



CUBAN CONFEDERATE COLONEL

The Life of Ambrosio José Gonzales



ANTONIO RAFAEL DE LA COVA

"With an enormous amount of hard-won detail, de la Cova presents a full blown account of this dashing Cuban Confederate colonel, who [had previously] appeared as a bit-player, if he has appeared at all, in accounts of the American Civil War."

Civil War Book Review

"De la Cova's study is provocative and revisionist in the best sense of both terms. Implicitly set within the theoretical framework of Atlantic world history and transnationalism, this book is also an archival tour de force."

Journal of American History

"This biography of Gonzales is a finely crafted narrative that carefully relates the life and times of this important Cuban filibuster and Southern patriot. An epic work, it contains a wealth of new information on Cuban filibusters and their U.S. allies; Freemasons; and the Civil War and Reconstruction in South Carolina."

Stephen R. Wise, author of *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running during the Civil War*

Cuban Confederate Colonel tells the story of a revolutionary who figured prominently in both his native country's struggle against Spain and the Confederacy's fight for secession. Immortalized as the first Cuban to shed blood in the effort to oust the Spanish, Ambrosio José Gonzales (1818–1893) placed himself in the center of hostilities in both his homeland and in the United States. In this biography Antonio Rafael de la Cova examines the Cuban filibuster movement of the 1840s and 1850s, the American Civil War, and Southern Reconstruction from Gonzales's unusual perspective as both a Cuban and Confederate rebel. In doing so, de la Cova sheds new light on the connections between Southern and Cuban society, the workings of coastal defenses during the Civil War, and the vicissitudes of Reconstruction for a Cuban expatriate.

With the failure of the 1854 filibuster attempts, Gonzales settled in the United States and married into South Carolina's prominent Elliott family. The author traces Gonzales's significant role in Confederate coastal defenses, his costly feud with Jefferson Davis, and his finest hour as a Confederate—as artillery commander at the battle of Honey Hill. Following the war, the colonel pursued a variety of vocations, all of which were marginally successful, but like many others he never provided the security he sought for his extended family. De la Cova points out that while Gonzales's connections to Cuba's economy may have made his postwar entrepreneurial endeavors distinctive, his efforts were similar to those of other formerly wealthy Southerners who sought to recover their estates and social status.

A native of Havana, **ANTONIO RAFAEL DE LA COVA** is an assistant professor of Latin American history at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the author of *The Moncada Attack: Birth of the Cuban Revolution*.

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Dr Ambrose Gonzales Hampton erected a monument at the gravesite of his great-grandfather Ambrosio Jose Gonzales, Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, N Y Author's collection

Eight

RECONSTRUCTION RETAILER

After Gonzales was paroled on May 1, 1865, he joined his family in Springville, South Carolina. He had kept in touch with Hattie by private messenger after the evacuation of Charleston, but the letters took a month to reach her. Ralph Elliott also joined his relatives after his cavalry unit disbanded at Chester without surrendering. The Oak Lawn clan was reunited with the arrival of brother William, suffering from tuberculosis. Emily described how they were "very comfortably located & find the good people of Darlington & Springville abundantly kind. They supply all of our wants & we have not felt any of the horrors of refugeedom." Even so, Annie started planting vegetables on a "very poor piece of land." Emily lamented that "we can not bring ourselves to believe that our four year struggle has been in vain, that our heroes have lived & died in vain & that we are to be a despised & conquered people." Yet all was not grief, as the Gonzales family attended that summer the wedding reception of Mary Gray Crockett at Col. Allan Macfarlan's home in Cheraw. Gonzales sang at the nuptial festivity and the bride recalled almost sixty years later how he had been a "splendid performer on the piano and gave us some fine selections."¹

Mary Barnwell Johnstone, the eldest Elliott sister, had been living in a rented cottage in Greenville, South Carolina, with her six children since the previous year, after her husband was murdered by Confederate renegades. She was "mortified" that her mother and sisters "should be

inconvenienced by the desertion of their well cared for servants," since she had felt "quite attached" to some of them. A few freedmen remained with Mrs. Elliott, including Dick, Jacob, John and his wife Chloe and their children. Chloe had been Caroline Elliott's servant. Mary still had her German governess, Miss Hinckel, and at least four former slaves attending her family.²

In June, Ralph Elliott went to Charleston to arrange housing; he was the first of his family to return. He found that the rents were going to be "exceedingly high" during the winter and suggested that his relatives stay in Springville. Ralph was using their servant Dick as a courier because the mail routes were deficient. He relayed rumors that Oak Lawn had been destroyed, but his sister Mary refused to believe it, especially after learning that their brother Tom's plantation house at Bethel was unburnt. Ralph advised his relatives to "try to be patient & hopeful, & bear the misfortune, poverty, & degradation which has been put upon us, with fortitude." Gonzales sent Ralph his ornate saddle to sell in Charleston, but it was returned when no buyers appeared.³

Gonzales then suggested that the family emigrate to Cuba, where his relatives and friends would provide support while they rebuilt their lives. Emily wrote for advice on June 28 to her cousin, Bishop Stephen Elliott, refuting in Augusta, Georgia. He replied that he had "no faith in emigration" to uncivilized countries where they would "only find greater misery." Talk of going to Brazil or Cuba, where slavery existed, was "mere nonsense" since they were "very expensive countries and have no use for the kind of talent we should carry there." He recommended that the Elliotts "remain in Carolina among your own people & kindred" and claimed that they would soon be able to recover their lands. Bishop Elliott also advised that if they had to dispose of their silver plate to survive, it was best to sell it in New York, where it would bring a higher price than in the South.⁴

The Elliott properties had been forfeited under the Confiscation Act of 1862, which authorized the U.S. Treasury Department to seize the 195 plantations on the Sea Islands for nonpayment of taxes and placed them on the auction block. General Sherman's Sea Island Circular of January 18, 1865, had reserved for the settlement of freedmen the islands from Charleston to Port Royal, and the adjacent lands thirty miles inland.

According to native abolitionist Dr. William H. Brisbane, white Northerners were "gobbling up the lands at the expense of the freedmen," forty thousand of whom had been moved to the area. African Americans purchased only three thousand acres of the eighty thousand auctioned off. A Boston joint-stock company bought eight thousand acres for a trifling seven thousand dollars. Four months later, president Andrew Johnson granted amnesty, with some exceptions, to former Confederates. Johnson claimed to be abiding by the Constitution when restoring all property rights, except slaves, to the Southerners. Lands not sold by the government could be recovered if the owners paid the tax, took the oath of allegiance, and received a presidential pardon. In July, Mrs. Elliott wrote for legal advice to her Charleston attorney Richard De Treville, a West Point graduate, former lieutenant governor of South Carolina, Secession Convention member, and colonel of the 17th South Carolina Volunteers.⁵

The lure of recovering their lands and restoring their civil rights prompted Gonzales and some of the Elliotts to take the presidential amnesty oath. Gonzales swore before the provost marshal at Darlington on July 28 to "henceforth faithfully support and defend the Constitution of the United States, and the Union of the States thereunder," and to "abide by and faithfully support all laws and proclamations which have been made during the existing rebellion with reference to the Emancipation of slaves." The next day, Mrs. Elliott took the same oath, followed by her daughter Anne a week later. Ralph later claimed that he was willing to take the oath of allegiance, on account of his mother, if it necessarily contributed to recovering their homes. He would "die rather than take it on my own." He never took the oath and remained an inveterate Confederate the rest of his life. By the fall of 1865, more than a hundred pardons a day were being granted, for which pardon brokers and attorneys were charging fees ranging up to five hundred dollars.⁶

Leaving his family in Springville, Gonzales was back in Charleston by August 2, visiting a family friend, the Reverend Dr. John B. Bachman, pastor of the English Lutheran Church and former associate of naturalist John James Audubon. The city was recuperating from the extensive damage of shelling, fire, and prolonged looting. Flocks of buzzards roosted on rooftops and chimneys. Rural freedmen had created squatter camps along the East Bay wharves and coal docks and had occupied many of

the abandoned residences. They had migrated to Charleston in droves, seeking work and rations from the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Most of the former merchants had returned to the city and were "making arrangements for resuming business." Gonzales was almost forty-seven years old when he explored the possibilities of starting a business in Charleston with merchandise and funds advanced by his wealthy relatives and friends in Cuba. He returned to the island in August, under a political amnesty that had been granted by the Spanish Crown in 1856.⁷

Hattie, pregnant with their fifth child, stayed at Springville with her children, mother, sisters, and invalid brother William. Ralph went to visit Mary Johnstone at Greenville and then proceeded to Flat Rock, North Carolina, to inspect their *Farniente* estate. It was "all in decent order"; two-thirds of their china was robbed, but they still retained a box of valuables in the Abbeville bank. In early September, the Freedmen's Bureau published an order calling for applications for the restoration of captured or abandoned property. The Elliott family then heard a rumor from their servant John that the silver plate and china that had been buried at Oak Lawn had been stolen. He also stated that the freedmen expected to return to the plantation in the fall and claim the land for themselves. To prevent this, the following month the family had attorney De Treville file a petition on their behalf for the restoration of their plantations on the mainland. Ralph found portions of the document "hard to stomach."⁸

