

ON THE TRACK OF COLUMBUS.*

By Horatio J. Perry.



FORTNIGHT out at sea! We are upon the track of Christopher Columbus. Only three centuries and a half ago the keels of his carabels ploughed for the first time these very waters, bearing the greatest heart and wisest head of his time, and one of the grandest figures in all history.

To conceive Columbus at his true value requires some effort in our age, when the earth has been girdled and measured, when the sun has been weighed and the planets brought into the relation of neighbors over the way, into whose windows we are constantly peeping in spite of the social gulf which keeps us from visiting either Mars or Venus. It is not easy to put ourselves back into the fifteenth century and limit ourselves as those men were limited.

I found it an aid to my comprehension of Columbus, this chance which sent me sailing over the very route of his great voyage. It is not, even now, a frequented route. The bold Spanish and Portuguese navigators of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are no longer found upon it. The trade of the Indies has passed into other hands, and this is not the road from England to the West Indies or to America.

Thus you may still sail for weeks in these seas, without ever meeting a ship. Leaving Madeira or the Canaries, you may even reach those western lands he reached without having seen or felt any other sign or incident, except precisely such as were noted by him.

* This paper is a chapter from a volume of Reminiscences left in manuscript by the late Horatio J. Perry, whose remarkable career in Spain, for the thirty years or more preceding his death a few years ago, is known to many readers of the NEW ENGLAND MAGAZINE. It was to his arduous efforts, while in charge of our embassy at Madrid in 1861-2, that the prevention of the recognition of the Southern Confederacy by Spain was chiefly due. The voyage which inspired the present chapter was a return voyage from Spain to New Orleans in the latter part of 1847. Some of its views and certain points of historical detail may be modified by study of the latest works upon Columbus—e. g., by Mr. Winsor and Mr. Fiske; but the authorship and spirit of the narrative give it rare interest.
—Editor.

But these are not the familiar incidents of other seas. They are new to you, as they were to him and to his crews. To be sure, it is the simplest of all simple things done upon the ocean—this running down the trade-wind, which he did for the first time when he showed the world that a new world lay at the end of the voyage. Why was it not done earlier? Anybody who can trim a sail or read a sextant or even the old astrolabe he carried, can do it now.

Here we are for ten days past, sweeping along under full sail, spread to a strong but constant wind which bears us over an unvexed sea, going at the full speed of our ship, and without touching a brace or starting a sheet by day or by night. Were it not for the foam of her speed, the gentle sway of her gait, and the long wake of swirling water she leaves behind her, you might almost fancy she was lying at anchor in a roadstead.

Play chess with that auburn-headed Scotchman for an hour,—play all day, for he is of the kind who do not know when they are beaten—and you may never feel a movement to derange a piece upon the board. When you look up towards evening you see nothing from the ship different from what you saw in the morning, except that the sun is now on the starboard bow and shining in your face; whereas when you sat down he was on the port quarter, and warmed your back from the direction of Africa. He dips into the western sea over the same mark you took upon the bitts yesterday, and he will rise out of the water to-morrow over the same spot upon the taffrail where you marked him to-day and the day before and six days ago. The ship has not varied her direction in the slightest for a week past; the sails are in the same position, the braces feel the same strain, the masts are bent to the same pressure, the fore-stays are just as slack, the shrouds are just as taut;

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JOSEPH BONAPARTE.—FROM THE PORTRAIT BY GOUBAUD,
EXECUTED AT BORDENTOWN IN 1831.

THE AMERICAN ST. HELENA. A REMINISCENT SKETCH OF OLD BORDENTOWN.

BY WILLIAM S. WALSH.

WHY does the funny man consider it funny to call New Jersey Spain? Of course one answer might be that the funny man's idea of fun is a crude and imperfect one. But that is not an answer which would satisfy the anxious archaeological student. He wants to know why the crude and imperfect humor of the funny man has taken this particular direction.

In other words, how and when did the jest originate?

Thereby hangs a tale. Let us tell that tale in the most dramatic manner that we can command.

