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Indianapolis-New York, U. S. A.

THE INHERITANCE OF JEAN TROUVE

By NEVIL HENSHAW
Author of *Life of the Grand Woods*, etc.

CHAPTER VI.—CONTINUED

"Good morning, M'sieu," he began. "I have called upon a little matter of business. That is, upon a matter of great importance which, I am sure, will bring you much pleasure and satisfaction."

The General gazed at his visitor until a sudden flash of recognition announced that he had placed him in the well-ordered catalogue of his memory. At me he did not so much as glance, despite the unwavering fixity of my stare. Evidently he was well accustomed to the admiring gaze of those awed dependents who were fortunate enough to be admitted to his presence.

"Very well, Dugas," said he briskly. "Get down to your business. What is this matter that is going to bring me so much pleasure and satisfaction?"

Taking my father's letter from an inside pocket, Monsieur Dugas held it for a moment in one hand. He was plainly nervous. It had not actually been a true Cajun that he was, he could not refrain from taking advantage of the dramatic possibilities of the situation.

"Last night, M'sieu, I returned from the city where I had been to replenish the stock of my store," he continued impressively. "While there I stayed at the house of a Madame Therese for whom I am delivering this letter. As it contains sad news, perhaps I had best prepare you for it by first explaining that—"

A sudden look of suspense flashed into the General's face, and he held up an imperious hand.

"Give me the letter," he commanded. "If, after I have read it, I find that I am in need either of your sympathy or explanations, I shall not hesitate to call upon you for them."

He fairly snatched the letter from the storekeeper's hand and, opening it with twitching fingers, began to read. Half-way through the first page he looked up for an instant to give me a quick searching glance, and after this he read hurriedly slurring through the pitiful lines of my father's appeal with a face as hard as stone. When he had finished he slowly tore the letter into bits, and rising, cast them into the fire. As he did so I noticed that his hand was steady once more, but a strained, tortured look had now crept into his eyes, and his face was like that of one already dead.

"Well, Dugas?" he inquired in a voice as lifeless as his face. "Is this all of your business, or are you the bearer of other messages from the city?"

"Why—why no, M'sieu," stammered the puzzled storekeeper. "There was only the one letter. But surely—"

The mask of hardness slipped over the General's face with a suddenness that was appalling. It was as though, after long and relentless tugging, a strong hand had released some reluctant blind.

"Then I wish you good morning," he grated. "Kindly close the door as you go out."

Gasping, staring, yet instinctively obeying the note of command in the General's voice, Monsieur Dugas backed toward the door. Surprise, disappointment and a certain aversive fear flashed across his ashen features. Evidently he had been prepared for anything rather than this cold dismissal without a word.

"But—but the boy, M'sieu?" he quavered.

The General shrugged as he picked up an envelope for his discarded letter.

"That, Dugas, is your affair," he replied, without a trace of interest in his tone.

"But he is your grandson, M'sieu, your grandson," persisted the storekeeper.

The pen scratched through the envelope's address and, had I been a little older, I could not but have admired the Spartan fortitude of this man who, even in his hour of torture, forced his trembling fingers to do the bidding of his iron will. Then the General raised his head.

"Dugas," said he, and his voice was thin and harsh with pain, "when my only son married the daughter of one of my tenants, I became a childless parent. This boy may be the son of John Mareh, as the letter informs me, but he is not my grandson."

"I see," he replied. "Then you disinherit him?"

"Not at all," corrected the General. "Without rights one can not be disinherited. Upon his marriage my son lost his rights. Therefore I can hardly deprive this boy of something that he has never had."

Perhaps Monsieur Dugas mistook the General's cruel irony for encouragement. Perhaps he was thinking of the little roll of money that Madame Therese had given him, and of the hole that would be made in it by a ticket to the city. Be this as it may, the fear in his eyes ebbed away to be replaced by a look of slow stubbornness.

"Nevertheless, M'sieu, grandson or no grandson, there is the boy,"

he pointed out. "Something will have to be done with him."

The General nodded. "Most assuredly, Dugas."