A second petition was presented in November after De Treville met with abolitionist general Rufus Saxton, assistant commissioner of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, to discuss the legal recovery procedure and had an interview with the land commissioner regarding the St. Helena properties. He was informed that the plantations Shell Point, Grove, and Ellis on Port Royal Island and Myrtle Bank on Hilton Head Island had been sold by the government and that the Beaufort house was being advertised to be auctioned for taxes on December 6. When Gonzales returned from Cuba that month, he was instrumental in helping De Treville obtain from Saxton an order on December 9 restoring to Mrs. Elliott the lands of Oak Lawn, Social Hall, The Bluff, and Middle Place after she relinquished "all claims against the U.S. Government for damages." De Treville later billed Mrs. Elliott one thousand dollars in legal fees.⁹

Three days later, the *Charleston Courier* announced that the former "popular energetic" superintendent of the Southern Express Company, W. T. J. O. Woodward, had returned to the city, and that "whatever business he undertakes is sure to be successful, for he knows no such word as fail." Gonzales brought Woodward and Peter J. Esnard into his business plans, which accelerated after City Hall announced on December 29 the renewal of applications for liquor licenses. The *Courier* advertised on January 1, 1866, the formation of the partnership Gonzales, Woodward and Company, "a general commission, shipping and factorage business in this city." It was located at 73 East Bay Street, an antebellum liquor and cigar store run by Capt. J. Gadsden King, first commander of the South Carolina Marion Light Artillery Battery. Today, the former business is the Adam Tunno House at 89 East Bay Street. The three-story brick house, built around 1780, had "a store front with square columns, and a large gateway with square columns and a balustrade, on the south portion of the property." Double shop doors led to store space on the ground floor. There were offices on the second floor and residential quarters above it. The rooms on the first two floors contained "paneled wainscoting, architrave molding in door and window surrounds, six-paneled doors, wooden cornices and interior shutters." The upper residential area had "plain mantels, plain-beaded flush board chair rails, simple door and window surrounds and board and batten closet doors with strap hinges." The fireplaces on each floor were encased in half vaults of English bond brickwork. The backyard led to Bedon's Alley. The storefront was removed during restoration in the 1930s.¹⁰

Gonzales, Woodward and Company advertised Cuban products of sugar, molasses, rum, coffee, and cigars, and it also bought and sold cotton and other southern produce. A week later, the credit agent for the firm R. G. Dun and Company gave the firm a "B" rating, with a credit risk, if any, of not over four hundred dollars. His company report described Gonzales as "a Cuban & is said to have means, expects to control consignments from that quarter." Woodward is mentioned as "formerly Agt. for the Adams' Express for yrs, is indus[trious] & atten[tive] to bus[iness] means." Esnard was a sixty-seven-year-old New Yorker who moved to South Carolina in the 1830s, where he raised a family and had been one of four partners in the commission merchant firm Hall and Company before the war. He appeared on the credit report as "an old

citizen, don't kn[ow] his means." Three days after the firm was established, Gonzales traveled to Havana on the steamship *Isabella* to promote his new mercantile endeavor.¹¹

While he was gone, Ralph Elliott visited Oak Lawn accompanied by planters William B. Means, Nathaniel Heyward, the Rhett, and a Yankee guard, who toured the area. Many freedmen had returned to the large lowcountry estates due to local familiarity, kinship, and economic necessity. Military squads were going through the plantations forcing squatters who did not contract with the owners to leave. Ralph's former slaves Dick and Jacob had recently visited Oak Lawn and confirmed that all of the buried treasures were stolen. The Elliott summer house in Adams Run was found in a dilapidated condition, with some of the doors missing and all the outbuildings destroyed. Ralph began contracting the former bondmen to start a crop at Oak Lawn, and among the first to go back were Jacob and his wife. Tom Elliott and his son William returned to their Bethel plantation in Pocotaligo, where they began planting cotton and erected a sawmill with ninety black and white laborers.¹²

While Gonzales was in Cuba, he received a letter from his mother-in-law in response to an earlier proposition he had made to her to acquire Social Hall and The Bluff plantations for seventeen thousand dollars. In order for Mrs. Elliott to acquire legal title to all her lands or to obtain a mortgage, her husband's will first had to be executed, which included the settlements of Hattie's ten-thousand-dollar marriage bond and Mary's seven-thousand-dollar marriage bond. Gonzales agreed that, in exchange for his ownership of Social Hall and The Bluff, he would forfeit Hattie's bond and the legacy of six thousand dollars left to her in the will, and he would pay in installments the remaining one thousand dollars to Mary's trustees. He considered that planting there was "out of the question this year" and had "very little hope that it will be made successful for a long time." Gonzales had "no potential use" for Social Hall, except for its timber. While in Matanzas, he tried procuring a two-thousand-dollar, two-year loan for Mrs. Elliott to start planting at Oak Lawn. The new entrepreneur also forwarded to his company a shipment of molasses and cigars by schooner.¹³

Gonzales left Cuba on March 10 with three Chinese coolies from Matanzas, whom he offered wages of fifteen dollars per month and rations. The Chinese labor used in Cuba since 1847 had proven "docile,

industrious, frugal, temperate, hardened to rural labor," reliable, cheap, and submissive. Gonzales was innovative by introducing Asian workers to South Carolina. Six months later, Chinese Commissioner A. H. Yue traveled from San Francisco to the southern seaboard states, "offering to furnish field hands." Mrs. Elliott commented three years later that "Southerners are taking hold of the idea of having Chinese labourers." The coolies would be accustomed to the arduous conditions of low-country rice cultivation. Upon returning to Charleston, Gonzales moved his family into a rented house on Society Street. Their cow Sallie had a shed in the backyard. The family was vaccinated against smallpox, which had swept through the city the previous year with devastating results. Charleston was still rebuilding from the ruins of war, with laborers engaged in "removing rubbish, pulling down walls and chimneys, and arranging the bricks in squares." The stench from filthy streets, stables and garbage-laden scavenger carts prompted the *Courier* to demand a city ordinance against such nuisance. Attorney De Treville described the city as "no place for a native of So. Carolina to live in. Of every twenty persons you meet in the street, nineteen are Yankees or negroes." Mary Johnstone considered Charleston "the least desirable place possible (next to Beaufort) to live in now."¹⁴

After Ralph failed to plant at Oak Lawn, his brother William, briefly recovered from a tuberculosis bout, decided to try it. Arriving there at dusk in early March, he gazed up the avenue of oaks: "I could almost believe myself in a dream for there stood a dwelling house at the other end, a kitchen and out house & from the last a cheerful fire seemed to bid me welcome. Still there was a strangeness in its appearance. 'Twas not the house I had formerly known. It required a much nearer approach to find that the still erect walls of house and kitchen were but the skeleton that once encased the spirit (forever fled) of the Hospitality & Refinement of bygone days." He found that the oaks and all the younger trees had not been cut or damaged except those near the mansion, "blackened as the hearts of the villains who fired the house." William saw that holes in the garden contained fragments of the Bohemian glass and china sets that had been unearthed. Some of the missing green and gold china was later seen in the home of a former slave and other pieces were being sold on Edisto Island. The kitchen walls stood well, although the floor and the ceiling were burnt. William reported the summer house still standing, but

with damaged floor and walls, and concluded, "Indeed the old place is still beautiful in its decay, and worth the trouble of repair." He moved into the two-story slave cabin formerly occupied by servant Chloe and her husband. William decided against raising a crop at Oak Lawn, fearing that cattle would destroy the unfenced fields, and instead hired eleven freedmen to plant one hundred acres at The Bluff.¹⁵

Many former slaves in the lowcountry obstinately rejected the new labor contracts due to distrusting their late masters and fear that the new arrangement might jeopardize their chance for "forty acres and a mule." On the Elliott lands, freedmen had already planted their own patches and were living on rations provided by the Freedmen's Bureau, but they finally signed the contracts under coercion from an army lieutenant. According to Gen. Robert K. Scott, the assistant commissioner for the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina, most workers refused to fulfill the terms of their contracts. He therefore issued two months later General Order No. 9, due to the increase of "theft, drunkenness, and vagrancy" among the freedmen. It ordered those who refused labor contracts to be expelled from the plantations by Bureau agents. Squads of the 35th U.S. Colored Troops Regiment, who fought at the battle of Honey Hill, enforced the evictions. Any freedmen violating their contract terms and wandering off the land were to be conscripted into public road work.¹⁶