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On the 29th of August, then, in the year 1815, the American bark *Commerce*, homeward bound from Bordeaux, France, landed at New York with two mysterious passengers, whom the captain treated with the utmost deference and respect. They were registered as M. Bouchard and his secretary. But the captain (the sly rogue!) was not to be fooled. He had determined in his own mind that M. Bouchard was no less a person than General Carnot, the great military and civic leader, who had been the real hero of the Hundred Days, and to whom Napoleon had paid the sad compliment of saying, "Would that I had met you sooner!" And being of a cheerfully garrulous frame of mind, the captain lost no time in spreading the news on his arrival in port. It came to the ears of the mayor.

"Surely," thought the latter, "here is a chance to honor our great ally in the person of one of her choicest representatives."

So, with a picked company of New York citizens, he made his appearance at the modest lodging house which the traveler had chosen. M. Bouchard was greatly surprised at the unexpected honor. He was still more surprised when he was hailed as General Carnot.

"No," he said, briefly; "I am not General Carnot."

"Are you really M. Bouchard?" queried the disappointed mayor.

"No; that is not my name, either."

The mayor pricked up his ears.

"Then, may I inquire," he asked, expectantly, "under what title you do pass?"

"I pass under the title of the Count de Surville," answered the Frenchman. "But here in America I believe I may safely announce the truth: I am Joseph Bonaparte."

This was better and better. Who was General Carnot in comparison with the brother of Napoleon, the elder brother, and in his own self an ex-king—a double ex, in fact—for he had ruled successively over Naples and Spain. A royal reception befitted the royal guest.

But Joseph was timid and refused any public honors. He was disposed to keep as quiet as possible. He did not wish to make his refuge in America too conspicuous. Indeed, as yet he was not entirely certain that America would prove a haven of safety. England might claim him, or Spain, or France, and he did not know what might happen. He proposed to retire to some secluded country place where he could forget the storms of Europe, and end his life in the security and peace of a private citizen.

Such was this man's proposal. But providence—or the American legislatures, not quite so wide

a remove from providence as they are at present—seemed for a time as if it would dispose otherwise. Every State had its laws against the holding of real estate by aliens. Legislature after legislature refused to make an exception in favor of the illustrious exile, until at last he reached New Jersey. There his application was successful. On January 22d, 1817, a general act was passed at Trenton "to authorize aliens to purchase and hold lands in this State."

Even before the final passage of the act Joseph had concluded arrangements for the purchase of a tract of land known as Point Breeze, in the immediate vicinity of Bordentown, N. J.; and because an ex-King of Spain was allowed to put up a little Kingdom of Yvetot in New Jersey the humorist still considers it droll to speak of that State as being out of the Union and a portion of Spain.

Joseph had made an excellent choice. Bordentown has many natural beauties. Situated on a high bluff overlooking the Delaware, just where that river, dull and orderly and uninteresting at most points, takes a sudden curve and redeems itself for a glorious interval, it is of all towns along the river the one upon which nature has smiled. Nor was the little village deficient in historical and literary associations even then.

As far back as 1681 Thomas Farnsworth, an English Quaker, once imprisoned for his faith in the mother country, had made the first clearing here, put up a rough log cabin and set up house-keeping with his wife and children. The place was then known as Farnsworth's Landing. After the death of the pioneer the log cabin and the surrounding acres of land passed into the hands of Joseph Borden, and was now called Borden's Ferry. From that to Bordentown the transition was easy.

Joseph Borden was an enterprising man. In 1750 he established a line of boats and stages between Philadelphia and New York, which accomplished the journey in from thirty to forty hours. In the same year he left the Farnsworth homestead for a commodious brick building which he had put up at what is now the corner of Main and Park Streets. It still remains in the hands of his descendants, the Hopkinsons of Philadelphia.

When Borden died he left behind him a son of the same name. It was this Joseph Borden who, in the early days of the Revolution, manufactured and sent floating down the Delaware River certain kegs of gunpowder furnished with a fuse, which were designed to destroy the British navy at Philadelphia. These primitive torpedoes did no damage, however, beyond killing four men and terrifying the remainder. But Mr. Francis Hop-

kinson, who was Borden's son-in-law, immortalized the event in a poem called "The Battle of the Kegs," which is justly looked upon as the cleverest bit of satiric writing in our Revolutionary history.

