

THE INHERITANCE OF JEAN TROUVE

By NEVIL HENSHAW
Author of "Alline of the Grand Woods, etc."
CHAPTER I.—CONTINUED

Ah, that word lonely! I wonder how many of us there are who really know what it means? At all events I did; for to offset the pleasant times that I have told of, there were many dreary days when Madame Therese was out of the house, and I was left all alone in my father's great room.

How I amused myself then I scarcely know, for I had but few toys, and the noises of the huge empty house were terrifying to my childish mind. Sometimes the stairs would creak and groan as though some one were stealthily ascending them, or else a venturesome rat would go scampering across the room up-stairs with a horrible-tounding sound as of human footstep tramping about overhead.

But worst of all was the music of Monsieur Bon's flute when he practiced in his little room on the other side of the court. Often in the early dusk of the winter afternoons the sound would come waiving across the black well beneath Madame Therese's windows for all the world like the plaint of a soul in torment. It was then that my terror would become unbearable and, dragging a chair to the high four-posted bed, I would roll in under the lofty covers and bury my face in the test. And here I would quake, listening to the demons of the court, until Madame Therese or one of the lodgers would come stamping up the echoing stairway and bring back my courage again.

At other times I would sit far out in the middle of the floor and look at the pictures on the walls—making up stories about them, and talking to the ones that I liked best. There were two of them that I honored especially: one a picture of a fat little soldier with many decorations and a sword; the other of a gaunt fierce-eyed man who stood with upraised knife above the body of a child.

When I asked Madame Therese about these pictures, she said that the fat little soldier was M'sieu L'Empereur Napoleon, who had been a great commander. Then she told me of his battles, his bravery and his greatness until he became the hero of my childhood.

I can see myself now as I used to appeal to him when the discords of Monsieur Bon's flute would come floating across the demon-haunted court. There I would sit in the vast white expanse of the great bed, a forlorn little mite with outstretched arms and tear-filled eyes, that shone, nevertheless, with the pride and devotion that I lavished upon my hero.

"Please, please, M'sieu," I would sob. "Please draw your sword and save me from the demons of the court." And, although he never answered me, I took comfort in the thought that some day he might do so.

Ah, M'sieu L'Empereur! With all your pomp and power I doubt that you had ever one to love you as did that lonely child of the rue Bourbon.

The fierce-eyed old man—so Madame Therese informed me—was M'sieu Abraham of the Bible. She told me his story also, but I could not learn to love him. Instead I feared him with all my little soul, so that it was a terror to look at him. Yet there was a fascination about his flowing beard and haunted eyes that often drew me toward them.

Now all these things that I have related are but the high-lights which stand out from the gray background of my early childhood. Perhaps I have done well to remember what I have and had I been as most children with playmates and other distractions, I doubt that I could have done so. But a lonely child will think of many things and, thinking of them, will remember them, though perhaps it would be better for him could he forget.

Thus I lived at the old house with Madame Therese, and the pictures, and my loneliness, all interwoven in a haze of monotonous vagueness. Thus I reached boyhood, a pale wraith of a lad, very small and frail from my life within four walls. Then, in my fourteenth year, came the event that was the turning-point in my young life—the event that was to take me forever from the rue Bourbon.

CHAPTER II.

PROLOGUE AND AFTER
It was carnival week and, as a consequence, Madame Therese's lodging-house was crowded. For the last six days the visitors had been coming in: brown-faced planters from the parishes, rough bearded lumbermen from the cypress belt, sleek well-fed storekeepers from the prairies, all of them brimming over with the enthusiasm which warms the heart of every true Louisianian at Mardi Gras.

They packed the old house from garret to cellar. They filled the great, echoing halls with the quaint French of their excited conversations. The ancient stairway creaked and groaned as though in protest at their ceaseless coming and going. They laughed, they sang, they shouted, greeting each newcomer

with roars of welcome and queer provincial oaths. For these visitors were Madam Therese's regular customers at carnival time, and would continue to be so long as the cane grew, the cypress fell, and the country folk bought their goods at the cross-road stores.

