

THE INHERITANCE OF JEAN TROUVE

By NEVIL HENSHAW
Author of "Allies of the Grand Woods, etc."
BOOK THREE.—BOIS BERARD
CHAPTER II.

A START IN LIFE
It was wonderful how easily I slipped into the life of the woods. Following the first weeks of strangeness, it was as though I had lived always at Bois Berard.

Established at Madame Alcide's, I began by looking after such of her affairs as were not beyond my rather limited powers. I chopped wood and hauled it in from the nearby forest. I looked after Achille. I tended the garden. Also I spent many hours with rod and gun so that the table seldom lacked its supply of fish or game. After the toil of the marsh it was like a long vacation, and my love of the soil, of growing things, increased each day.

I now found my chief delight in Madame Alcide's garden, and only when some inbound traveler passed with his purple hoarding of plant came dull and my contentment. Then I thought of those vast rugling acres that had rimmed the prairie, so that I returned to my kitchen stuff with a mingled sense of longing and contempt.

As for Toinette, she at last found herself in one of those long-entrenched homes of the mainland. At first there had been some talk of the convent, but even then its winter session was far advanced. Accordingly Toinette joined Madame Alcide in the care of the home. As yet she lacked her bright humor, her quaint fancy of former days, nor did she soon regain them. In their place came a quiet wistfulness to mark the memory of her loss.

Thus the weeks slipped by until, with the coming of spring, I suddenly found myself at a standstill. The garden, fully planted, showed not an alien leaf. The care of Achille, formerly a dangerous adventure, had now developed into a tiresome routine. There was no game in the woods, and, after the plentifulty of the coast, the fishing became a bore.

All of a sudden I found myself with nothing to do. I had enjoyed my rest, but few are the holidays that can not last too long. I became dull and discontented, and to the irk of idleness was added one day the realization that, whereas Madame Alcide was doing everything for me, I was doing nothing for her in return.

The thought of this decided me. That night, during the interval between supper and bed, I spoke to Madame Alcide. "I can not go on like this, Madame," I began. "I am used to work, and I have nothing to do. The old lady shot me a swift glance, sharp yet kindly. In her keen forceful way she had already begun to show me an affection that I was only too eager to return.

"Nothing to do?" she echoed. "Let us see. The garden is ready?" "As you know, Madame." "And Achille?" "Achille is nothing," I retorted contemptuously. "I know him as well as I know his story and the story of the other Achille."

"He no longer stamps upon your foot occasionally?" persisted Madame Alcide. "He never tries that now," I answered. "He knows it is no use."

Madame Alcide shook her head. "Ah, you young folk," she sighed. "You learn the secrets of everything. No wonder you come to find the world empty. When Achille hears my approach, he immediately begins to stamp. As for Poussard, let him hitch up, and he limps for a week."

listening quietly. "And if your luck is very good, you may some day have a mill in which to grind the cane."

Madame Alcide, although not so sanguine, appeared quite satisfied with this proposal. "Bien, Jean," said she. "It is agreed. You do your part, and you may count upon me to do mine. But first of all you must find work. You have decided what you will do?"

"I can trap, I can hunt," I began confidently. The old lady made a gesture of dissent. "You are through with all that," she interrupted. Go back to your skins and in less than a year you will be a savage. No, Jean, you have chosen your goal, and from now on you must march toward it not away from it. There are many, many things that you must know before ever you put plow to earth, and you can not learn them in marsh or forest. If you would plant cane, your place is on the mainland where the cane is planted."

This was good advice, and it was something more—something that had been woefully lacking upon the marsh. For the first time in many months I hearkened to the voice of ambition. "Yes, Madame," said I humbly. "You are right. My place is here, and I would like to stay. But what can I do?"