Francis Hopkinson was one of the signers of the Declaration. Another of Colonel Borden's daughters had married another signer, Thomas McKean, afterward Chief Justice of Pennsylvania. It was, in short, a family of scoundrelly Whigs. As such it is not surprising that they should have been objects of British hatred, or that in 1779 a party of redcoats should have landed in Bordentown and burned and pillaged the property of Colonel Borden. The story is still told in the town of how old Mrs. Borden calmly sat in the middle of the street watching the work of destruction, and how when a British officer, kinder than the rest, offered her some words of sympathy, she proudly answered: "I thank you, sir, but this is the happiest day of my life. I know you have given up all hope of reconquering my country, or you would not thus wantonly devastate it."

After the close of the Revolution Bordentown grew rapidly. Francis Hopkinson was a scholar, a wit and a leader in the social life of Philadelphia. He and his wife spent their summers in the old Borden mansion, where they kept open house. In 1779 he had become Judge of Admiralty for Pennsylvania, and in 1790 he was made United States District Judge for that State. He did not enjoy the latter distinction long. He died in 1791, his father-in-law having preceded him by just six months. Joseph Hopkinson, the eldest son, thereupon became the head of the house, and maintained the social prestige of the old Borden mansion. Joseph also was a distinguished jurist, who eventually became a United States Judge, but he is chiefly remembered to-day as the author of the national song "Hail, Columbia," which he wrote in 1798.

The year before Joseph Bonaparte's arrival Bordentown became the residence of an American more famous than any who had already settled there. This was Commodore Charles Stewart, "Old Ironsides," the hero of the War of 1812, the naval commander who performed the astonishing feat of attacking two British men-of-war, the *Cyane* and the *Lerant*, and capturing them after a spirited conflict of not quite an hour. He was a comparatively young man, just turned thirty-nine, when he purchased a couple of hundred acres that lay on a high bluff overlooking the Delaware just south of the town proper. He christened it Montpelier, and here he lived until his death in 1869. Then the property passed into

the hands of his daughter, Mrs. Delia Parnell, mother of the great Irish leader, Charles Stewart Parnell.

We have said that Nature had smiled upon Bordentown. She must have laughed outright over the thousand acres which constituted Point Breeze. Rising above the picturesque Crosswicks Creek, in all the primeval glory of stately trees and gracious shrubbery and trailing vines, it looks like the product of one of Nature's riant moods. Joseph at once set himself to turn this lovely wilderness into a garden. Yet he wisely forbore from making too extensive alterations. A tract of marshy land lying at the foot of the slope he turned into an artificial lake; the forest was intersected with walks and drives; open spaces here and there were cleared for lawns; rustic bridges were thrown over rocky-sided ravines, summerhouses were erected in sequestered spots, flowers bloomed in the parterres and rare exotics in the conservatories, and just where Crosswicks Creek meets the Delaware Joseph erected his house.

It was a palace for those days. Built of brick and covered with white plaster, its slanting roof, high dormer windows, sloping eaves and broad columned doorways were the admiration of everyone. The interior even surpassed the exterior. There was a grand staircase, flanked by great reception and dining rooms. The huge fireplaces had marble mantels with marvelous bas-reliefs. The bedchambers were hung with rare tapestry. The walls were decorated with still rarer paintings, more or less dishonestly acquired, and statuary of similar beauty and similar burglarious associations. Not for nothing had Joseph been king over countries that abounded with the works of the old masters!

Time was needed to complete this marvel of architecture and of landscape gardening. It took four years before everything was in order. But hardly had the last touches been put upon the house than it was utterly destroyed by fire. This was on January 3d, 1820. How the accident occurred is a mystery. Some people even whispered that it was the work of an incendiary maidservant who had been bribed by a female member of the Russian Embassy in this country. But Joseph himself never harbored any suspicion. He had been away in Trenton when the flames broke out. Hastily summoned, he had arrived just in time to find his house a huge bonfire. The inhabitants of Bordentown, men, women and children, turned out in full force to assist in the work of fighting the flames. Many valuable things were rescued; many more perished.

