

**THE HOUR AND THE MAN:
A HISTORICAL ROMANCE.
IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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HARRIET MARTINEAU

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AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY
HARRIET MARTINEAU,
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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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THE HOUR AND THE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

WAITING SUPPER.

THE nights of August are in St. Domingo the hottest of the year. The winds then cease to befriend the panting inhabitants; and while the thermometer stands at 90°, there is no steady breeze, as during the preceding months of summer. Light puffs of wind now and then fan the brow of the negro, and relieve for an instant the oppression of the European settler; but they are gone as soon as come, and seem only to have left the heat more intolerable than before.

Of these sultry evenings, one of the sultriest was the 22d of August, 1791. This was one of five days appointed for rejoicings in the town of Cap Français; festivities among the French and Creole inhabitants, who were as ready to rejoice on appointed occasions as the dulness of colonial life renders natural, but who would have been yet more lively than they were if the date of their festival had been in January or May. There was no choice as to the date, however. They were governed in regard to their celebrations by what happened at Paris; and never had the proceedings of the mother-country been so important to the colony as now.

During the preceding year, the white proprietors of St. Domingo, who had hailed with loud voices the revolutionary doctrines before which royalty had begun to succumb in France, were astonished to find their cries of Liberty and Equality adopted by some who had no business with such ideas and words. The mulatto proprietors and merchants of the island innocently understood the words according to their commonly received meaning, and expected an equal share with the whites in the representation of the colony, in the distribution of its offices, and in the civil rights of its inhabitants generally. These rights having been denied by the whites to the freeborn mulattoes, with every possible manifestation of contempt and

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dislike, an effort had been made to wring from the whites by force what they would not grant to reason, and an ill-principled and ill-managed revolt had taken place in the preceding October, headed by Vincent Ogé and his brother, sons of the proprietress of a coffee-plantation a few miles from Cap Français. These young men were executed under circumstances of great barbarity. Their sufferings were as seed sown in the warm bosoms of their companions and adherents, to spring up in due season in a harvest of vigorous revenge. The whites suspected this, and were as anxious as their dusky neighbours to obtain the friendship and sanction of the revolutionary government at home. That government was fluctuating in its principles and in its counsels; it favoured now one party, and now the other; and on the arrival of its messengers at the ports of the colony, there ensued sometimes the loud boastings of the whites, and sometimes quiet, knowing smiles and whispered congratulations among the depressed section of the inhabitants.

The cruelties inflicted on Vincent Ogé had interested many influential persons in Paris in the cause of the mulattoes. Great zeal was exercised in attempting to put them in a condition to protect themselves by equal laws, and thus to restrain the tyranny of the whites. The Abbé Gregoire pleaded for them in the National Assembly; and on the 15th of March was passed the celebrated decree which gave the mulattoes the privileges of French citizens, even to the enjoyment of the suffrage, and to the possession of seats in the parochial and colonial assemblies. To Europeans there appears nothing extraordinary in the admission to these civil functions of free-born persons, many of whom were wealthy, and many educated; but to the whites of St. Domingo the degree was only less tremendous than the rush of the hurricane.

It arrived at Cap Français on the 30th of June, and the tidings presently spread. At first, no one believed them but the mulattoes. When it was no longer possible to doubt; when the words of Robespierre passed from mouth to mouth, till even the nuns told them to one another in the convent garden, "Perish the colonies rather than sacrifice one iota of our principles!" the whites trampled the national cockade under their feet in the streets, countermanded their orders for the fête of the 14th of July (as they now declined taking the civic oath), and proposed to one another to offer their colony and their allegiance to England.

They found means, however, to gratify their love of power

and their class-hatred by means short of treason. They tried disobedience first, as the milder method. The governor of the colony, Blanchelande, promised that, when the decree should reach him officially, he would neglect it, and all applications from any quarter to have it enforced. This set all right. Blanchelande was pronounced a sensible and patriotic man. The gentlemen shook hands warmly with him at every turn; the ladies made deep and significant courtesies wherever they met him; the boys taught their little negroes to huzza at the name of Blanchelande; and the little girls called him a dear creature. In order to lose no time in showing that they meant to make laws for their own colony out of their own heads, and no others, the white gentry hastened on the election of deputies for a new General Colonial Assembly. The deputies were elected, and met, to the number of one hundred and seventy-six, at Léogane, in the southern region of the island, so early as the 9th of August. After exchanging greetings and vows of fidelity to their class-interests under the name of patriotism, they adjourned their assembly to the 25th, when they were to meet at Cap Français. It was desirable to hold their very important session in the most important place in the colony, the centre of intelligence, the focus of news from Europe, and the spot where they had first sympathized with the ungrateful government at home, by hoisting, with their own white hands, the cap of liberty, and shouting so that the world might hear, "Liberty and Equality!" "Down with Tyranny!"

By the 20th the deputies were congregated at Cap Français; and daily till the great 25th were they seen to confer together in coteries in the shady piazzas, or in the Jesuits' Walk, in the morning, and to dine together in parties in the afternoon, admitting friends and well-wishers to these tavern dinners. Each day till the 25th was to be a fête day in the town and neighbourhood; and of these days the hot 22d was one.