"Also, M'sieu, I am a poor man," continued the storekeeper. "Already it has cost me much more than I can afford to bring him here. Therefore I would like to know my position in this matter."

Monsieur Dugas paused expectantly, for by now he had recovered his composure. His little eyes shone greedily, and in his voice there was a vague hint of the threat which, if necessary, he would later on put into words.

The General smiled with the savage satisfaction of one who, having dug a pit, has seen his enemy stumble into it of his own free will.

"Dugas," said he, "I have been waiting for just that question. Otherwise you would now be upon your way to the piraie. If I am not disappointed in my tolerance, I am at least disappointed in you. I have thought you a shrewd careful man."

"But, M'sieu," whined the storekeeper, a look of sickly fear driving the stubbornness from his gaze.

The General's fist came down upon the table with a bang.

"Silence!" he thundered. "You will hear me out, and then you will go. You ask your position in this matter? I will explain it to you. You have mixed yourself up in an affair not your own, an affair that has been dead and buried for years. Moreover you have chosen as the object of your impertinence the one man in all this parish who holds your ruin in his hands."

"Some weeks ago, if you will remember, you came to me and asked me as a member of the Police Jury to use my influence in having your liquor license restored to you. You swore that it had been taken away unjustly, and since then I have looked into the matter. Also, upon two occasions, I have made it my business to visit your store."

He paused, and Monsieur Dugas, gray with fear, passed a hand across the little beads of moisture that had gathered upon his brow.

"Well, and what of it, M'sieu?" he demanded with pitiful bravado.

"Only that your petitions are too thin, especially those in the rear, my dear Dugas," mocked the General. "Really I can not understand why you wanted the license at all unless you contemplate opening another place."

"There was a moment's pause in which the storekeeper, ghastly and trembling, stretched forth an appealing hand."

"Mercy, M'sieu," he implored. "I did not know, I swear it. I thought that you would be pleased, that you would want the boy. I knew not what was in the letter. I do not know it now. I thought that I was doing you a favor. I spent my money, I gave my time. I will take the boy wherever you tell me. I will keep my mouth closed. Only do the same for me, M'sieu, or I am a ruined man."

The General folded his letter and sealed it very deliberately before replying. All the anger and triumph had fallen from him now, and he suddenly looked gray and worn. When he spoke, however, it was in the same curt, businesslike tone with which he had first addressed the storekeeper.

"Go, Dugas," he ordered. "Go and will see. Perhaps, if you are careful from now on, I will let the matter pass. In regard to the other affair, that is your business. You can arrange it as you see fit, only be sure that you never mention it to me again."

He paused wearily, and a terrible, haunting look of loneliness crept into his fierce old eyes.

"Never again, you understand," he repeated, and suddenly he sprang to his feet, his arm upraised in furious, impotent despair.

"God!" he cried. "Why did you bring it back, Dugas? I had buried it deep beneath the very wreck of my soul, and now, after all these years, you unearth it again! You fool! You impudent, meddling fool! And you ask me for mercy? Go, go quickly before I soil my hands with you."

All this time I had stood staring before the table, my thoughts divided between the puzzling resemblance, and the excited words of the two men. Now, when the General rose in the majestic erectness of his wrath, the door of my memory opened, and I peered inside. The tall lean figure, the haunted tortured eyes, the sinewy upraised arm, all of them restored the picture that I had lost.

A hand fell upon my shoulder, and Monsieur Dugas, cowering with terror, sought to draw me away. But I was not to be denied the triumph of my discovery. Freeing myself from his faltering grasp, I pointed a finger at the towering figure before me, and childlike, spoke out my thoughts.

"Ah, M'sieu," I cried. "I know who you are like now. It is M'sieu Abraham."

A sudden siren fell in which the tall figure resented itself stiffly in the chair. Once more Monsieur Dugas sought to draw me away, but the General held up a detaining hand. His mask of hardness had fallen again, and the cold gray eyes bored into mine until I was forced to turn away my head.

"A moment, Dugas," he ordered, and then added, turning to me, "So you think that I am like M'sieu Abraham? What M'sieu Abraham do you mean?"