A new house was built, but not on the old site,



THE LAKE HOUSE.

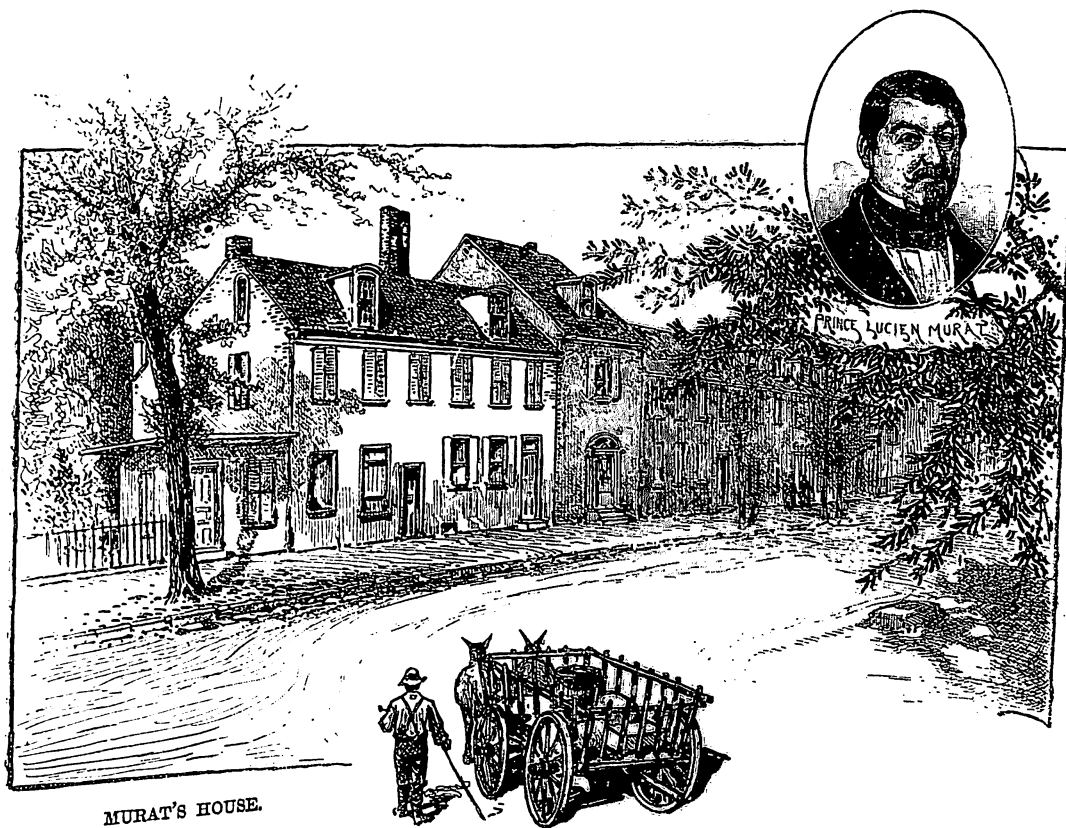
nor on the same magnificent scale. The stable in the rear of the old mansion was expanded into a dwelling house, plain, solid and unpretending. And here the ex-King of Spain lived in democratic simplicity. He had been joined by his two daughters, Princesses Zenaïde and Charlotte, the former with her husband, Prince Charles Lucien Bonaparte. For the convenience of the young couple he built what is now known as the Lake House, a large structure at the entrance to his grounds, which he connected with his own house, a quarter of a mile away, by means of a subterranean passage. This passage had no more direful object than to afford a covered way in case of storms. But gossip would not be satisfied with so simple an explanation. It was whispered, and tradition still indorses the whis-

per, that Joseph lived in daily fear of capture by some foreign agent, and that the passageway was part of a labyrinthine system leading from secret trapdoors inside his house to secluded exits in various parts of the grounds. The ruins of the old passageway are to this day looked upon with superstitious awe, but the most adventurous spirit can only penetrate a short distance into it, on account of the caving in of the earth bed above.