It was like a family, a huge, rollicking family of boys, of which Madame Therese was the head. Good Madame Therese! How her eyes would shine, her cheeks would glow, and her basket of keys would jingle, as she flew about upon the countless errands of her charges. Those were great days for her, days of rich harvest in which all dread of the rat-faced collector was banished from her mind.

This Mardi Gras, as I had done ever since I could remember, I gave up my little room to the visitors, and slept upon a cot at the foot of my father's great bed. As usual my father had insisted upon making the exchange the other way round, thereby contributing a floor space sufficient for four mattresses. But Madame Therese had made her unvarying reply of, "No, M'sieu. You have already done too much. My regular patrons are due a little consideration even at Mardi Gras."

Accordingly, having moved my few belongings into the huge armchair in my father's room, I prepared myself to enjoy to the fullest extent the delights of the season. They meant much to me, those first few days of carnival. The crowded house, the cheerful visitors, the shouts and laughter that drowned even the most persistent practicing of Monsieur Bon, all of them brought pleasant memories that served to fill many a void in my lonely life.

But best of all were the wonderful parades which each year must pass along the rue Bourbon upon their way to the French Opera. Now to see such a display is a pleasure, but to witness it from one's own private box is a delight to set any boy's heart a-thumping. My private box was the little-iron-railed balcony outside the long windows of my father's room, and from it it was my custom to review the hosts of King Rex. Here I would stand, my eyes agleam in the torch-light, my hands waving frantically to the floats, the tall tops of which were upon a line with my head. Often some high-perched masker, would toss me a handful of bon-bons, sometimes even I would think that I recognized upon him one of Madame Therese's mysterious costumes.

And then my small heart would swell with pride and awe at the thought that I too had been entrusted with a share of the secret. It was my one season of delight, of proud possession, and Madame Therese was always very careful to exact the proper recognition of my ownership.

"You must see little M'sieu Marsh," she would say to the visitors when they asked for a place upon the balcony. "It is his, and no one but himself can invite you."

Thus it was with a feeling of pleased anticipation that I awoke upon the day before Mardi Gras, and went out upon my balcony to see if all was in readiness for the events of the evening. Yes, all was as it should be. The gay bunting with which I had draped the iron railing was perfect in every fold. The circular marks left upon the floor by Madame Therese's flower pots had been carefully erased. The little stool upon which I would wait for the parade was already in its place at the right-hand corner.

The morning was bright and cool, with no hint of rain, and, as I stood looking far up the street to where the parade would first appear, I was filled with a great contentment. As usual I had invited each of the visitors, and the grave courtly thanks of these men of the parishes still rang in my ears as a pleasant accompaniment to my thoughts. Truly it was good to be alive at carnival time, especially if one was fortunate enough to live upon the rue Bourbon.

I was just about to return through the window to Madame Therese's room and breakfast, when my attention was attracted by three men who were coming toward me from the direction of Canal Street. Two of the men were walking with careful steps as they supported the third between them. The third man's head hung low upon his breast, so that I could not see his face, and his legs, swinging limp and nerveless, seemed incapable of bearing up his body.

Now had it been later in the day, the sight would have caused me no surprise. Many revelers came each year to the city at carnival time, and the spectacle of some helpless visitor being helped to his lodgings by his friends had become for me a common one. But though I had slept late, in preparation for a still later bedtime, it was not yet nine o'clock, and such early-morning debauches were of rare occurrence upon the rue Bourbon.

Leaning from my balcony I watched the trio approach until they arrived at the corner above me. Here the supported man seemed to regain the use of his limbs, for he planted his feet determinedly if weakly against the curbing, and sought to withdraw himself from the grasp of his companions. Then ensued a brief argument in which the weak one was apparently commanding the others to release him, as presently they drew away leaving him to stand alone.