"Why, M'sieu Abraham of the Bible," I replied, encouraged by his sudden notice. "He was the one, M'sieu, who sacrificed his only son."

With a gasp of horror, Monsieur Dugas seized me in a grip that was not to be denied.

"Died?" he panted hoarsely as he dragged me outside. "Are you mad, little one? Now he will most certainly destroy us both."

But I, looking back over my shoulder, felt only surprise. For I had caught a glimpse of the General's bowed head where it lay upon limp hands amid the scattered papers of the table.

Thus we left him, a hard, bitter old man who, flaunting his cruelty before the world, had finally come to judgment, and had bent his proud head in shame at the innocent words of the child whom he had denied.

TO BE CONTINUED

THREE BLESSINGS

"May God's blessing attend you, and when your time comes, may you not pass out of this world without the assistance of your clergy."

It was the first time Hugh L'Estrange had come in contact with anything Catholic. He laughed to himself—the idea of either death or clergy seemed incongruous in connection with his vigorous life. But he did not forget the blessing that the old Irish woman at the corner of Liverpool street had bestowed upon him. A gust of wind had sent her battered bonnet flying, and before her old limbs were set in motion he had stepped out into the road and recovered the truant headgear. Returning it, with something in addition to replace the mud-stained trimming, he noted anew her patient, poverty-worn face. In return she again called the blessings of heaven upon him.

On Sunday when he sat decorously in his new pew while the clergyman of his parish read the prayers in a monotonous voice, the Irish woman's words recurred to his mind. He repressed a smile at the thought of how much he would prefer Mr. Drake's absence to his assistance, even when death should come to him.

For an instant, too, the thought flashed across his mind that a religion of which the ministrations of the clergy were a vital part might hold something worth having for the poor and the dying.

At this juncture Mr. Drake's high-pitched call to prayer brought him back to the duty of the moment, and he rose to his feet with his neighbors.

Though he did not know it, the blessing of God was attending Hugh L'Estrange. For after this, often this Liverpool man of business came in contact with things Catholic. Possibly it was only some reference in a society paper, or the name of a church which he had never noticed before, or the knowledge that one or other of his many workmen were Irish, and therefore Catholic. Then he gave a thought to the old woman, whom, curiously enough he had never forgotten.

Perhaps the second direct contact that Hugh L'Estrange became aware of was one day at a meeting of the Board of Charities. The case of a Catholic boy was brought forward on account of some oversight in his registration on the workhouse books. He was to be brought up nominally in the Church of England; practically according to the views of those with whom he was to be boarded out.

The child, a sturdy young Lancastrian of eight or nine years, was standing near Mr. L'Estrange whilst a heated discussion went on between the other guardians. Touching the boy on the shoulder, Mr. L'Estrange spoke to him in an undertone.

"What do you think you are yourself, eh?" he asked, with a movement of the head to show that he referred to the theme of his guardian's conversation.

The boy looked at him squarely. Without hesitation he answered: "I be a Catholic."

Then he added: "If you were not a Catholic, what would you be?"

A Baptist, a Methodist, and a Congregational home were being discussed in turn.

"If I weren't 'un," replied the boy sturdily, "I'd be one."

"By jove! so you shall!" exclaimed L'Estrange, throwing himself into the discussion in which heretofore he had taken no part. So insistently did he press his point, declaring his intention of calling in legal opinion if necessary to support his claim, that before the meeting closed the boy was inscribed Catholic on the books and handed over to the manager of a Catholic boys' home. Afterwards Mr. L'Estrange noticed the boy pointing him out to the priest, who was losing no time in freeing him from the workhouse.

"Young George here tells me what you have done for him, sir," said the priest as Mr. L'Estrange passed him. "God will reward you for this."

That was the second Catholic blessing he received.

The third blessing came through no act of his own. He was only a spectator of a scene, and that, it seemed, by chance. Afterwards he understood that God's blessing was attending him.

