

These Three Things

By Victor Rousseau

Illustrated by T. V. McCARTHY



IN the late forties the day of the feudal lords had really passed, though they still ground the villen's corn for a tithe, and had the village crier proclaim the rentals in kind at the church door one Sunday in the year. Nevertheless, Alphonse de Betincourt kept up his country house in the style of his father; he gave a caribou hunt every November before returning to Quebec for the winter; and, if his pomp was wearing a little thin, he covered it the more with the cloak of ceremony.

Everywhere throughout the Province the rising tide of democracy was sweeping the old landmarks away. In a few years tithe and due, rental and manorial right were to be swept into the limbo of the past. De Betincourt knew it, but no whisper of it crossed his threshold. And, because there was more human kindness in the old order than there is under the new, he had resolved that the most promising of his servants, Jean Robichaud, should be trained in Laval, at his expense, for the priesthood.

There was the golden key to opportunity. For, once he had wrapped himself in his cassock, Jean would be the equal of any man in the land. Already the shadow of celibacy—or the illumination, whichever you will—enveloped the young man; so that, from groom, he had become a sort of trusted secretary, and saw Hermine de Betincourt for many hours daily. He saw her at breakfast and at supper, he said good-night to her, and good-morning; he saw her in various moods; and the whole thing was incredulous to young Louis Dussault, who had driven out from Quebec for the caribou hunt and ball, and could not conceive how any man should have the privilege of such felicity.

When a youth is marked for the priesthood all women are one to him, so that he never needs look at the same one twice. This is generally known. That is why the Seigneur de Betincourt, knowing and suspecting nothing of the conflicting passions in Jean Robichaud's heart, was glad to provide his daughter with the services of a smart attendant, who could ride with her, and carry her purchases, and dig her flower-garden.

Now to the old question why one man is born to riches and rank, and another to degradation, a wise answer has been suggested. Namely, that the former is born with the possession of certain knowledge which the latter must acquire through the lessons of life. Jean Robichaud lacked knowledge of three things, and the first was self-control. He learned his first lesson on that night of the ball.

For the Seigneur had had a miserable chase, and was in a carping humor; he looked at his daughter, standing among the young men, and speculated which might prove the best for her husband. He could find no satisfaction in any of them. He had heard a report that Pierre Dussault, the father of Louis, had lost a fortune in a lumber deal. Just at the height of his vexation Jean Robichaud, passing with a tray of spiced wine, and trying to look more like a courtier than a waiter, stumbled over a chair, and let the tray fall, breaking the glasses and sending their contents all over Hermine's gown.

De Betincourt strode forward and cuffed the young man soundly on each ear.

"A fine cure you'll make, Jean, if you trip over your soutane every time you go up into the pulpit!" he exclaimed angrily.

There was the youth's first opportunity. The Seigneur's act was outrageous; but de Betincourt was an old man, and Robichaud had shot up suddenly from a little boy. And the chase had been bad, and Pierre Dussault's suspected losses had worried the Seigneur. Next moment, he had placed his hand upon Jean's shoulder.

"Forgive me for that, my boy!" he said, with the pride that knew how to stoop to self-abasement.

Jean Robichaud stood up, white from forehead to throat. What he might have said he never knew afterward, but at that moment, he saw Hermine flushed, miserable face, and pity in her eyes. And either her father's act, or a long rankling sense of inequality, or both, stung him to fury.

He shook his fist in the Seigneur's face. "I leave your doors to-night," he stuttered. "And I'll make you suffer for that blow—mark me, I'll never forget it!"

Young Dussault tittered, and he swung round upon him.

"And you, too!" he shouted, and waved his arm in fierce gesticulation toward the company. "You, and all of you."

He strode out of the hall toward the habitant cottage beneath the knoll, in which he had been born, in which he kept the few possessions that he had, living alone there since his mother's death a few months before. He put on his fur cap and his coat, and took the road toward Quebec.

Inside the hall, after a few moment's pause, the dance was resumed. Hermine de Betincourt smiled at Louis Dussault as they moved in time to the music. The sight would have sent the blood coursing furiously through Jean Robichaud's veins, had he been there to see.

OLD Michael Jardine, the draper, wanted an assistant.

He always wanted one, being a crabbed, cross-grained old man who could never keep a boy long. As soon as he had hired one he had to begin looking round for another. The placard was perpetually in the window of his shop on St. Jean Street. Jean Robichaud saw it the morning of his arrival, after a tramp of thirty hours, broken only by a snatch of sleep and a bite of food in a peasant's hut.

He stood outside the shop, gathering courage to enter. He had already spent a year in Quebec, but that was in the Little Seminary, a sort of preliminary school, where he had been kept rigidly housed, and allowed out only when the scholars marched in pairs through the streets on their enforced walks, under the watchful eyes of the teachers. So Quebec was really as much of a closed book to Jean as life itself.



Hermine sat down on the lowest step of the stairs and laughed

Old Michael Jardine saw him through the glass as he arranged his little parcels of woollen and linen goods. He guessed his purpose—Michael was a shrewd judge of a man—and liked his looks. So, after letting him wait, and tarry, and go away, and come back, he went to the door and called him.

"Ye'll be wanting to buy something, my laddie?" he asked, with the malicious sarcasm that had become second nature to him. "Or mebbe ye've never seen such a fine display of goods in a window before?"