At this Madame Alcide smiled in benevolent appreciation. Now that I had become a petitioner, she was all indulgence. "That is my affair, Jean," she replied. "While you have been thinking and planning, I have looked about me. Thus I have found that your best chance is with Bonnemaison. He is getting old, and each month his business increases. Also, in all the years that he has been here, he has had no clerk—only some one to come in and help in time of necessity. Here is your opportunity and, as it happens, it should fit in very well with your ambition. At the store you will meet men of all kinds, planters, farmers, raisers of cattle and of horses. Talk to them, remember their words, and when you come to put in your own crop, you will be able to draw upon the store for the knowledge that you could have gained in no other manner."

She paused while I fairly shouted aloud in my enthusiasm. "Madame, Madame," I cried. "It is the very thing. And you will let me stay on here with you?"

A soft fond look shadowed for a moment the keenness of the old lady's eyes. "Yes, Jean," she answered. "I had thought of that also. This fall Toinette goes to the good sisters at St. Pierre. With both of you away I should have felt very much alone."

And she added bruskiy, as though to counteract this show of emotion, "So that is settled, and now we will go to bed. In the morning I will arrange with Bonnemaison."

That night I enjoyed the luxury of Madame Alcide's sheets with a mind free from care. Never before had I known the strong unerring force of such a guiding hand. Not only had a place been found for me, there had been something about Madame Alcide's attitude which suggested that, having made me worthy of the place, she would march with me shoulder to shoulder toward my far-distant goal.

"Wait, my friend," she had seemed to say, "I am not half done with you."

The thought of this brought me a sense of security unknown since the days of the rue Bourbon. Somehow, I felt that my drifting was over, that I at last had found a true haven amid the cool green reaches of Bois Berard.

CHAPTER III. MONSIEUR BONNEMAISON
True to her promise, Madame Alcide lost no time in interviewing Monsieur Bonnemaison. Only waiting until breakfast was over, the following morning, she donned her sunbonnet and set out for the store. "It is all right, Jean," she announced upon her return. "Then I am to be M'sieu Bonnemaison's clerk?" I questioned eagerly. The old lady gave me a look, almost of alarm, she protested. "Have you no discretion? You do not know Bonnemaison. He has run so long in a rut that the mere mention of a clerk would have thrown him into a panic."

ent eyes than those of the months before. For, judging him solely by his personal appearance, I had always considered Monsieur Bonnemaison with a species of mild contempt.

He was a small stout man, and his stoutness was of such a round puffy sort, that he resembled nothing so much as a huge animated ball. Indeed, in moments of excitement Monsieur Bonnemaison seemed fairly to bounce along, although at ordinary times he proceeded by means of a sedate waddle. His head, like his body, was smooth and globe-like, beginning in a perfectly bald crown, and ending with a fat pink chin like that of a baby. Between crown and chin appeared a pair of small, dewy blue eyes, a button-like nose, and a mouth that was forever set in an amiable smile. Whatever his mood, Monsieur Bonnemaison never lost that smile. Through long practice it had become as much a part of him as the lips that expressed it. His eyes might betray impatience, anger, even despair, but one had only to glance below them to be reassured of his amiability.

Thus, to the country at large, the storekeeper was ever more or less of a puzzle. "He is a queer one, that Bonnemaison," said the wood-folk. "You never know which part of his face to believe."

Summed up in a word Monsieur Bonnemaison was bland but, as I came to learn, his blandness was of a sort peculiar to himself. Outwardly he might appear a mild, contemplative cherub, inwardly he was as inscrutable as a Chinese god. "Well, Jean," he greeted me. "And so you have come to help? Bien, you can begin by taking down the shutters. In no other way could you be of more assistance to one of my age."

This accomplished, he led the way indoors where, for a busy ten minutes, he waddled up and down the two long counters that lined the store on either side, pointing out the different articles, and firing their prices at me with the rapidity and precision of a machine gun.

"But, M'sieu," I protested when finally his breath gave out. "It is too much to learn all at once. I could not keep one-half of it in my head."

Above his smile Monsieur Bonnemaison evidenced a mild surprise. "But it is not to be kept in one's head," he explained. "I could not do it myself. It comes when you need it, and the next moment it is gone. You understand? It is not that you must know the exact price of each unmarked article. It is that you must be able to feel what it is worth."