The presidential proclamation of April 2, 1866, declared that the rebellion was over and that South Carolina and the former Confederate states could have civilian authority to enforce their own laws. A few days later, Emily and Annie left Springville and moved into the "dilapidated negro house" at Oak Lawn. William went to live in a tent at The Bluff to closely supervise the work force. The women started making plans to plant tobacco and corn at Oak Lawn and to grow rice in the pond. They were surprised to find their former slave Jacob very glad to see them and "talking all the time." Jacob expected to resume his previous servant duties, as he "confesses he can not do much himself with the hoe." Emily wrote her mother that the freedmen "nearly all carry guns" and were "civil & quietly respectful. We are better waited upon than we have been since the fall of the Confederacy, with cheerfulness & alacrity, showing the advantage of being land owners, if nothing else."¹⁷

Mrs. Elliott was staying in Charleston with Hattie, who was in her ninth month of pregnancy. Gonzales got "very vexed" when his mother-in-law

took over making the boys beds and spanked Gertrude. He sent one of his coolies, Isidore, to assist at Oak Lawn. When the train stopped at the main gate, conductor William Crovatt bellowed to the Elliott ladies: "I've brought you a gentleman who does not speak English." At first impression, Emily found Isidore "rather wild," with "fine boots & bandy legs," and his speech was "not very intelligible." The antebellum socialites felt "strangely rather, domiciled with negros & a china man." After twenty-four hours, it was evident that Isidore objected to doing the field work expected of him. When Emily showed him the tobacco seed for planting, "the only notice he took was to say that he did not smoke." Instead, he proposed "cutting down all of the Laurels & large trees to sell in Charleston to make 'too much money.'" When he left Cuba, Isidore had expected either to supervise field hands or to have congenial employment in Charleston. He demanded to talk to Gonzales, departed for Adams Run, and returned in the evening. Emily had wanted him to "take a hoe or spade & show the negroes how to work," especially those who had reverted to the idleness manifested during bondage. According to Reconstruction historian Joel Williamson, African Americans "labored less arduously in freedom than they had in slavery. To many whites, the slowdown seemed a stoppage." He added that the freedmen "had to be instructed in the necessity of constant and assiduous labor." Emily concluded that with Isidore, "so ends, another attempt to better our fortunes & we must confess, great disappointment." Emily, who was busy hoeing and raking, bristled at the "tea caddy" and "heathen asiatic . . . only fit for the cholera," sending him back to Charleston the next day.¹⁸

By contrast, Hattie was enjoying her Chinese servants who "bowed & smiled & looked so happy & clean & so much like servants that I was quite pleased with them. They speak only broken Spanish." She regretted that they would soon leave her for other employment in Charleston. Many Carolinians complained that black servants, some being former field hands without refined training, had a rapid turnover and when irritated would resign without notice. Cooks were habitually wasteful and unclean. Hattie delivered her fifth child, Benigno Gener Gonzales (later christened William Elliott Gonzales) on April 24, 1866. He was named after Matanzas planter Benigno Gener Junco, a personal friend with whom Gonzales was doing business. It was a difficult birth, with Hattie remaining unwell for more than a week, causing great anxiety to the family. The baby was later described by his grandmother as "an uncommonly

fine child—intelligent & good. His mouth may improve as his nose has & then he will be handsome.”¹⁹

Meanwhile, the Elliots were divided over the future of their Chehaw River lands, Social Hall, and The Bluff, which had gone up in value due to the growing Northern demand for yellow pine timber. New steam circular sawmills were being erected on plantations in the proximity of Charleston. Commission merchants were advertising to negotiate prices with lumbermen and timber cutters, and the Charleston City Railway Company was submitting public proposals for acquiring more than eleven thousand pieces of lumber. Emily advocated establishing a sawmill at Social Hall to exploit the timber lands. She expressed that Social Hall should go to Hattie and her children, but insisted that Gonzales pay sixteen or seventeen thousand dollars for it. Emily complained that Ralph was unsuccessful and indicated that had she “been the fortunate owner of a pair of pantaloons, the debts of the Estate would have been paid by this & the lands would remain in hand for the legacies.” The Elliott sisters contracted J. Z. Johnson and four lumbermen to cut cross ties at Oak Lawn before departing to Flat Rock for the summer. Hattie, her mother, and the children joined them to avoid the prevalent summer fevers.²⁰

In May, Gonzales applied at the Spanish consulate in Charleston for a new passport to travel to Cuba, trying to expand business contacts. Gonzales, Woodward and Company had steadily grown during its first five months. They started paying a city tax of \$11.86 in January on sales merchandise, which the following month quintupled to \$55.17, indicating a large growth in revenue. Their first merchandise consignment arrived from Cheraw on January 28. The company received a cargo of molasses and cigars from Matanzas on February 1; cigars, tobacco, fruit and other goods from Havana on the twelfth; merchandise from Baltimore on the twenty-fourth; and a railroad shipment two days later. Goods arrived from New York on March 5, and there were five railroad consignments that month. In April, the shipments increased to two from New York, on the thirteenth and the nineteenth, and there were six railroad consignments. In May, two more merchandise shipments arrived from New York, on the twenty-third and the thirty-first, and there were five railroad consignments. Federal tax records for May 1866 indicate that Gonzales, Woodward and Company was a wholesale liquor dealer and commercial broker, with a tax of seventy dollars, indicating a steady increase in business

during the previous five months. The firm received three merchandise shipments from New York on June 11, 20, and 25, along with six railroad consignments. Gonzales had traveled to New York City on June 12 on the steamship *Quaker City* to promote his business ventures.²¹

That month, Gonzales, Woodward and Company apparently became the target of looters. On Sunday, June 24 at 5:00 P.M., a rock-throwing incident between black and white children at the Battery escalated into a fight between adults of both races. A *Harper's* artist on the scene sketched what he described as a race riot, depicting an officer's futile effort to halt the melee. The police dispersed the crowd and arrested about half a dozen ringleaders. Hours later, a group of African Americans who eluded the authorities instigated others in the immediate vicinity. Soon, a mob of two or three hundred “directed by some eight or ten negro soldiers” rampaged up East Bay Street and turned left on Tradd Street. The Gonzales wholesale liquor business at 73 East Bay Street was located three doors north of Tradd, close to the path of the rioters. The liquor trade was a hated symbol for African Americans, who were prohibited by the Black Code of September 1865 from making or selling alcoholic beverages. Richard M. Brantford, a white man who tried to flee the mob, was knocked down on Tradd Street by a shower of brickbats. The victim was kicked and beaten to death, abetted by an agitator shouting “kill the rebel son of a bitch.” Although news accounts of the damage done by the rioters is superficial, it appears that the prosperous “Gonzales, Woodward & Co.” suffered heavy looting. During July, the business only received one railroad consignment on the twenty-fifth, in contrast to the nine shipments the previous month. After the riot, the firm disappeared from state and federal tax records.²²

Gonzales then turned his energies toward establishing a sawmill at Social Hall. The previous month he had bought one acre of land from John Raven Mathews for one hundred dollars. The land was on Chapman's Bluff on the west bank of the Ashepoo River, near Social Hall plantation. It was the site of the May 24, 1864, Battle of Chapman's Fort, where Confederate artillery had sunk the Union navy transport *Boston*. The landing had docking facilities to handle lumber shipments. Gonzales then traveled to Baltimore, where on July 17 he bought a steam-powered circular sawmill from George Page and Company with a promissory note for \$6,726.63 to be paid in eight months to the

sanction to the transfer." Ralph wanted to sell Social Hall for cash to Northerners, in spite of the objections of the majority of the family, who wanted Hattie and her children to have it. He felt that Gonzales might not be able to pay off Mary's bond, making the Elliott estate liable for that debt. Ralph quoted De Treville as saying that if Gonzales lost Social Hall by defaulting on Mary's bond, he would then have the right to claim his ten-thousand-dollar marriage bond from the Elliott estate. In spite of this opposition from Ralph, Tom signed the deed giving Gonzales title to Social Hall plantation. Prior to finalizing the transaction, Gonzales and Jacob rode to Social Hall to verify the land marks, but the freedman was doubtful about the property limits.²⁵

After acquiring Social Hall, Gonzales advertised in the *Courier* on November 10 the sale of "twenty bags of superior Coffee, warranted Cuba grown, over two years old, and to have been fifteen months in the pod before being shelled." The shipment had just been released by Customs after its July 2 seizure when it arrived from Matanzas on the British schooner *Aid*. It was part of a larger invoice, consigned to F. P. Salas and Company from the firm Da Costa and C. P. Madan, which also contained smuggled brandy casks and cigar boxes packed in seven sugar hogsheads and four kegs of rum marked as California wine. In a landmark admiralty case, the federal court ruled in favor of exempting from forfeiture Gonzales's goods and upheld the confiscation of the entire Salas invoice. In November, Hattie and the children joined Gonzales in a Charleston boardinghouse. He was back in Matanzas by the end of the month, with free passage from his friends Mordecai and Company in Baltimore, the agents for the two-mast propeller steamers *Cuba* and *Liberty*, which frequently traveled to Baltimore, Charleston, Havana, and New Orleans. Gonzales spent the next two months shuttling between Matanzas and Havana, seeking contracts to sell yellow pine timber to five railroad enterprises, including the Sabanilla Rail Road Company, directed by his friend Benigno Gener Junco. Spanish colonial bureaucratic transactions were very slow. Gonzales had to make personal appointments and give individual presentations and bribes to each member of the various committees involved in the negotiations.²⁶