Besides his daughters, Joseph had with him his secretary, Louis Maillard; the latter's son, Adolphe; M. France La Coste, afterward Consul General in New York, with his wife and son; William Thibaud, and a number of retainers, some French, others selected from the native population of Bordentown. His wife had been advised by her physician against attempting a sea voyage. But in 1823 the two Murats, sons of the unfort-



MONTPELLIER.



MURAT'S HOUSE.

unate marshal who had become King of Spain, and consequently nephews of Joseph, came to America. The youngest of these, Prince Lucien Murat, took up his abode with his uncle in Bordentown.

But the ex-king assumed no kingly state. He did not even assume the kingly title. He called himself the Count of Survilliers, after his estate of that name in France. When appealed to for some high-sounding appellation to be given to the Bordentown property he said, sadly: "It is my St. Helena. Call it St. Helena."

And St. Helena has,



ADMIRAL CHARLES STEWART, U.S.N.—FROM THE ENGRAVING BY SARTAIN.

in fact, remained a popular name for the place even to this day, though it is more generally known as the Bonaparte Park.

For the greater exile in the real St. Helena the little colony of Bonapartists retained a reverent and affectionate memory. The anniversary of his surrender to the English was kept as a day of fasting and prayer. When he died the whole colony went into mourning, and a priest was summoned from the village to conduct the services prescribed for days of tribulation.

Yet Joseph really seems to have lived a cheerful sort of life.

His tastes were simple and kindly. He had soon established himself as a prime favorite in Bordentown. He made gifts to the little city in various ways, helped its deserving poor with a lavish hand, visited among the townspeople, gave balls and entertainments to them in his own house, and spoke the most liberal republican sentiments in his intercourse with them. His grounds were thrown open to the public. His hospitable doors were never closed to visitors, even the most humble, and a servant was in readiness to show them around. Indeed, the king himself was not averse to acting the cicerone to any party of pretty Quaker girls, and it is still told in the village how he used to take a sly pleasure in pointing out to them the nude pictures and statues, and noting their blushes and giggles.

In the winter the lake was frozen over. Those were great days! The smooth icy surface was covered with skaters, big and little, male and female. The good Joseph loved to watch the boys and girls as they whirled past him. Often there stood beside him great baskets of nuts and oranges, into which he would plunge both hands and fling the fruit broadcast upon the ice to be scrambled for. The confusion and excitement that ensued filled him with naïve joy.

The writer of this remembers a conversation with a former servant of the Bonaparte household, now dead.

"The day before Christmas," said this worthy, "was a great day at the Park. The Princess Zenaïde had a sleigh made in the shape of a swan, and she would drive up and down the length of the lake, throwing out sugarplums and toys to be scrambled for, and the count would look on, and laugh and laugh. There was a big nigger boy called Smith who was a great skater, and I can see the king now standing on the bank and crying: 'Da nig's ahead! Da nig's ahead!'"

Other reminiscences of other servants showed him in his less cheerful mood. His Scotch gardener, who died only half a dozen years ago, used to tell an anecdote in point.

"I remember one day he stood talkin' wi' father about the crop—they wore knee breeches and laced coots in those days, and he was dressed like that—and he had the far-away look in his e'e he often had. Father said so'thin' about the weather, and the king said na'a word in reply. He just looked sadlike and abstracted as if he were lookin' across the seas to St. Helena, and then he walked away wi' his head doon an' his hands under his coot tails, and you might 'a' took him for the image of his brother!"

