later I distinguished a sound like the grunt of a wallowing hog, followed by a long, low, guttural groan, which I instantly recognized as the "bellowing" of a full-grown alligator. Colon headed the boat in the direction of the noise. The beam of light shone far ahead, in an oval glow over the surface of the water. The bellowing gradually grew louder; then it ceased altogether.

Soon in the center of the broad, dim dusk of
light, projected by the lantern some distance beyond the bow of the skiff, glinted on two points of brighter light, like the sparks of marsh glow-worms. As we approached, the two faintly glowing spots seemed to grow farther apart. At last they seemed to be separated by about eight inches of space, and to be located near the end of some long, dark, yet indistinct body floating near the surface. 

"Oh! C'est grand cayman," ejaculated Colan, in a loud whisper.

The two lights instantly disappeared, and the long, dark body had sunk out of sight. The current was running swiftly, turning around with a gesture of deep distrust, then the contracted beam of the lantern full on the rower's face; the latter's countenance became a study: it was suddenly **abraded** into a depiction of dejection, contrition, and despair. The old man again flashed forth his beam over the water, mumbling an incantation at the stupidity of his colleague in thus unreasonably breaking silence, and emphasizing his mutterings with an occasional deep-breathed "sacred-jeu!" The oars were stopped, resting in the water; the skiff half turned, drifting in the sluggish tide; the long beam of the lantern, with its oval disk, now swept far out on the surface, then swayed slowly around over the waters looking for the two lost lights. Ten minutes or more passed thus before the oarsman realized the dilemma, and gleamed back in a new direction. A gentle, noiseless push on the port oar headed the skiff toward them again. "Dese or a big loup," whined Paul. His associate, still more gently, guided the boat to the left, till only one light shone from the obscure object in the water. This was desired, because a forward shot always glances. Cautiously the silent oarsman again curveted the port oar, and the long rifle ready to fire. The disk of the lantern on the water, contracting gradually, grew proportionately more brilliant. As it contracted the solitary light shining back on the water from its center became larger and brighter, till at last a bath of the great saurian glimmered as if he had a secret, he had got on its side, as if he had pursued the desired, because a forward shot always glances. Cautiously the silent oarsman again curveted the port oar, and the long rifle ready to fire. The disk of the lantern on the water, contracting gradually, grew proportionately more brilliant. As it contracted the solitary light shining back on the water from its center became larger and brighter, till at last a bath of the great saurian glimmered as if he had a secret, he had got on its side, as if he had pursued the

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intervals of a few feet, shorter cords, baited with pieces of alligator meat, are attached to the extended lines. The crab-fishers, in their boats, pass up and down these long lines, pulling in the baited cords with crabs attached. They

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hunt for the "season," in which they had secured, salted down, and sold in the New Orleans market over three hundred boxes. When the first decided "nother" of the fall sets in, these hunters, in small squads, take to

soon thus catch a skiff-load of the prized crustaceans, which are at once transported to New Orleans, and there sold, "by the basket," to market venders. Tom looked incredulous, but said nothing. He afterward kept to his short lines, and the two sparske guns on his quarter alley, humor of the stooge, and his sight, alone, "I don't repute what dey say, sir; but I believe dey goes purders wid de crabs nut'in' de meat, when game is scarce." These men are alligator hunters only when the warm weather has driven game back to the breeding-places and feeding-grounds in the far north; or when the heated waters of the lakes and lagoons compel the fish to seek the more temperate currents of the open sea. They hunt alligators during the hot months. They live far up from the gulf, in rude palmetto-roofed shanties and huts made of split cypress boards, on the banks and bordering shell-mounds of Lake Salvador, Bayou des Allemands, St. Denis, Dupont, and Barataria, and numerous other sluggish tidal streams and lakes in the great tidewater wilderness of Louisi-

A PLACED SNAKES.

Paul and Colan informed me that they lived at the junction of bayous Dupont and Barataria and that this was their last alligator

Andrews Wilkinson.