Part of his business difficulties stemmed from the bad luck of arriving in Cuba at a time when the government bank was in its biggest economic crisis in a decade. Gonzales had offered his friend Cándido Ruiz

a partnership in planting at Social Hall, but Ruiz reneged at the last moment due to financial difficulties. His contract proposal to the Sabanilla Rail Road was rejected by the board of directors in December because he asked for a two-thousand-dollar advance for resuming sawing operations. The lack of business progress delayed a Christmas homecoming. Gonzales wrote Hattie about his predicament, saying that "it is hard to go back empty handed after all the trouble and the still greater suffering I experience owing to my anxiety about yourself & the children such as I have not had before." Gonzales later received promises for future orders from the managers of three railroad companies and hoped to obtain an order from his friend and former separatist conspirator Miguel Aldama Alfonso, owner of the Havana Railway Company. The Cubans were interested in yellow pine timber, which rarely rots, for building railroad cars and cross ties. The high-quality hardwood trees, native to the southeastern United States, did not grow on the island.²⁷

Gonzales planned to return home with at least one lumber contract from Aldama, who gave him a four-hundred-pound "box of refined sugar, a hogshead of brown sugar, and a large bag of black beans." He was taking back two guardian dogs and Luis, his aunt Lola's young Chinese coachman, on loan free of charge for one year, who could "cook, sew, and do almost anything." In his letters to Hattie, Gonzales expressed great suffering and anxiety over being absent from his family for so long. He told his wife: "I am anxious to go to our little home and cease this roving life for since you have been with me and satisfied, I have loved you and cherished you so much the more and I know that we can be happy in a home of our own, if I can only pay my debts." Gonzales instructed Hattie to obtain from merchant Edward H. Lafitte all their family needs and that if they were too uncomfortable at the boardinghouse where he left them, to move to the Carolina House until he arrived on January 22, 1867. Mrs. Elliott, living with Hattie, described her as still looking "remarkably young, has her father's buoyant spirits, but the unassisted care of five children is telling upon her strength." The Elliott matriarch preferred the country life for her daughter and grandchildren.²⁸

The Elliots were also encountering emotional and financial difficulties. The crop from their Chehaw River lands was "less than hoped"; after paying expenses, they earned less than three hundred dollars' profit. Emmy and Annie returned to Oak Lawn in January, taking six-year-old

nephew Alfonso, called Fonsy, with them. They asked their mother to "promise not to cry when you see the old place but to behave like the mother of the Gracchi!" Mrs. Elliott was feeling "sorry & much shocked" at hearing of the death from cholera of former family servant John at Hilton Head. She regretted how "we were never grateful of those times that are now gone for ever." The family was overcome with grief when thirty-six-year-old William Elliott Jr., died of tuberculosis on January 21 at Tom's residence and was buried in the Stoney Creek Church Yard in Pocotaligo near the graves of Tom's children.²⁹

After Gonzales returned from Cuba without funds, Ralph went to New York and Boston to obtain loans for himself and for Charleston merchants, expecting to make a five-thousand-dollar commission. He carried a letter of introduction from his sister Anne to William Amory, a family friend who had stayed at Oak Lawn in May 1861. The unreconstructed rebel was dour and uncomfortable among the aristocratic Yankees who refused to loan him money on the little security he had to offer. The Amorys gave Ralph a "small sum very hastily collected among several friends" who kindly remembered the Elliotts. Ralph departed Boston so abruptly that other family friends were unable to give him over one thousand dollars in donations that were later remitted to Oak Lawn. Four months later, Amory sent Annie Elliott two hundred dollars for a stone marker and a cast iron fence for her father's grave in Magnolia Cemetery. The money was instead spent on the land tax for Oak Lawn, which had doubled.³⁰

Ralph returned home on the steamship *Quaker City* from New York on February 12. He befriended passenger George H. Hoppock, a thirty-two-year-old New York carpetbagger who lived in the Mills House and had run a wholesale grocery and commission merchant business on East Bay Street since 1865. Ralph later boasted how he "soon made him succumb to my eloquence," and as a result two weeks later Mrs. Elliott signed a risky two-year, ten-thousand-dollar mortgage on Oak Lawn to Hoppock. In exchange, Ralph agreed to cultivate cotton and rice at Oak Lawn and The Bluff and deliver the produce to Hoppock, who after discounting "the usual and customary factorage charges and commissions," would equally divide the profits between them. Ralph's previous failures can be attributed in part to his apparent bouts with alcoholism. Soon after he signed the deal with Hoppock, he wrote to his nephew William:

"I am sober & industrious, & feel the better for it." Ralph contracted thirteen hands and got seven mules to plant one hundred fifty acres of short cotton and twenty acres of corn. William received twelve hundred dollars of the mortgage to raise a crop at Tom Elliott's plantation. Tom had rebuilt his sawmill and sent lumber to Oak Lawn for housing renewal. The Elliotts also tried raising money by having an inexpensive edition of their father's *Carolina Sports* published in Great Britain that year.³¹

The Congressional Reconstruction Act of March 2, 1867, started a process that gave the military control over the governments of South Carolina and other former Confederate states. Two days later, the Gonzales clan, minus Alfonso who remained at Oak Lawn, departed Charleston by railroad for Social Hall plantation. The property is presently the Ashepoo plantation on state Highway 26 ten miles south of Green Pond. It had 1,450 acres of woodland and marsh, with 100 acres under cultivation. Its western boundary was the Chehaw River, and the southern and eastern property lines were contiguous with John D. Warren's farm. To the north were the plantations of Alexander Robert Chisolm and Haskell S. Rhett. The area abounded in "excellent yellow-pine, oak, hickory, cedar, etc.," and the wildlife included "deer, wild turkeys, squirrels, hares and in winter wild ducks." Social Hall was valued in the 1868 Colleton County auditors tax return at \$1,970, a far cry from the \$16,175 sale cost, indicating how much South Carolina land prices had been declining since the war. Its residents included Luis, the Chinese coachman, and Irish domestic servants Margaret Fludd and Roseanna Roach.³²

The plantation was centrally traversed by a road from the main gate in the east to the Chehaw River landing dock on the west. Social Hall Creek and its canal extension flowed from north to south, pouring into the Chehaw River. The junction between this waterway and the road divided four rice fields. The creek and canal had four wooden dams, destroyed during the war, for regulating the tide water flow on the rice fields. The one-hundred-acre crop field, partitioned by the road, was at the center of the plantation. Near the entrance, on the highest land elevation, in a cluster of pines thirty-eight feet above sea level, were six log cabins with weather boarding. The parental quarters contained their bedroom furniture and a crib for Gertrude and Benigno. Hattie described how "an aged dimity, well darned & starched is hung between the sleeping & eating room—& is pushed aside when desirable." The room had

a small cooking stove that also provided heat during the winter. Outside, under an awning, a safe stood on one side and a large white table on the other. Ten-year-old "Brosio" and eight-year-old Narciso, called Narto or Nanno, slept in the cabin occupied by twenty-seven-year-old Margaret Fludd, "on a cot & mattress, an old white curtain on a rod, divides their apartment, which is kept clean & is naturally ventilated." The abodes contained trunks for storing clothing and linen. The kitchen cabin had a stove with a waffle iron and coffee toaster, pots, dishes and utensils. A storeroom served as a commissariat for sawmill hands. The residential area had three enclosed lots: a vegetable garden by the main cabin, an oat field next to the storeroom, and the third contained the stable and cow house. Hattie made a constant effort to keep the place tidy, but the cabins were "so low to the ground & so impossible to keep clean. The poultry, pig & even the pony 'roam at their rise' & come into the shanty when ever they please [sic]. I don't object to clean poverty but I do rebel against dirt & dirty we must be as long as we are in such a low building." Other animals at Social Hall included two dogs, a rooster, some mules and horses. The latter were fed on fresh marsh, which was cut daily at the sawmill and transported in the wagon to the settlement.³³

Five days after arriving, Hattie felt ebullient and optimistic, marveling at the fine complexion of her children, who had never looked better, were nourished, and in excellent health. She was "too glad to get the boys out of Charleston. The boys there are so profane & vulgar." The Elliots sent from Oak Lawn baskets with reading material, correspondence, flowers, food, and clothing for the children. Hattie delighted in picking wild flowers with two-and-one-half-year-old Gertrude, called Tula or Tulita, whom she described as "a darling little foreign thing, very dark, & graceful, & a natural coquette," whose father "idolizes her." When Margaret admonished Tula that her father would be told of her misbehavior, she replied, "You can tell him, Papa is not going to 'Spanish' his only little daughter." Hattie felt partial to one-year-old Benigno, called Minie or Mino, and hoped that God would grant him as her last male child. Hattie was breastfeeding both children and wrote her sister Annie how "Tula considers that B. deprives her of a part of her nourishment. She says that *one* belongs to her & teases me very much at times. B. bellows whenever he sees me & Margaret says will never be good until he is weaned but I will nurse him until he is fourteen months old."³⁴