Even to one as ignorant of the ways of trade as myself, this reply was startling. However, I held my peace, and answered with a polite, "Yes, M'sieu."

Milly having made the round of the store, Monsieur Bonnemaison went out to the porch where he promptly lowered himself into the broad, cane-seated chair which, in warm weather, he was wont to occupy during his moments of leisure. Here he sat smiling and staring out over the road while I watched him from the doorway in an ever-increasing agony of helplessness.

"And what must I do now, M'sieu?" I finally burst out when I could stand it no longer. Again Monsieur Bonnemaison's eyes expressed a species of quiet astonishment. "Why, wait upon the customers, of course," he replied, and returned to his smiling and staring. Utterly demoralized, I stumbled back inside where I wandered aimlessly from one counter to another. All along I had thought Monsieur Bonnemaison peculiar. Now it appeared that he was undeniably mad. And here I was expected to look after the madman's customers. Having never made a sale in my life, I was further handicapped by my complete ignorance of the prices and disposition of the stock in trade. I could only wait in impotent despair for the customers to come along.

DICK CARLETON'S CHRISTMAS

By Mary T. Warrington

It was Christmas Eve—a white Christmas, with snow blocking the highways and byways and shrouding the lawns and gardens and terraces of Carleton Hall in the ceremonies of death. And perhaps that was a kindly veiling, for beneath the Christmas snow lay cruel traces of neglect, desolation, decay, fallen gates and fences, weed-grown wastes of field and meadow—the broken winged nymph of the silent fountain holding her shattered urn.

Still, there was a promise of Christmas cheer in the old mansion for the coming night. If Dick Carleton, as every one agreed, was going "to the dogs" he was taking the route gayly.

As he assured his running mates he meant to keep it up as long as the money lasted, and then—then neither Dick nor his friends cared to pursue the subject any further. It was enough for them that the old "Roose" (as they irreverently dubbed the stately mansion) where five generations of Carletons looked down from the pictured walls on their derelict descendant, could still glow with light and warmth at its reckless master's bidding: that James Madison, his butler, body servant, and factotum in general, was prepared to serve such viands, as no cordon bleu in the city could surpass, although the cordon bleu in this case was coal black Aunt Keziah, who had nussed" both Dick and Dick's mother, and whom no great Emancipator but Death could free from loving slavery to her boy.

"Yes, he's gwine to de debil," Aunt Keziah had agreed this morning to the crowsy who had stepped in to borrow a "taste" of flour and sugar for a belated cake. "Marse Dick is guine fast and sure I know, but dar ain't nobody or nothink kin but him. Like all dis high stepping fur class stock, when he takes de bit in his teef, dar's no bridling him in. You jes have to fold yo' hands and shet yo' eyes, and pray de Lord for mussy on yo' sinful soul."

"But de sinfulness ain't in yo' soul Sister Keziah," consoled her hearer. "An if it was you'd been on de mourner's bench often enuff to hev it washed away."

Dunno chile, dunno—when you nuss a child like I nussed Marse Dick, maybe de Lord holes you sponable fur his misdoings. Ef you shoulders dat boy's sorrows, looks ez if you hadn't ought ter shirk shouldering his sins."

"But dar's other folks dat can't do no shirking nuther, Sister Salina," continued the old woman, her sunken eyes kindling with Sibylline fire. "Grand and fine ez she is, Miss Milly Somers got to face de judgment fur de way she treated my boy. He lubbed dat gal like he lubbed his life, and she done make believe she lubbed him back—she did for sure. And wif de wedding clothes bought, and de wedding dress made, and de wedding cake baked, wif three coats of icing and a sugar bell on top of all, dat gal done turn him down."

"But, but"—Sister Salina seethed over the well known explanation of Miss Milly's turpitude—"de cause of her hearing 'bout de other wif."

ly to her feet to prepare the dinner ordered that morning by her young master.

