Alcee Fortier

St. James Parish, Louisiana (Jan 2000)

Submitted by Mike Miller

Alcee Fortier, author and educator, was born in St. James parish, La., June 5, 1856.  The Fortier family is an ancient one, and has a distinguished record in Louisiana.  The ancestor of the subject of this sketch came to Louisiana about the year 1740.  He was one of the signers of the famous petition of the merchants of New Orleans protesting against the transfer of the colony to Spain.  His son, Michel Fortier, was a member of the first city council of New Orleans with Etienne de Bore' as mayor, and took part as colonel and aide-de-camp of Governor Claiborne in the battle of New Orleans.  His son, Edmond Fortier, the grandfather of Professor Fortier, was a wealthy sugar planter, and married the daughter of Alexandre La Branche, one of the signers of the constitution of 1812, and father of Octave La Branche, speaker of the Louisiana house of representatives, and of Alcée La Branche, speaker of the house, member of congress and ambassador to the republic of Texas.  Florent Fortier, the father of Professor Fortier, was a sugar planter.  He received an excellent classical education in France, and was a man of considerable literary attainments, being the author of some very graceful poems in French.  He superintended with the greatest care the education of his children.  His wife, Edwige Aime, was the daughter of Valcour Aime, so well known for his philanthropy and success as a sugar planter, and was the niece of Gov. A. B. Roman.

Alcee Fortier, having completed the course in the classical school of A. V. Romain in New Orleans, entered the University of Virginia.  He was prevented by serious illness from completing his course in that institution.  He next read law for two years with Judge St. M. Berault, but in the meantime his father having lost his large fortune, he was forced to begin earning his living, and for some time worked as a clerk, always continuing his studies, however, under able instructors.  We next find him teaching French in the city high school; then he appears as teacher in, and later as principal of the preparatory department of the University of Louisiana.  In 1880 he was elected professor of French in the university of Louisiana, and was re-elected when that institution became the Tulane university of Louisiana.  This position he still holds.  Professor Fortier's whole career has been characterized by an untiring energy and devotion to the work he has had in hand.  He has unswervingly labored to encourage and promote the cultivation of the French language and literature in his native state.  His purpose and his achievement has been the improvement of methods and the elevation of the standard to that of true scholarship in the study of French, and we find him active in every enterprise leading to that end.  His own scholarship in at the same time broad and thorough, including protracted research in English, Spanish, Italian, German, and the classical languages and literatures.  He has followed an extensive course of study in romance philology in its various departments.  He is president of "l'Athenee Louisinais," and is a prominent member and officer in the New Orleans Academy of Sciences, the American Folklore society, the American Dialect society, and the Modern Language association of America.  He was appointed in 1888 a member of the Louisiana state board of education for the First Congressional district.  His contributions to literature have been numerous and various in character. Among them may be named "The Importance of Labor and the Necessity of Education, " a prize essay before "l'Athenee Louisianais;" "The French Language in Louisiana and the Negro-French Dialect;" "The French Literature of Louisiana;" "Bits of Louisiana Folk. lore;" "The Acadians of Louisiana and Their Dialect;" "The Yalinos of Louisiana and Their Dialect," papers read before the Modern Language association of America, and various articles appearing in the pages of "Modern Language Notes;" "Journal of American Folklore," and in other journals.  He has also published the following books: "Sept Grands Auteurs du XIX e Siecle;" annotated editions of de Vigny's "Le Cachet Rouge," of Corneille's "Polyeucte" and of Moliere's "Lee Femmes Savantes;" also several lectures in French and in English, among which may be mentioned: "Le Chateau de Chambord," "Le Vieux Francais et la Litterature du Moyen Age," "Les Conquetes des Normands," "Rousseau and the Emile."  He is now writing a history of French literature to be published both in English and in French.  Professor Fortier's researches in Acadian and other dialects in Louisiana have opened an exceedingly attractive field for linguistic study.  His very active and successful work along this line has earned him a national reputation, and has rendered his name well known to European scholars.  He is the author also of a graceful French novelette: "Gabriel d' Ennerich, Histoire d' an Cadet de Famiile an XVIII e Siecle,"  As a lecturer, Professor Fortier's reputation is rapidly extending itself.  Besides numerous lectures on a variety of subjects in New Orleans before various bodies, he has delivered several courses upon French literature at the Monteagle assembly in Tennessee, and he has by invitation, delivered two lectures in Nashville on the history and literature of Louisiana.  He has also ably attacked and controverted Mr. Cable's statements in regard to society and manners among the creoles of Louisiana.  He has also contributed very interesting articles for this work.

Professor Fortier married in 1881 Miss Marie Landuze and has four children living--two boys and two girls.

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