Young Prince Murat had small patience with these Napoleonic moods. In his after years he

was fond of recalling an occasion when he had taken the old man down a peg or two. "My uncle Joseph," he would say, "was a very estimable man, with one great weakness—his excessive and ridiculous affectation of philosophy and martyrdom. He had been King of Spain, and yet he had become resigned to living in obscurity in a republic! One day I lost my patience and almost my temper. 'I am weary of these absurd pretensions,' I said to him. 'You are not half the philosopher I am. Compare for a moment our respective fates. You were born a miserable Corsican peasant. Your brother happened to be a man of genius. He grasped the sceptre of the world and made you a king. When he fell you fell. But you came to the ground unharmed. While your illustrious brother was completing his destiny on a barren rock in the midst of a distant ocean you retired in safety to this charming place, where you are living like a prince on the comfortable income of sixty thousand dollars. I, on the contrary, was born upon the steps of a throne. My father was shot in Italy. I narrowly escaped the same fate in Spain, and landed in America without a cent, and have ever since been a poor New Jersey farmer. Yet I take things as they come. To say nothing of martyrdom, I am a hundred times more of a philosopher than you!'"

This is all very well. But Lucien was really not so resigned as he pictured himself. An old lady still living has a very vivid remembrance of him stalking up and down his parlor, recounting his woes and dramatically slapping his breast as he emphasized the dismal tale by ejaculating, "Moi, fils d'un roi!" And this informant slyly continues: "He never added, 'Et petit-fils d'un aubergiste.'"

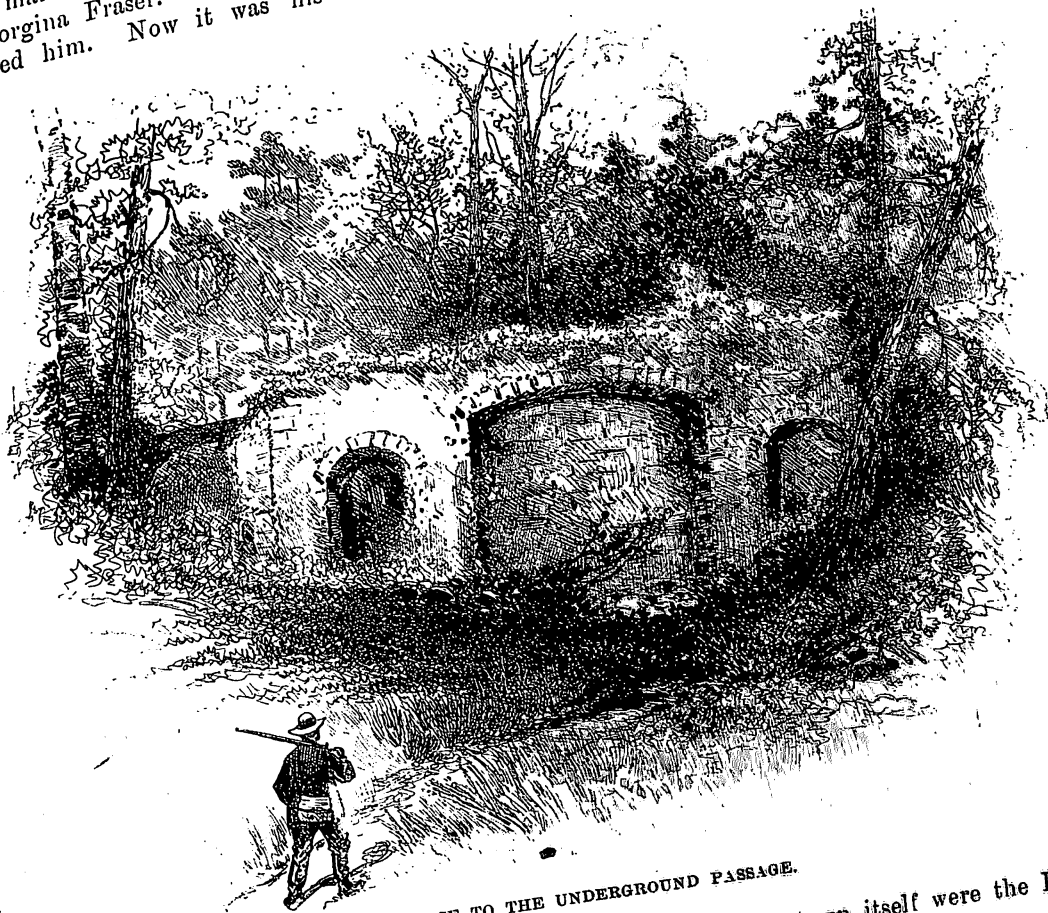
But being a woman, she probably knew Lucien only in his sober moods. The townsmen knew him both drunk and sober, and liked him always, but preferred him drunk. Sober, he was sometimes a little haughty and overbearing; he remembered that he was a prince. Drunk, he only wished to be a prince of good fellows. He loved the companionship of barroom loafers; he would sit down on a fence and play a game of cards with any other good fellow he chanced to meet. Many are the stories that linger in the town about his wild scrapes. One night, being storm-staid in the village tavern with a crowd of rioting blades, he finally got tired out, took off his clothes, bundled them under his arm, and, followed by his companions in like *déshabille*, ran home through the pelting rain. It was midnight, to be sure, and everybody was asleep. But the town rang with the story next morning.