Two steps the weak man took toward me, swaying as he did so. Then he paused, and, looking more violently, and suddenly crumpled down upon the sidewalk like a wet rag. His companions were at his side in an instant, raising him again, but in that instant I had caught a glimpse of his face and had swayed so myself that the iron railing alone prevented me from tumbling down into the street. For the unfortunate man was my father, who, but a short time before, had left as usual for his work at the commission house.

How I got into Madame Therese's room I do not know. I remember my choked, tearful description of what I had seen, and Madame Therese's white face as she listened to me. Then we were down at the open front door through which the two men were bearing the senseless body of my father. Slowly they carried him up the wide stairway and into his room, while the few late-rising visitors who remained in the hall, whispering excitedly to the half frantic Madame Therese that they might know exactly what had occurred.

Later, after they had put my father to bed and had sent for a doctor, the two men explained the affair to Madame Therese and the assembled visitors.

It was entirely the fault of their friend Marsh. He had been ill for some time, and they had both advised him to take a rest. Why, only the week before he had fainted at the commission house and had scared them half to death. The owner of the business himself had joined his supplications to their in favor of a brief holiday. But Marsh had been stubborn. He was perfectly well, he told them. He had had these spells before, and they had never harmed him. He would be so miserable without his work that it would only make him worse.

So Marsh had gone his way to faint again a half-hour before. True, he had recovered quickly, but his friends had insisted upon his going home and despatching his objections, had accompanied him. He was well that they had done so. Otherwise he would have been picked up in the street.

All that day my father lay in his great bed, while I perched upon the covers beside him, and Madame Therese flitted in and out a dozen times an hour. The doctor arrived, muttered some vague fear about a weakened heart and departed, after promising to return the following morning. The visitors came, went with muffled footsteps, pausing outside the door to inquire if the sick M'sieu were any better.

It was an eventful day for me, yet, looking back upon it, I can not say that it was an unhappy one. Whether it was the knowledge of that which was so near or the unnatural garrulousness that sometimes besets the sick, I do not know, but in those few hours of illness my father came nearer the companionship for which I had yearned than in all the years that had gone before.

For the first time he spoke to me at length of the past, of his boyhood, of those trivial yet intimate details that are the rightful heritage of every son. True, he mentioned no names—not even those of the places of which he spoke—but what are names to a child?

That which I had longed for, dreamed of, came true. No longer were we merely parent and child. We were comrades wandering joyfully through the dim, yet pleasant byways of the past. Side by side we roamed the cane-fields, the woods and marshes. Together we rode upon the carrier of the sugar house or, with roughly whittled paddles, dipped molten sweetness from the huge open kettles of molasses. Slowly, yet with the patient thoroughness of boyhood, we explored each nook and cranny of that long-forgotten plantation of my father's youth. And ever as we went the bond of affection tightened between us.

Yes, that was an eventful day, a happy one. It lingers in my thoughts a fragrant wreath of remembrance, and as such I lay it reverently upon that tomb in which the memory of my father is enshrined.

TO BE CONTINUED

A CONQUEST OF TERESA OF LISIEUX

Tall, handsome, and clever, master of several European languages and two or three Indian dialects, J. P. F. had quickly climbed to the topmost places, and at this particular time, was Prefect of Police at Cuttack. Unfortunately, however, he had the defects of his qualities in a marked degree. And, Irishman though he was, what befalls many a young Englishman going out to the Colonies in quest of fortune, had happened to J. P. F. Left to himself, with more money than he could handle, he refused himself no manner of enjoyment. He drank heavily, read anything at all, and led a rather fast life. Naturally enough he wound up by abandoning the Faith, and sinking gloriously into infidelity.