The two eldest sons were being educated at home. They were "reading the history of France, studying that of England, spelling with meaning, Geography, Spanish, writing." The boys also read a biography of Alexander the Great, *The Life of Stonewall Jackson* (which the boys did not find interesting), and their grandfather's *Carolina Sports*. Gonzales personally instructed them in arithmetic and French, subjects that Hattie claimed she was "a poor hand at." The kids spoke fluent Spanish with their father and Luis, and they helped tend the vegetable garden. Hattie proudly wrote to Oak Lawn how "my boys bring the cow from pasture, cook for the dogs, feed them, go on errands & rake the yard, besides learning their lessons & having plenty of time to play." Sallie the cow provided the family with seven quarts of milk daily, clabber curds, and butter. Their diet was supplemented with poultry, fish, terrapins, crabs, mullets, shrimps, ducks, pork, and venison. The family sometimes savored roast lamb or a soup containing fox or squirrel meat with curry and rice. During lean times they ate crows, which according to Hattie, their "flavor is almost identical with the rice bird & they afford a much larger mouthful." Gonzales held family prayers at least four times daily, which Narciso considered tedious.³⁵

One of the first tasks Gonzales completed was building a shed over the sawmill, which for seven months had been left exposed to the corroding ocean mist and the elements. The steam engine also operated a gristmill on Saturdays, and the toll for its use helped to ration the workers. A dock was built on the Chehaw River for schooners and rafts to transport the timber. A small rail line connected the landing with the sawmill. Hattie told her sister that "the decline in lumber has been terrible to all engaged in sawing, if it were not for the orders from Cuba, the prices of which were fortunately fixed, milling would be ruinous." To fulfill his Cuban contracts, Gonzales found that it was "cheaper to buy timber at the present prices, than to haul it from this pine land." The former school teacher, unaccustomed to rudimentary farm work, accidentally sliced his finger to the bone with a fodder-cutting machine. He was treated with home remedies, although his wife insisted that he see Dr. Henry E. Bissell in Ballowville, to whom the family recurred during emergencies.³⁶

Social Hall received occasional visits from the neighboring Rhett family. Hattie, still harboring the Elliots' resentment toward them, objected

having "to see people whom I don't respect" and was "much disturbed at their proximity." The Elliott-Rhett antebellum property-line feud was rekindled when Haskell S. Rhett proposed building on a spot that he claimed was his land, and Gonzales considered it part of Social Hall. Rhett alleged to have recently had his place surveyed, to which Hattie informed her mother, "If it was done during the war I have no doubt he took what he wanted." Hattie was going to keep her eyes "very wide open on all transactions with him." She later felt relieved upon hearing that her close neighbors were going to be Nathaniel Heyward and Alfred and Marie Rhett instead of Haskell. Col. Alfred Rhett, brother of secessionist *Charleston Mercury* editor Robert Barnwell Rhett Jr., had led the South Carolina 1st Artillery Regiment and commanded Fort Sumter during the April 1863 ironclad attack.³⁷

Former slaves stopped by Social Hall to pay their respects, including three females who worked at the neighboring Rhett plantation. Freedman Quash George gave the Gonzales family "a fine present of eggs." Hattie commented that "the negroes are ragged & look so hungry that I can't help feeding them—encouraged, they beg extensively." In response to difficulties that the Elliots were having with their contracted field hands, Hattie complained that some freedmen agreed to work on certain days and then not appear. Others frequently arrived at work late and periodically vanished during task hours. According to African American historian Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, when blacks "worked for white people for wages they found that by two or three days' work they could procure money enough to support them in idleness the next week." He indicated that Colleton County laborers received "from \$6 a month to \$120 and \$150 a year." To add to the family's problems, the Social Hall sawmill stopped working in early May. The shoddily-built water supply well was caving in, threatening the engine. Gonzales bought a new water pump and hired Charleston machinist Archibald McLeash to mend the leaking boiler. He lost "a valuable order for lumber from Edisto" due to a rumor that his mill had "blown up." The lumber shipments to the Cuban railroads were "too long delayed."³⁸

When the sawmill became operational after two weeks, only a few local orders were finished, and it "was done so badly that it had to be done over again." Hattie complained that the nine white sawmill workers were fed three times a day, "received high pay & did nothing. The

freedmen now employed there seem really to have more conscience." She lamented to her mother in mid-May, "if we only could get a cargo off for Cuba I should breath [sic] freely. . . . Well, if we fail here entirely we can still find a home & something to do in Cuba." Hattie expressed in the same letter anti-Union and antiannexationist feelings, saying that she hoped Cuba would be saved "from the clutches of the detested eagle!" Her previous desire for Cuban annexation was now dampened by the recent passage of the Fourteenth Amendment by the United States Congress. It had disenfranchised thousands of former Confederates and the Southern states still under military rule were required to draft new constitutions before rejoining the Union.³⁹

Gonzales was frequently absent from home seeking sawmill contracts and doing business transactions. He went on horseback or wagon to Green Pond, Salkehatchie, Walterboro, and adjacent areas, or took the four-hour train ride into Charleston. While in the city, he occupied his old quarters at Mrs. Sheen's home at her invitation, thereby saving the expense of a hotel. Hattie heard "little but Irish" all day. Her husband was "so often away & when he is at home—at the mill & farm all day—& when he returns he finds me using some very unenglish expressions" adapted from Margaret and Roseanna. Hattie considered them "excellent servants, but they lack the refinement of language so striking in our former [house] slaves." In the evenings, Hattie read to her husband all the political articles she had saved from the publications sent by the Elliots. When the patriarch was absent, Hattie had one of her sons sleep with her, ready to blow a horn in case of an emergency, because she could not do it. When the horses and mules "broke through their fence & took to promenading on the piazza," the blaring horn summoned Luis and the overseer to the rescue. Hattie was very grateful to Luis, whom she considered invaluable, honest, and watchful: "Sleeps in the store house & guards it with 'macheta' [sic] & pistol, weighs rations, goes to the R.R., works at the mill, paints, has made a nice boat in the last two days—cuts wood & draws water for the cook—& gives us delightfully cooked dinners when we feel self indulgent & is besides a safe & kind companion for the boys who are perfectly devoted to him."⁴⁰

Gonzales hired an Irish overseer, "Old" Simmons, who did not stay long. He "didn't like to get up early, & feed the horses," and "could not direct others & was so afraid of negroes that he would not stay by his

garden to guard it at night." The garden contained corn, peas, turnips, cabbages, leeks, squashes, snap beans, tomatoes, okra, potatoes, plums and watermelons. It became the frequent pilfering target of freedmen and raccoons. Gonzales then employed an armed African American to protect the patch. Even so, when the blackberry bushes were picked clean, the watchman purported that the crows "had eaten them all." Other sentinels proved just as unreliable, making Hattie exclaim, "The man he left in charge I know is a thief—but I won't worry & am grateful when they allow me a dinner from the garden." The habits and attitudes of slavery still needed considerable modification. Poor crops, low wages, and high prices increased larceny. To solve the problem, a ferocious mastiff named Leon was kept chained near the storeroom during the day and allowed to roam freely at night.⁴¹

The Elliots left Oak Lawn on June 1 to reside in their rebuilt house in Adams Run until the fall, sending seven-year-old Alfonso to Social Hall on the train with his father. While staying with his grandmother and aunts, Fonsy had been troublesome, dedicating "little attention to his book" and being "indignant at the idea of cleaning the cows house." His early abhorrence of work and study became perennial traits. Hattie decided to bring Alfonso home after Mrs. Elliott complained that he "needs control" and was "racing about in the sun & won't come in when he is called." When Fonsy departed, Mrs. Elliott and Anne "almost cried," but Emily laughed, an act that the child considered "very reprehensible." The mischievous Alfonso, who enjoyed being with mules, may have gotten kicked by one. His body had an "ugly" scar and prior to returning home, his mother assured him, "None of our mules kick they are all good mules."⁴²