The instant of Isaak Walton was strong within him, and the yearly

holiday he allowed himself from business was always spent where fishing might be had. It was only natural, therefore, that the west of Ireland should attract him. There, late in the autumn season, he found himself in a primitive riveride inn. During his stay the equinoctial gales changed the Atlantic into a gray, cruel sea, till, rising in mountains of water and foam, it seemed like a huge wall of rearing liquid rushing against the sky.

A pier to make safe harborage for the boats coming in from the islands had been built in the congested districts, but on this night the little gray wall was one mass of seething water which seemed to offer neither shelter nor safety to any craft. Yet here it was Hugh L'Estrange, watching the storm with Barble Joyce, his boatman on the lakes, his self-constituted guide along the river, saw, hardly believing his own eyes, a small craft cresting the huge billows for an instant, then falling away out of sight. It reappeared at intervals, however. Each time it took more certain shape in the fitful light of the fleeting moon. "A boat! God help them this night!" cried Barble, steadying himself against the pier and straining his eyes to see when the black, oblong shadow rose again on the waves. "Never can they live at the pier end there till the priest gets out to join them."

"The priest?" repeated the Englishman, thinking the wind had misheard his companion's meaning.

"Aye, the priest," returned Barble. "What else would bring ten men in their sense over from Irish-beg this night?"

He turned quickly and disappeared in the darkness, and L'Estrange guessed that he had gone to where the parochial house stood in some place at shelter.

He had learned long ago that Catholics wish for long prayers, and the priest to help a passing soul into eternity, but he never realized before how universally, even in the face of almost unsurmountable difficulties, that presence was sought.

It seemed madness even to try to reach the boat that tossed just beyond the pier, much less to board her and turn again into the storm. Yet sooner than he would have thought possible Barble, with half a dozen others, were back at the pier head again, and from the lanterns some of them held he could see a tall figure in black tarpaulin and close-fitting sou'wester standing whilst a rope was firmly fastened round it.

L'Estrange knew intuitively it was the priest. A momentary lull enabled the little band to make their way to where the boat was truly strained against the determined efforts of the rowers to keep her from destruction.

Coming nearer, they threw out a line. The priest took it winding it around his body. Then he dropped down as the boat waited for him. He loosed the rope afterward, and the men on the pier would have hauled it in, only there seemed some hitch or delay. Then they saw that one of the boat's crew was coming ashore in place of the priest. As he reached the pier L'Estrange, by some act of Providence, being nearest the boat, heard a groan of pain, and the hands of the sailor as he grasped them were wet and warm with blood. L'Estrange understood then that this man, hurt by some accident, was of no use in the boat, and that they were waiting because they needed another rower.

Barble, the next man to L'Estrange, was the father of a family; so too, was the next beyond. L'Estrange was not a good seaman, but he was a strong rower. Further, he had neither wife nor child to leave.

There was hardly time even for this to shape itself in his brain. He acted as he felt, and he decided to go where he felt the rope in his hands, saw for an instant the tossing depths beneath him. Then strong arms caught and held him, and he was in the boat.

The priest facing him was young, boyish, almost too young, too boyish, he had carelessly thought, to be the pastor of strong men's souls. But his face was white, determined, and his eyes were bright. He was a strange light excitement, perhaps, but certainly not fear. Young as he was, this was not the first midnight struggle he had had with the sea, but tonight as before, he carried his passport of safety on his heart.

Down went the boat, green walls of water before her and behind her, and nothing was left of the sky, but a narrow ribbon of black overhead. The Englishman, straining every nerve at the clumsy oar which he shared with one of the islanders, had no time for thought. Even afterwards everything seemed to him like a shapeless dream. Once even the helmsman faltered. The last wave nearly swamped them with a return of foam, and a rower from either side was forced to abandon his oar. From the white foam and distended eyes of the men about him L'Estrange realized that this was a greater peril than they had ever braved before.

"Steady, boys!" above the storm the priest's voice rose. Then he pulled himself upright, and even now no fear was in his eyes, though his face was white. "Remember, we cannot go down. Have you forgotten we are not alone?"