"Spend it all," he had said, thrusting a bank note into James Madison's hand. "Not—not all dis, Marse Dick," that loyal henchman had gasped in dismay.

"Didn't I say all?" was the rejoinder. "But—but—but," stammered James Madison braving the storm blackening his master's handsome brow. "Judge Watson was hysk yesterday talking mighty sassy 'bout de money you owes him—and—"

"D— Judge Watson and his money," blazed forth Marse Dick fiercely. "Spend that rip roaring dime tonight for ten. Oyster, terrapin, wild turkie, anything in the Christmas markets, and break open dat old wine closet (I've lost de key) and bring up every cobwebbed bottle it holds."

"Dat, dat—was kep' for de wedding and christenings!" Sah. "Yes," the word came with another oath. "We've done with weddings and christenings. It's likely to be my last Christmas at Carleton Hall, but I'm going down like my old great granddaddy's ship went down a hundred years ago—colors flying, and my flag nailed to de mast!"

"De land—de land," murmured Aunt Keziah when this conversation was reported to her. "He alius busts out wild like dis at Christmas. It was to have been his wedding day five years ago. And dar ar Miss Milly Somers—she done it all—she done it all!"

While Aunt Keziah thus condemned her, the gentle subject of her anathemas was seated in the parlor of her Alma Mater, Mont Marie, chatting with her old friend and school mate, Nettie Lee,—happily veiled this three years as Sister Seraphine.

Now with all the girls gone home for de holidays you will have a pleasant time of peace and rest," Miss Milly was saying cheerfully. "Oh! my dear, no not at all," sighed Sister Seraphine. "We have six left on our hands. Six of the liveliest and gayest girls in the school, and seniors too, seniors that we can't distract with stockings and Santa Claus. The Mortons' home is closed and their parents in Europe. Jenny Dixon and Margaret Vane live in Idaho, and couldn't go so far, Dick, maybe de Lord holes you sponable fur his misdoings. Ef you shoulders dat boy's sorrows, looks ez if you hadn't ought ter shirk shouldering his sins."

"The other wif," echoed Aunt Keziah indignantly. "Who kears about 'nother wif dese here days chile? Ain't Cunnel Gresham got 'nother wif? And ain't Mr. Len Lanson got one too? And all of em taking 'it kind and friendly and making no perturbation. And 'cause my boy made a fool marriage of her when he was twenty years old, folks is flinging 'it up at him. Didn't he buy de divorce? When you buys de divorce it sets you free—like Marse Abe Lincoln set de niggers free when you and me was little gals. An' you ain't got no master or mistress or husband or wif or nobody to bother you no more."

"It do look sort of dat way," said Sister Salina doubtfully. "But den you see Sister Keziah, Miss Milly Somers was Romist, and de Romists ain't allowed but one wif at de time—and Miss Betty Bond—dat I wash fur (she's Romist too) say dat Miss Milly dun just right, dat when you stands up 'fore de preacher and says you 'se gwine ter take a wif until death do yo' part, dar ain't no judge or jury can set you free from dat word. And folks say, spite of all Miss Milly holding her head so high, she tuk dat dis-appointment mouty hard, she aint looked at no beau since, though all dat was five years ago. Jes' stirs round helping de poor and de sick, and de needy, ez de Lord commands, so I can't 'gree with you, Sister Keziah, 'bout de judgment waiting for her. Ez for de wedding clothes and de wedding cake, Sister Susan and de wedding it talks sore 'bout it to dis day. She say Marse Dick Carleton orter spoke up sooner 'bout de t'other wif he had married cross de sea, he orter spoke up or shet his mouf 'bout it forever, ez many a man does. But here I is gabbing on, and my Christmas cake waiting wif de eggs all beat up and ready to fall. So good bye Sister Keziah, an' Merry Christmas spite of de tribulations dat must come to de end of de good Book say." And Sister Salina was off briskly, having effectively stirred her listener's faithful heart into waking pain. Aunt Keziah dragged herself heav-

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