Alfonso's joyous homecoming was marred by the news that the largest commission merchant firm in Charleston, John Fraser and Company, with offices in New York and Liverpool, had gone bankrupt. The United States government had brought suit against the firm and its partners, making them pay import duty plus interest on all goods arriving on blockade runners during the Civil War. The confiscation "terribly depressed" the Charleston business community, including many of Gonzales's creditors, who started calling in their loans and canceling further credits. The failure affected the merchant firms of E. H. Lafitte and Company and Willis and Chisolm, to whom Gonzales owed \$3,700. Hattie

informed Emily that as a result of the John Fraser and Company bankruptcy, "our good friend Lafitte does not know if he owns a dollar." Gonzales was also indebted to merchants Thomas Bonnel, \$200 for a note; West and Jones, \$125 for a produce box; W. Mathisson and Company, \$25 for clothing; and druggists Charles F. Panknin and Raoul and Lynah, \$45 for medicine and quinine. Hardware debts to keep the sawmill operational amounted to \$246 with the Charleston firms of Cameron and Barkley, Adams and Damon, John Toumey, J. E. Adger and Comapny, Cleland Kinloch Huger, and Bissell Brothers. Gonzales also owed \$255 in grocery bills to Klinck and Wickenberg, R. A. Pennal, and Laury and Alexander. The great scarcity of money made corn "a cash article." It was consumed boiled or parched, and was used for making corn bread, corn meal or whiskey. At Social Hall, hired hands would "only work for corn," fearing greenbacks might become worthless like Confederate money. Gonzales was obligated to buy corn to also feed his family and horses, paying extra for drayage, railroad, and carting expenses.⁴³

The financial crisis prompted Gonzales's debtors to default on him. The purchaser of their Charleston furniture had only partly paid for it. The family had not heard from the agent who was selling their silver in Baltimore. A gentleman owing them \$35 for lumber begged to be let off after he could not raise the money in Charleston. Gonzales had not received payment for the work done by his blacksmith and grist mill. Hattie felt bitter when the Seabrook plantation manager obtained only twenty dollars worth of lumber from them while sending a major order of several thousand dollars to someone else. She called neighbor Alfred Rhett "mean" for not purchasing floor boards from their sawmill. By mid-June, Gonzales had not filled his Cuba orders and there was "little timber to be bought now, the low prices have discouraged the cutters & raftsmen." A month later, Hattie lamented that "Chisolm, Colcock & others who bought lumber 'for cash' can't pay for it. Men who were to furnish timber have had fever & could not cut it. Mill not working, hands to be paid & family to be fed! Nothing sure but debts. Poor Gonzie, he does not sleep at night, & is up at day light & is looking very badly. I trust something may 'turn up' for him soon."⁴⁴

Neighboring sawyers were also having difficulties. The sawmill of William Simmons exploded after its well caved in. A Mr. Glover had "stopped sawing for want of orders" and desired to subcontract with Gonzales for

the Cuba orders. The spring crop throughout the state had been severely damaged by insects and bad weather. Ralph Elliott wrote to his brother Tom that it had "utterly destroyed our prospects, and we have to sell mules, to eke out provisions until the corn ripens. I have no hope of being able to do more than pay expenses this year, & fear that even may not be accomplished. We are a doomed people."⁴⁵

The summer season brought legions of mosquitos, sandflies, and other bugs to Social Hall, which were "piquing the poor children unmercifully" and had "Brosio murmuring about the [Biblical] plagues of Egypt." The family used a "portable smoke" to fight the insects and slept under mosquito nets. Poisonous reptiles crawled about and Hattie revealed at having "killed a young rattle snake with my own hands." The mettlesome Alfonso kept the Irish servants and his brothers "in a constant row" and had his cot moved into his parents' room. The boys would cool off with "a cold bath in the piazza which they enjoy the more perhaps from having to draw the water for it themselves." Hattie shaved Tula's head to prevent lice, and quipped how she "resembles Mr. Petigru at present. She is very merry & not at all unhappy at her appearance." The Social Hall inhabitants began their daily ration of quinine on July 1 to avoid fevers, which affected some of their sawmill hands and the neighboring Rhett children. Even baby Minie received a half-gram daily dose mixed with clabber. Hattie discovered that making quinine pills for a large household consumed much time. Her other tedious labors included darning and the weekly washing of over sixty articles of clothing.⁴⁶

When Leon died that summer, he was replaced by two "very efficient" and "very much dreaded" guardian dogs, Marengo and Chino. The Gonzales family appreciated these animals, "for we have lost nothing while our neighbors have met with serious losses," of stolen mules, puppies, ducks, and vegetables. Luis accompanied Gonzales one night to guard the corn field from depredation by bears and freedmen. Gonzales also hoped to kill a deer, but was unsuccessful. Luis later said that he would not undertake another such venture, not even "for \$1,000, the sandflies were so dreadful!" Hattie indicated that "undisciplined blacks . . . have taken *all* of our corn." The young freedman in custody of the field alleged that "Mr. Rhett's mules ate it but the white man says he sees where it has been plucked." She also complained of having no "pecans, for the negroes

have robbed us of nearly all of those at Social Hall." Mrs. Elliott blamed the freedmen and the crows for taking all the corn planted at Oak Lawn. She accused former slave Robert Kinsey of stealing her turkeys.⁴⁷

The Gonzales family was able to survive when aunt Lola in Cuba sent Gonzales money in mid-September which allowed him to buy corn, bacon, and supplies and to feed the sawmill hands. Their family diet was so deficient, that according to Hattie, "rice is a great luxury with us, we never have it but on rare occasions when the grist gives out." When rice was available, it was given to the baby with milk for breakfast. Gonzales then hired W. W. Stubbs, a Northeastern Rail Road sawyer from Mount Holly, to run the sawmill. Hattie wrote to her mother on October 2: "You know that the mill has been idle for months. We have now an admirable manager & so far an honest man. He has removed the mill to the very bluff (where it should always have been) saving a great deal in the future thereby." She also pleaded for the Elliotts to plant or hire out the adjacent Bluff plantation, which had become "a harbour for vagrants who steal where they can." The Charleston correspondent of the *New York Times* noticed a general "feeling of despondency" among the planters, due to the increased need "for capital and the unprecedented scarcity of ready money," the dismal future culture of cotton, and the "stagnation which has existed on the business streets during the Summer."⁴⁸

Prospects for a crop at Oak Lawn were "unpromising" that fall. Ralph was only able to raise two bales of green seed cotton, which sold for fifty-five dollars each after prices had fallen by half. Sea Island planters Seabrook, Jenkins, and others, had completely failed. It was the third year of poor crops for the state, due to droughts, storms, and a caterpillar plague. Tom Elliott bemoaned: "I am financially Ruined my Crop will yield me nothing." Hattie noticed that there was "no money & scarcely any business in Charleston!" When Gonzales went to Charleston during the first days of October in search of milling contracts, his wife hoped that "this last visit will determine if our business is to go down entirely, or go on for a while,—success I do not dream of—The expenses of the mill are too enormous & labour too high to permit it. The lost crops, of course diminish the demands for lumbers, planters, don't need to build houses when they have nothing to put in them."⁴⁹

In mid-October, Hattie received three letters in one day from her husband in that had been delayed in transit. He expressed "great anxiety at

his prolonged absence & in great suspense kept waiting day after day upon the Gentleman who expects money & who has partly promised to lend it for carrying on the milling." Hattie informed her mother, "We are so much in debt that failing to get this money—will be complete ruin—but I am perfectly prepared for the worst. I am most anxious to leave this country for ever. The only attraction here is yourselves & although so near the difficulties of meeting are innumerable." The Elliott matriarch replied, "Hattie, tis a consoling idea that every one, the most acute Merchant & Planter, has failed. We have worked hard & must submit to our doom." Emily expounded their situation: "Money is scarcer than ever, & we hear of nothing but failures & losses. We are up to our ears in debt for the crop, won't think of paying & even had we made a crop the prices forbid profit, \$9.00 tax on every bag of cotton."⁵⁰

Hattie wrote back to her husband that the family was well and asked him to remain "until the business can be settled one way or the other." Gonzales responded on October 18, thanking her with all his heart for the very comforting letter. He planned on being home in a week, as he had better hopes than previously of making a business arrangement. The Cuban sent his wife by the Southern Express Company some postage stamps, "63 lbs. of bacon, some nice crackers for the family & 1 oz. genuine ham." He asked her to have Stubbs, the sawmill foreman, buy and grind corn for the family and the laborers. In late October, the sawmill was handling a new order from the Seabrook plantation. The Gonzales family was "put to great inconvenience & suffering by the failure of N. Heywards son to fulfil his engagement of paying for his lumber in corn." Hattie complained that "no one now seems to care about breaking their engagements." The Elliotts had been anxious to see the Gonzales children for months, but the railroad trip had to be postponed as "there was literally no money to buy their passage." The pesky Alfonso was described by his mother as "a lazy little scamp & is never energetic but when he [is] riding or driving a mule." Stubbs was so impressed, that he told his timber haulers that Fonsy "could beat them all at driving." Benigno was teething, had learned to walk, and delighted in being drawn about in a cart that Luis built for him.⁵¹