"I'm looking for a position, sir," faltered Jean, who had, of course, not understood a word of the old Scotchman's remarks.

"Come in," said Michael, in Jean's own language. "You're wanting a position, eh? Can you read, write, cypher, run errands at half a mile an hour, and not take anything bigger than a halfpenny out of the till when you're wanting sweeties?"

The bitter, taunting tone struck the young man dumb. He made a movement to leave the shop; and then he stayed. He raised his head and looked the old man in the eyes. Michael Jardine liked that.

"I'll try, sir," he said.

For Jean Robichaud had already learned his first lesson, although he did not know it.

"Ye're a besotted Papist, I don't doubt," said the old man. "Where's your references?"

"I've never worked in town before, sir," answered Jean. "I was raised on the Seigneurie of Monsieur de Betincourt. I left him Tuesday last because he struck me for upsetting a tray of glasses. And he was going to train me for the priesthood."

Michael liked the young man's candor better than ever.

"I don't know," he said doubtfully. "Mebbe I'll write him a letter to find out about ye. If you're honest I don't so much mind your being clumsy. They're all that. Come back a week from to-morrow and I'll see about it."

"Won't you take me for a week for my board and lodging, sir? I have nowhere to go, and no money," pleaded Jean, trying to keep back the tears of shame. "I'm sure he can't give me a bad reference—about being honest, I mean—but I'd rather you wouldn't write to him."

"The devil with references!" exploded Michael. "Don't you know, my lad, that you're carrying yours about with you?"

On the fourth day thereafter Michael took down the placard in his window.

Jean was clumsy, but so were all of them, thought Michael. On the other hand, he was honest. Michael had tested him with a silver piece, dropped under the counter, and then with a gold piece, stuck into a corner of a shelf, just as it might have fallen out of the till. And he was going to tell him, and compliment him, but, just as he was about to speak, he thought it better not to.

It was a little store, but Michael had a good trade. Most of the fashionable ladies dealt with Jardine's, and Jean was sent constantly to their houses, to deliver parcels. One day Michael called to the young man as he was getting ready to close up the shop.

"Ye didn't see Mademoiselle de Betincourt when she was here this morning," he said. "I'd sent ye to the warehouse, I remember. There was some of the new stockings that she'd be pleased to see any time I could send them. Ye'd better take the bundle to her house and see if ye can sell them."

JEAN ROBICHAUD took the package, which old Michael had in readiness, and started on the climb up the hill toward St. Louis Street, where de Betincourt had his city house. All the way his legs felt weak under him, but he was no coward; he knew that a man cannot face dangers unless he is strong enough to face humiliations. Holding the bundle under his arm, and miserably aware of his cheap clothes and insignificant appearance, Jean rapped at the door and asked the maid for Mademoiselle Hermine.

She neither told him to wait nor asked him in, and they met at the open door of the parlor. Inside a bright fire burned in the open hearth, and there were ladies in rustling gowns and furs, chattering and clinking teacups, all ignorant of the blackness that the disparity cast over Jean's soul. Hermine uttered a little cry and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Jean! My poor Jean!" she said. "How often I have thought about you since you went away! Come in and tell me—no, not into that room, into here! You were so foolish, Jean! What have you in that parcel?"

"Silk stockings," faltered Jean Robichaud. "You see, I work for Monsieur Jardine, Mademoiselle, and he sent me to you to choose those which you wanted to buy."

"How many pairs—how much—I'll buy them all, Jean," said Hermine de Betincourt, beginning to sob, and then beginning to laugh, and then catching her breath again.

"I do not know, Mademoiselle," said Jean, removing the string from the bundle and opening it.

It slipped out of his hands; for Jean was always clumsy, and they tumbled to the floor, black stockings, blue stockings, white and striped stockings. Jean stooped and began to pick them up and fold them. Hermine sat down on the lowest step of the stairs and laughed uncontrollably.

From within the parlor the young ladies, their curiosity aroused, came cautiously out, and seeing what had occurred, stood with linked arms, laughing at Jean also.

Jean folded up the stockings very deliberately—he had quite learned his first lesson by now—wrapped up the package and handed it to Hermine.

"Perhaps you will make a selection at your leisure, Mademoiselle," he said.

"Ah, Jean Robichaud, you will kill me if you don't stop!" cried the girl, holding her sides.

Jean went quietly out of the house. When he had closed the door behind him he stopped a minute in the blinding snowstorm, and all at once the germ of his idea, born on the night of the blow, became clear in his brain.

"I know now that rich people are quite heartless," he said. "Money—that's the thing! Money! When I am rich I'll never rest till I have humbled you."

After that Jean saved every penny. Five years later, when his employer was suffering from a reverse of fortune, he was able to lend him enough to tide him over, and win his way to a partnership. The firm prospered and grew. Old Michael was content to leave the direction of affairs to his energetic young assistant. When (Continued on page 3)

The Lessons of Life

MOST people have lessons to learn in the school of life. The teacher is generally Experience!—a hard master, some folks say.

Jean Robichaud had three lessons to learn before he attained his goal. The third of these was that love is never given in vain.

Let Victor Rousseau tell you how he learned them!

Victor Rousseau has related many delightful romances—some in Everywoman's World, some in the Red Book, some—oh, in dozens of journals, but none more interesting than "These Three Things."