All except L'Estrange understood. With a stifled sob the helmsman turned again to create the breaker. For an instant they spun up in the air a blurred black

mass, then a collection of moving lights appeared in the darkness ahead, and the men knew their journey's end was near, and they felt assured of safety now, though only certain knowledge and skill could have taken the boat up to the only possible landing place.

But before there in the water at their sides, half drowned by the swirling foam, to meet and welcome the priest. They seized the boat, and the exhausted rowers sat at rest. High up onto the shingle they dragged her, and suddenly Hugh L'Estrange was aware that he alone of all those present was not bare-headed and on his knees.

Between two rows of kneeling figures, women bowed down and men bare-headed, the priest passed up to the rough-built quay. He was in time, they told him. Some impulse bade L'Estrange to follow him to the house of the man who lay dying. They said that for hours he had been calling in agony for the priest. Now he was calm and content; his prayer had been answered.

L'Estrange was not bent over the bed, saw those who had been waiting keep back until he drew himself upwards again, felt himself pressing forward, kneeling with the others; saw the flash of a silver case as the priest drew something from his breast.

"Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi, custodia animam tuam in vitam aeternam, Amen."

Then Hugh L'Estrange understood. It was not for the priest alone; it was for what he brought with him, for the Master, in whose name he had power to forgive sin, that Catholics pray all their lives long. The dying man was at rest, and half turning to those who had risked their lives to secure for their loved one that he had so passionately craved, the priest raised his hand in the final blessing.

Thus a third time a Catholic called down the blessing of God on Hugh L'Estrange.

Those of his colleagues who were present when George, the Lancastrian, had been allowed to keep the faith of his fathers declared themselves not in the least surprised when they heard that Hugh L'Estrange had been received into the Catholic Church. To others the news of his conversion came as a nine days' wonder. But to no one was the wonder of it all so deep or so lasting as to the man himself. Faith had come to him in the midst of the blindest ignorance. As a child he had to learn the catechism from its first page. On one point only he needed no teaching. He knew that God the Son was truly present in the Sacrament of the Altar, and that light made every-thing clear.

In the boat on the open sea, in the island cabin, with the storm still raging without, the faith of the priest and people had shown him a reflex of heaven's light. And knowing himself, with a sudden, overwhelming knowledge, to be in the presence of Jesus Christ, he had understood that this was the fulfillment of his first two Catholic blessings. The blessing of God had indeed attended him, and here, unexpectedly as to form and place, the reward of God had come upon him. It would lead him, God willing, some day to die at peace, with the assurance of forgiveness for the past and happiness for the future on the lips of the priest at his side. —Alice Dease in *The Magnificat*.

A PROTESTANT ROSARY

A profound change of attitude towards things Catholic has come over the Protestant denominations since the War. It is no longer an anomaly to see them advocating Catholic points of doctrine and practice which have been bitterly abhorred and viciously derided ever since the days of the Reformation. Many sects have not stopped at mere suggestion but have taken a step, sometimes in the face of strong opposition, towards services and religious practices which the most ignorant man knows to be frankly Catholic. We are no longer surprised to find Protestants having Mass, Midnight Mass on Christmas with Catholic carols, prayers for the dead, holy water, Lenten fasts. Only a short time ago the Episcopal Church proposed six of its members for canonization.

The latest suggestion has reference to the Rosary, and was made by Rev. James A. Beebe, at the Troy Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in these words: "The Catholic religion has wisely adopted a mechanical device for dwelling in certain incidents in the life of Christ. The Quakers, too, in their hour of silent prayer have realized the benefit of systematic reflection. It would be well for us, then, to adopt as our rosary a series of meditations on the Twenty-third Psalm and other inspired excerpts from the Bible."

What Luther must think of such a suggestion can easily be imagined by those who remember how he inveighed against the beads. How times have changed since the Episcopalians persecuted the Irish for their devotion to the Rosary. It is no longer the fashion for the sects to taunt us for "vain repetition of prayers," or "our mechanical way of approaching God."

Catholics must welcome these changes as infallible signs that the relics of Catholic conscience, long

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