While in Charleston, the forty-nine-year-old Cuban was bedridden during the last three days of October with "awful" back pains due to a

cold and "a great disorder of the liver." He was prescribed "tonics and two pills" by family physician Thomas L. Ogier. The city was "very unhealthy," with "fevers, congestive, & membranous croup," resulting in some deaths. Gonzales acquired from grocer R. A. Pennal some provisions on credit and sent them to Social Hall by express. He enclosed a note to his wife saying, "The 5 gallon whiskey you can have transferred to smaller vessels & have it dealt out to mill hands. The five gallon keg of molasses likewise. The one gallon demijohn of whiskey & 1 gallon demijohn of syrup are for home use. The self raising flour is in a box for Roseanna." According to Hattie, "Bacon, molasses & whiskey is what the freed people cared for. They have passed the stage for fancy hats & Jewellery at least in these regions. Tis very amusing to see Gonzie trading with them, several times he was about to cheap himself badly when Brosio & self came to the rescue—he is an excellent shopper however & has made some wonderful bargains lately."⁵²

Gonzales returned home on November 5, worried about his unsuccessful commercial dealings. He went hunting with the Rhett brothers several times, to get "meat for the family," failing to get a deer, "although the woods are full of them." The Cuban found that one of his mules had been stolen when it was turned out to pasture to avoid starvation. Sallie the cow was pregnant and unproductive, and Brosio was being sent to purchase milk from a freedman at twenty cents a quart. The two servants had not been paid in months and, according to Hattie, were restless due to "sandflies, fear of fever, absence from the Priest (what a mountain they will have to confess) & want of company." Roseanna soon gave a month's notice that she would return to Ireland at the end of November.⁵³

When the fever season ended in early November, the Gonzales family was relieved that their children had overcome slight fevers, thanks to their daily dose of quinine. Tom Elliott, his six-year-old son Apsley, and his daughter-in-law Belle were afflicted with congestive fever in October, resulting in the death of the last two. The neighboring Rhett family had become ill and some African Americans in Walterboro had died of bilious fever. Gonzales and his wife imbibed a mixture of gin and whiskey as a medicinal tonic. Hattie had helped nurse the sick field hands and wrote to her sister Annie: "You would be amused to see what a doctress I am considered by the nigs & poor whites—& t'is lamentable to find

what ignorance prevails among these people. They die for the want of proper medicine." With winter approaching, the Elliott women were soon sewing warm clothes for the Gonzales children, who were also fitted out with "Paddie" jackets by Margaret.³⁴

Gonzales, after spending a week in Social Hall, returned to Charleston on November 12 to collect cash "for lumber bought at the mill." His wife described the situation as "hard work to get this money for the factors are rarely in funds for their patrons & it takes a deal of coaxing and teasing to induce them to pay up." Gonzales also learned that George Page and Company, whose promissory note for the sawmill had been due in April, had sued him in the Federal District Court in Charleston. The plaintiff, represented by the firm of F. Rutledge and H. E. Young, was asking for double indemnity, a total of \$13,460. Gonzales hired thirty-six-year-old defense attorney Michael Patrick O'Connor, a Beaufort native and former State representative. During the war, O'Connor had organized the Jasper Greens and was later a first lieutenant in the Lafayette Artillery Battery. He had also been the conduit of relief funds donated by Cuban planters for the Confederacy. In 1865, O'Connor had taken his family to live for two months in Cuba at his father-in-law's Delta plantation in Sagua la Grande. Gonzales returned home a few days later, stopping to visit the Elliots at Oak Lawn.³⁵

Hattie envisioned a bleak future for her family: "We are trying our best to make the mill pay but it has done little more so far—I have to ration the hands. T'is awfully expensive, all the time requiring something which costs money & does not return any. The present manager is very capable, hardworking & is altogether a businessman so I trust something may be done to make the speculation not altogether so forlorn a failure as it now appears to be." The mounting vicissitudes wore down Gonzales's natural optimism by mid-November. Hattie noticed that "he has not been so hopeful for some time past." She had also lost her enthusiasm for Social Hall, saying, "One would think that 'Sodom' was the veritable place of this spot." Hattie called it a "great place this, for insects of every description, & they 'never say die' fleas 'skeeters' sand flies, house flies, cockroaches, crickets, grasshoppers & moths of every kind—a splendid situation this for a naturalist." She had stopped teaching the boys because of "too much to do & too little time to do it in. Our servants do very little: Margaret only minds Benigno, & Roseanna confines herself to

her very little cooking & washing . . . I wait more upon my cook that she does upon me."³⁶

Gonzales hired a white carpenter from Whippy Swamp named Fields, who claimed to have been "a good soldier," to build a clay chimney onto the cabin. Fields's wife agreed to do the wash and her sister, "a colored gal," would cook and do chores. After the Fields clan occupied a sharecropper's shack at Social Hall, the carpenter alleged that he and his children were sick, and delayed his work on the chimney. The Gonzales family provided medicine and soup for the children and sent Fields his meals, in addition to his rations of coffee, flour, tobacco, and whiskey. The carpenter spent weeks without finishing his work before absconding. The chimney was completed on November 29 by a freedman from the sawmill, who also built an addition to the main cabin.³⁷

Gonzales returned to Charleston, summoned before the federal district court on December 2, regarding the pending lawsuit. Since the family letters never mentions this affair, Gonzales may not have initially informed Hattie about it to avoid her further grief. She only told her mother that her husband had gone to Charleston to collect "the paltry sums due him by a 'big planter,'" and to acquire supplies for his family. They had "not had a drop of milk for nearly a fortnight & have been out of sugar & butter too." Gonzales grieved at seeing his eighteen-month son "so thin & pale," and Hattie regretted having stopped breastfeeding him. She indicated that Benigno "cries dolefully after corn bread. We give him coffee & gin & water, very weak." Gonzales was invited to stay in Charleston at the residence of railroad conductor William Crovatt, who lived "in comfort & style" at 83 Cannon Street. Crovatt "gave him a party, at which were present very respectable people." Gonzales heard that after New Year's, many King Street stores were closing and large numbers of clerks were being dismissed.³⁸

The Cuban was back home by December 9 with corn rations and very "cheerful for he had the prospects of forming a lucrative contract North—Money to be paid as cargoes left the mill." His glee turned into despair the next morning, when Stubbs and his employees told him that the sawmill boilers, which had been in disrepair for a long time, had broken down. The workers then departed to spend Christmas with their families. Stubbs remained a few days, traveling to neighboring islands to look at boilers for sale. When a deal could not be arranged, Stubbs

returned to his Mount Holly home with a note for \$140 in back wages. Other calamities followed that week, with the loss of a fine mule and Gonzales's buggy breaking down when Luis drove it to Green Pond.⁶⁰

In mid-December, fifty-three-year-old Charleston merchant Edward H. Lafitte stayed at Social Hall with his nephew for a few days, enjoying a hunting invitation from Gonzales. Hattie described him as "a perfect gentleman & has been most kind & considerate of us," but she was embarrassed by "the horrors of our present condition." She borrowed silverware from her mother for the visit, making her melancholic as she recalled "the good old times." Lafitte, who was the family's biggest creditor, was no longer able to assist them, as he had "been ruined through endorsing for the Trenholms whom he believed to be good pay." The Gonzales household was experiencing their worst Christmas season ever, and lack of money prohibited them from traveling to Oak Lawn to be with the Elliots.⁶¹

The Cuban made another business trip to Charleston during the first days of January 1868. The city was abuzz with the arrival of 124 delegates elected to the state constitutional convention. After Gonzales returned to Social Hall, he visited grocer "Large Trees" Hutchinson, bartering provisions of corn, bacon, sugar, and molasses for a lumber debt. The economic depression, the money shortage, the mounting debts, and the difficulty of repairing his sawmill, made Gonzales decide "after enduring a summer of anxiety" to "give up all his plans" at Social Hall and find something more reliable in Cuba. In February, the family abandoned their farm for the long-awaited reunion with the Elliots at Oak Lawn. Their remaining domestic servant, Margaret Fludd, owed \$135 in back wages, went to work in Charleston for the family of lumber merchant E. H. Sherman.⁶²

The Elliots had renovated their slave-cabin home with two additional chambers in the loft, each with three large windows. One room was for the matriarch and the other was used by the Gonzales family during their visit. Some of the children slept with their grandmother and aunts. The kitchen house had been rebuilt and brother Tom was also staying at Oak Lawn. The family reunion was an ecstatic event, but Elliots were shocked to see the emaciated twenty-eight-year-old Hattie. A year of exposure in the pinelands had taken its toll on the Southern belle. Her weight had dropped under ninety-six pounds, she had three ridges

across her forehead and her hands were "as hard as bricks." She was accustomed to sleeping anywhere and did not mind "sleeping on the floor." Still, Hattie arrogantly claimed, "I am more aristocratic now, than I ever was & the poorer I am, the more proud I am of my good blood—perhaps in *heaven* two classes might live together on the same footing, *religion* making ladies & gentlemen of all, but on earth certainly not." Her sister Mary considered Hattie "a heroine to have stood those fevers so long uncomplainingly."⁶³