THE AMERICAN ST. HELENA.

was utterly shiftless and improvident. Only one way was he a financial success, and that was at a horse trade. It was said that he would start off from home for a journey upon the back of a sorry Rosinante, and return after an absence of several weeks driving a stylish pair of horses before an elegant carriage, the whole being the result of a series of successful swaps.

One day he did a supremely sensible thing. He got married to an excellent lady, Miss Caroline Georgina Fraser. Hitherto his uncle had supported him. Now it was his wife. The

Henry Clay, President Adams and General Winfield Scott, presidents, statesmen, generals, men of literary and scientific distinction. So also was every foreigner of eminence who landed in America, especially if he were French. Lafayette was here during his triumphal tour through the United States in 1824. So were Lallemand and Tocqueville. Prince Louis Napoleon, afterward Napoleon III., spent several days with his uncle in the spring of 1837, and borrowed a considerable sum from the easy-tempered old gentleman; and among the people who took up a transitory



ENTRANCE TO THE UNDERGROUND PASSAGE.

young couple lived in a long, rambling house still extant in Park Street. Here Mme. Murat started a boarding school for young ladies. For a few years it was quite successful, though the graceless husband gambled and risked away everything he could get from his wife. Moreover, he flirted a little too openly with some of the older and prettier boarders at the school, and the parents objected.

Meanwhile the presence of regal and princely dignity in Bordentown had made it a marked place. The most distinguished Americans were entertained at the Park — Daniel Webster and

residence in the town itself were the Iturbides, exiles from the Mexican throne.

But now the time had arrived when the imperial purple was to disappear forever from the sober drab of the little Quaker town. Louis Philippe had ascended the French throne in 1830; a partial amnesty had been granted to all the Bonaparte exiles. Joseph had so far profited by this amnesty as to make a trip to Europe in 1832. In 1839 he took his final farewell of America, and died five years later in Florence. The Murats remained until 1848, when they left for France. There Lucien was triumphantly elected

to the Assembly in his father's native town. After the *coup d'état* his fortunes steadily mounted upward so long as the Empire lasted, but when the Republic was re-established Murat retired to England, where he died in 1878. His Bordentown home is still pointed out to the curious, a low two-story plastered brick house, with sloping roof, antique cornices, narrow windows and heavy shutters, all remaining as they were in the days of the prince's residence, unchanged, except in its inmates and its furnishing, ragged children of many families and brawny laborers of many nationalities now overrunning what was once a prince's dwelling place.