Knowing this and many things besides, I did not feel at all like approaching him. But Providence, at the unrelenting prayers of the Little Flower, almost forced me to do

so. Coming one day from the hospital, I met him on the way. "I saluted him; for he salutes everybody. He answered my greeting very politely, and as we were going the same road, he invited me to a talk. We spoke of the weather, of the rains, of golf and football; and before leaving him I gave him a hint about a collection being taken up in the locality to help the mission, and asked him whether he would object to having his name placed on the subscription list."

"Not in the least," he answered, "I shall even be glad to give you my monthly mite. Come to dinner with me tomorrow and bring your list."

The dinner helped me to complete my information concerning him, and the details which he gave me about himself, in the talkative heat of the banquet, simply horrified me. Born in Ireland of fine Catholic parents, he had begun his studies with the London Oratorians, and gave signs of such piety that his teachers thought of directing him to the sanctuary. "Imagine!" he exclaimed, laughing at the idea, "those poor priests had discovered in me a vocation to the priesthood." He went to other schools, and ended, not by taking the cassock, but by donning the uniform of the police. He was hardly thirty, but had lost the Faith long before, and even boasted of having done so. There was but one article to his creed: to believe in the present life and to make it as agreeable as possible. He was sure his life was to be short; for he was determined, at the first shock of serious adversity, to drive a bullet through his poor head. He had bought a revolver for that purpose, and had made a special study to find out at what point it was best to aim. The temple, it turned out; right beside the ear.

"A bullet there," he said, placing his finger on the spot, "means instant death,—the end of all one's troubles."

"But if it proved to be the beginning of all one's torments?" I suggested.

"Well, I just suppose I should have to submit to such a lot, with millions of others already there. "Do you carry any medal?"

"The Government decorated me with several, but I wear them on certain occasions only."

"Pardon me, I meant a medal of the Blessed Virgin, for instance. Why should I play the hypocrite and carry any?"

"Do you pray?"

"Never."

"Not even a Hail Mary now and then?"

"Neither Hail Mary nor Our Father, nothing."

"But how am I to explain your generosity towards the Church in contributing such a sum of money?"

"Listen, there is no religion in what I do. I should be ready to do as much for the Grand Lama. I want to be happy and to help others to be happy as well."

Indeed I learned later that he scattered money right and left.

The Rectory at Cuttack being in the European quarter I often fell in with my officer, and he sometimes came over to see me. He was ever most polite, but also, ever so touchy on the religious question. I jokingly threatened, one day, to come in a carriage the following Sunday and bring him to Mass.

"Father, 'tis useless," he said, "I'll do anything to please you, but I'll never do that, unless you come yourself to take the consequences of a refusal."

Knowing him to be a great reader and a lover of fine style, I lent him one day the life of St. Augustin by Louis Bertrand. But, as he handed it back to me a few days later, he acknowledged that the first part, dealing with the Saint's youth, had interested him immensely. He had gone no further, and did not intend to do so.

J. P. F. had a sister in England who was a model Catholic. She taught music and occasionally composed religious pieces. She sent an "O Salutaris" and a "Tantum Ergo" to the Mother Superior of our Convent, asking to have the pupils learn them and to invite her brother to come and hear them on the next feast day. The music was learned and the message was sent to J. P. F. as kindly as could be. The only result was the following reply, received one week later:

Madam: Kindly excuse me for not answering your letter sooner. Let it be understood once for all, that I have definitely renounced the Catholic Church. You will see me in a church neither living nor dead.

Begging you, Madam, henceforth to mind your own business, I am, etc.

He surely thought he had put an end to the matter for good. But the persecution was only just beginning seriously. The Sisters talked it over, and they resolved to paste his letter on the back of a picture representing Teresa of the Child Jesus, and to ask the little Carmelite for the conversion of the poor prodigal.

For several months no change. Then the Lord deigned to send him a precious gift—a cross. He learned of his father's death, and he asked me to say thirty Masses for the departed soul. With tears in his eyes, he added: "Poor father—he went to Mass every day in spite of his age and the distance. I have killed him by my infidelity."

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