In March 1868, when Luis was scheduled to return to Cuba, the entire Gonzales family accompanied him. That month, Jefferson Davis stopped in Havana on his way from New Orleans to Baltimore. He received a telegraphed invitation from an acquaintance, Edward Sánchez, to visit his home in Matanzas. After Davis accepted, Sánchez quickly gathered a welcoming committee that included his cousin Gonzales, Hattie, and former Confederate Gen. Birkett Davenport Fry, living on the island since 1865. When Davis arrived in Matanzas, he shook hands with the former colonel, whom he had denied a general's rank on six occasions, and they quickly forgot their differences. Hattie wrote on March 20 to a friend in Greenville, South Carolina, that when she saw Davis, "I was so happy, I took his hands in mine and we instinctively pressed them in long silence." Davis rode in a carriage with Gonzales, Hattie, Fry, and Sánchez, to the latter's residence, where they dined together. Davis was introduced to the Gonzales children. He took three-year-old Gertrude in his arms and spoke of his own family. They spent the evening reminiscing and then accompanied the former Confederate president to the Matanzas Lyceum, where he was made an honorary member. Hattie found Davis to have "a look of melancholy, still he was entertaining and amusing at times. Joked about many incidents during the war." Gonzales "enjoyed his visit greatly."⁶⁴

The Gonzales family recovered their health while guests of wealthy relatives and friends. The patriarch arranged to settle permanently in Matanzas, before returning with his kindred to South Carolina, after receiving passports on June 17, 1868. The following month, the state was readmitted into the Union after ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment. The Gonzales family settled in Charleston, but their movements are sketchy during the next six months. The federal lawsuit for nonpayment of the sawmill was pending. The machinery was removed from Social

Hall and returned to Baltimore in August. Appraisers from the Baltimore Steam Boiler Works "found the whole in a broken and damaged condition," worth only \$1,250. By mid-August, Brosio, Fonsy and Mino were staying with the Elliots in Adams Run, while Gonzales, Hattie, Narto and Tula were living in an 1820 two-story boardinghouse run by a Prussian couple, fifty-nine-year-old grocer John Scharlock and his forty-nine-year-old wife Amanda. It was located at 75 Cannon Street, a few doors from the home railroad conductor William Crovatt. Amanda was apprenticing two African American girls, eight-year-old Rebecca Chisolm and her five-year-old sister Anna. Tula liked Becky "very much & is playing with her all the time." A week later, Gonzales obtained a visa from the Spanish Consulate in Charleston to travel to Matanzas with his family, but he failed to use it because the legal claim against him had not been settled.⁶⁴

In early October, the Gonzales family once more quartered with the Elliots, and continued making plans to return to Cuba. Hattie sent a warm cloak to her niece in Baltimore, where her sister Mary Johnstone had moved with her children that month to work as a matron in the recently founded Edgeworth School for Young Ladies. Mary was "much pleased at the idea of seeing Hattie and her children on their way to Cuba." The crop at Oak Lawn, planted by Tom and Ralph with hired hands, was again a failure. Gonzales and most of the children returned to Charleston first, where Hattie and Benigno joined them on October 31. The family visited a traveling circus the next day, except Alfonso, who was feverish and remained with Mrs. Scharlock.⁶⁵

Gonzales wrote on December 2 to General Beauregard in New Orleans, asking to intercede with the owners of Perkins and Company for reduced rates or free steamer passages to Havana. Beauregard replied eight days later that it violated company rules, adding, "I regret to hear of your disappointments, but you have this to console you, if it be a consolation, that few, very few of our late associates have met with any success since the War." Beauregard wished Gonzales better luck in Cuba but warned him against involvement in the independence revolution which had started two months earlier: "Your past experience will give you, at once, an important position there, should you desire to take a part in the coming struggle. You should consider well, however, whether Cuba is not happier under Spanish rule, than it will be under the complications which

may ensue, should she separate from the mother country." The first Cuban War of Independence was declared by planter Carlos Manuel de Céspedes and a group of Masonic conspirators on October 10, 1868. Céspedes freed his thirty slaves, who joined the insurgency, and issued a proclamation calling for abolition and independence. The struggle was initially contained in the eastern provinces of Oriente and Camagüey.⁶⁶

Beauregard later wrote to his former chief of staff, Gen. Thomas Jordan, in New York, enclosing a letter of recommendation Jordan needed to be hired by the exiled Cuban Junta to organize their rebel army on the island. He informed Jordan that Gonzales had returned to Cuba and could be of service to him there. Beauregard stated that he opposed filibustering and classified Narciso López and William Walker as no more than "Military Carpetbaggers." Beauregard's letter, his recent contempt for filibusters, and his animosity toward Jefferson Davis disappointed Gonzales and resulted in a lengthy estrangement between them. No further correspondence between them has been found, and Beauregard later omitted his former chief of artillery from his Civil War reminiscences.⁶⁷

As the verdict of the sawmill lawsuit against Gonzales drew closer, he filed for bankruptcy on December 16 before Charleston federal district court judge George S. Bryan. Attorney Michael Patrick O'Connor again represented him. Gonzales gave a statement of "creditors whose Claims are Unsecured," attesting that during 1866 and 1867, he owed \$5,088 to Charleston merchants, of which \$1,900 was due to Edward H. Lafitte and \$1,800 to Willis and Chisolm. Twenty other debts were under \$200, including \$20 he borrowed from Joseph Purcell, the livery stable keeper at the Mills House. The smallest debt, for \$10, was due to druggists Raoul and Lynah for medicine. He also declared that he owed George Page and Company of Baltimore \$7,000 for the ruined sawmill, the \$6,175 bond of Mary Johnstone, and his \$10,000 marriage bond, which he signed over to Ralph Elliott as trustee. The total debts of his bankruptcy petition amounted to \$28,263. The ownership of Social Hall reverted to the Elliott estate since the two bonds Gonzales assumed for it, totaling \$16,175, were unpaid. The Reconstruction state constitution had exempted the property of married women from their husband's debts. Gonzales surrendered to the court register his entire estate: a deed for one acre of land at Chapman's Bluff, bought in June 1866, worth \$100. The "Personal Property" inventory form filed with the court indicated that Gonzales

owned "no Household Goods, 2 suits of clothes." That same day, Gonzales was adjudged bankrupt and was granted a certificate of protection. Four days later, the jury in the civil lawsuit brought in a verdict against Gonzales for \$6,300.64 on behalf of plaintiff George Page and Company, and an additional \$31.25 in court costs.⁶⁸

In spite of the bankruptcy and the freezing weather, the Gonzales family had a "pleasant" Christmas Day. Hattie indicated that the children "were very happy in their own way—having sold some old clothes we could give them a little money which they spent in the most foolish way for such sensible boys—Trumpets, horns, accordions, organs, & other noisy toys—fire crackers of course." Mrs. Amanda Scharlock, their boardinghouse owner, supplied the family with a turkey meal, fruit, and pound cake. A Mrs. Huger gave the children a big bundle of candy and a little cup and saucer for Tula. She also received a beautiful "doll, cradle & real little mattress," which delighted her.⁶⁹

The Spanish consulate in Charleston expedited visas on December 29 for the Gonzales family to travel to Havana. The consul noted on the passport: "This gentleman, I know for certain that, in accordance with acquired information, after the dismissal of the confederate army, to which he belonged, is dedicated exclusively to his agricultural interests." Two days later, the *Courier* published the Gonzales bankruptcy notice, calling on his creditors to prove their debts before the federal court register on January 11, 1869. Gonzales avoided that embarrassment. On New Year's Day, the family started bidding farewell to their Charlestonian friends and relatives. Cousin Ebet Burnet found that "they all looked bright & well, the children all seemed delighted with the idea of traveling, steamboats, etc." Hattie seemed "very bold, and determined to be cheerful. . . . She had a bright color, and looked just as pretty as ever." Upon boarding the steamer for Savannah that night, on the first leg of their circuitous journey to Havana, the sky was very dark and looked "so much like rain." It appeared to be an omen of the misfortune that awaited them before the year ended.⁷⁰

The previous three and one-half years had been very trying for the Gonzales family. The stress, insecurity, anxiety, debts, despair, and poverty, prompted by Reconstruction, defined Gonzales's character. His religious faith, expressed through frequent family prayers, supplied spiritual comfort during times of crisis. Hattie, the consoling and loving wife, provided

affection, understanding, and moral support. Gonzales proved very forgiving toward a despondent and powerless Jefferson Davis, forever ending their wartime bitterness with a sincere handshake. The Cuban, an honest businessman, was incapable of exploiting anyone, even the freedmen, in his transactions. His commercial failures were the result of fateful circumstances that affected many other Carolinians, including crop losses due to theft and inclement weather. His increasingly prosperous Charleston commission business was destroyed by race rioters. The economic depression of 1867 thwarted his lumber venture and drove him deeper into debt. Forever an optimist, the Cuban always expected something to turn up. He now viewed the return to his homeland as providing that forlorn opportunity.