As to the Bonaparte Park, Joseph had left it in his will to his grandson Joseph, son of the Princess Zenaide. The young prince disposed of it at auction in 1847, and sailed homeward in the wake of the Murats. In 1850 it became the property of Henry Beckett, a wealthy Englishman, who tore down Joseph's home and built a handsome modern residence nearer the bluff. The sculptured mantels of the old house were retained in the new, as well as some of the old furniture,

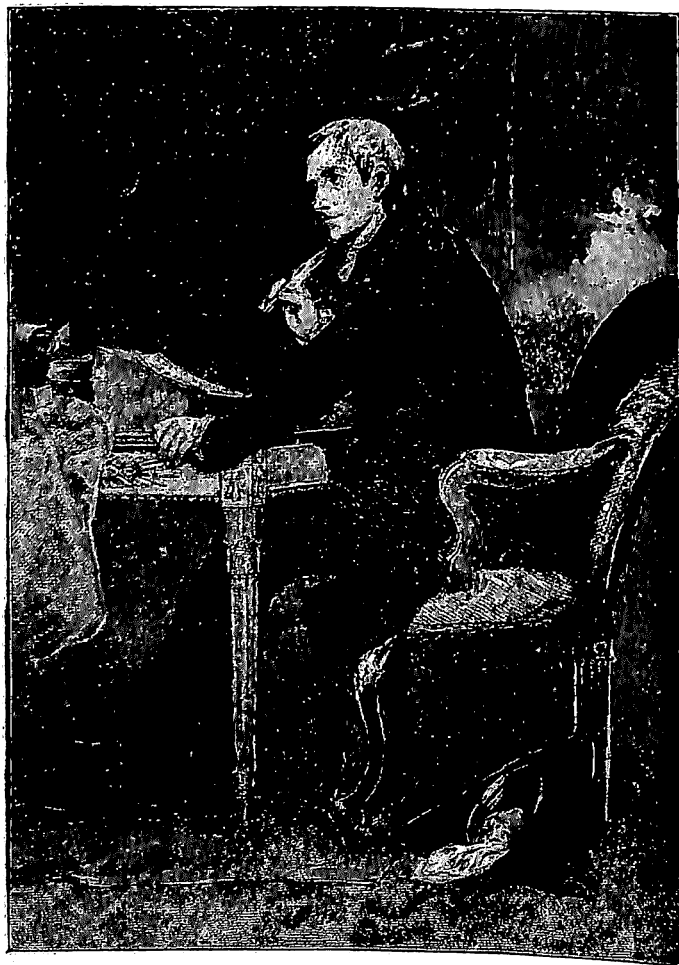
pictures and stationary. But with Mr. Beckett's death in 1872 ruin overtook the old place. His widow came to New York; his heirs, the children of his first marriage, were in England. Only a few days after Mr. Beckett's death the magnificent conservatories were destroyed by incendiary fires. The lawn was neglected, the roadways fell into disarray.

Few traces remain of the former beauties of the place. It was offered for sale at \$75,000. Although the house alone had cost nearly \$100,000, no one cared to purchase the property at that figure. Finally it was knocked down for the

ridiculous sum of \$28,000 to the Roman Society of St. Lazarus, who use it as a summer school of theology for their novitiate.

Montpellier also is but a shadow of its former self. In November, 1869, the citizens of Bordentown were called upon to pay the last sad honor to the old hero who had been for more than half a century one of the most interesting features of the place. Commodore Stewart died, and his daughter, Delia Stewart Parnell, inherited the place. She still lives there, faithfully tended to by an Irish servitor who was in Kilmainham Jail with "Mr. Charles," of whom he speaks with tearful reverence.

The Hopkinson mansion retains some of its old-time prestige. The descendants of the signer still spend their summers here, and are as hospitable as their ancestors. Meanwhile, during the last quarter of a century the town has developed in material prosperity. It has two well-known schools, one for young ladies, the other a military academy for boys. There are eight churches, a newspaper office, and several foundries and workshops. It is true that the removal of the work-



FRANCIS HOPKINSON.—FROM THE PORTRAIT BY CHAPPELL.

shops of the Camden and Amboy Railroad, consequent upon the absorption of the latter line into the Pennsylvania system, was a temporary blow to the prosperity of the town. But, save in the loss of a number of trained mechanics who moved elsewhere, the blow was only temporary.

To-day, the fair and historic Bordentown, though no longer the meeting ground of kings, princes and heir apparents, though it boasts no great statesmen or warriors among its citizens, is a thriving, bustling American town, mindful indeed of its past, but setting its face hopefully toward the future.

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HENRY & RO
OF HEDCO

George

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