Among these friends and well-wishers were the whites upon all the plantations in the neighbourhood of the town. There was scarcely an estate in the Plaine du Nord, or on the mountain steeps which overlooked the cape, town, and bay, on all sides but the north, which did not furnish guests to these dinners. The proprietors, their bailiffs, the clergy, the magistrates, might all be seen along the roads in the cool of the morning; and there was a holyday air about the estates they left behind. The negroes were left for this week to do their

work pretty much as they liked, or to do none at all. There was little time to think of them and of ordinary business, when there were the mulattoes to be ostentatiously insulted, and the mother-country to be defied. So the negroes slept at noon and danced at night during these few August days, and even had leave to visit one another to as great an extent as was ever allowed. Perhaps they also transacted other affairs of which their masters had little suspicion.

All that ever was allowed was permitted to the slaves on the Breda estate, in the plain, a few miles from Cap Français. The attorney or bailiff of the estate, M. Bayou de Libertas, was a kind-hearted man, who, while insisting very peremptorily on his political and social rights, and vehemently denouncing all abstract enmity to them, liked that people actually about him should have their own way. While ransacking his brain for terms of abuse to vent on Lafayette and Condorcet, he rarely found anything harsh to utter when Caton got drunk and spoiled his dinner; when Venus sent up his linen darker than it went down to the quarter; or when little Machabée picked his pocket of small coin. Such a man was, of course, particularly busy this week; and, of course, the slaves under his charge were particularly idle, and particularly likely to have friends from other plantations to visit them.

Some such visiter seemed to be expected by a family of these Breda negroes, on the Monday evening, the 22d. This family did not live in the slave-quarter. They had a cottage near the stables, as Toussaint Breda had been M. Bayou's postillion; and, when he was lately promoted to be overseer, it was found convenient to all parties that he should retain his dwelling, which had been enlarged and adorned so as to accord with the dignity of his new office. In the piazza of his dwelling sat Toussaint this evening, evidently waiting for some one to arrive; for he frequently put down his book to listen for footsteps, and more than once walked round the house to look abroad. His wife, who was within, cooking supper, and his daughter and little boy, who were beside him in the piazza, observed his restlessness; for Toussaint was a great reader, and seldom looked off the page for a moment of any spare hour that he might have for reading either the books M. Bayou lent him, or the three or four volumes which he had been permitted to purchase for himself.

"Do you see Jean?" asked the wife from within. "Shall we wait supper for him?"

"Wait a little longer," said Toussaint. "It will be strange if he does not come."

"Are any more of Latour's people coming with Jean, mother?" asked Génifréde from the piazza.

"No; they have a supper at Latour's to-night; and we should not have thought of inviting Jean, but that he wants some conversation with your father."

"Lift me up," cried the little boy, who was trying in vain to scramble up one of the posts of the piazza, in order to reach a humming-bird's nest which hung in the tendrils of a creeper overhead, and which a light puff of wind now set swinging, so as to attract the child's eye. What child ever saw a humming-bird thus rocking, its bill sticking out like a long needle on one side, and its tail at the other, without longing to clutch it? So Denis cried out imperiously to be lifted up. His father set him on the shelf within the piazza, where the calabashes were kept: a station whence he could see into the nest and watch the bird, without being able to touch it. This was not altogether satisfactory. The little fellow looked about him for a calabash to throw at the nest; but his mother had carried in all her cups for the service of the supper-table. As no more wind came at his call, he could only blow with all his might, to swing the tendril again; and he was amusing himself thus when his father laid down his book, and stepped out to see once more whether Jean was approaching.

"Lift me down," said the boy to his sister, when his head was giddy with blowing. Génifréde would fain have let him stay where he was, out of the way of mischief; but she saw that he was really afraid of falling, and she offered her shoulders for him to descend upon. When down, she would not let him touch her work; she took her scissors from his busy hands, and shook him off when he tried to pull the snowberries out of her hair; so that there was nothing left for the child to play with but his father's book. He was turning it over when Tous-saint reappeared.

"Ha! boy! a book in your hands already! I hope you may have as much comfort out of that book as I have had, Denis."

"What is it? what is it about?" said the boy, who had heard many a story out of books from his father.

"What is it? Let us see. I think you know letters enough to spell it out for yourself. Come and try."

The child knew the letter E, and, with a good deal of help, made out, at last, Epictetus.

"What is that?" asked the boy.

"Epictetus was a negro," said Génifréde, complacently.

Epictetus

"Not a negro," said her father, smiling. "He was a slave, but he was a white."

"Is that the reason you read that book so much more than any other?"

"Partly; but partly because I like what is in it."

"What is in it—any stories?" asked Denis.

bearing "It is all about bearing and forbearing. It has taught me many things which you will have to learn by-and-by. I shall teach you some of them out of this book."

Denis made all haste away from the promised instruction, and his father was presently again absorbed in his book. From respect to him, Génifrède kept Denis quiet by signs of admonition; and for some little time nothing was heard but the sounds that in the plains of St. Domingo never cease: the humming and buzzing of myriads of insects; the occasional chattering of monkeys in a neighbouring wood, and, with a passing gust, a chorus of frogs from a distant swamp. Unconscious of this din, from being accustomed always to hear more or less of it, the boy amused himself with chasing the fireflies, whose light began to glance around as darkness descended. His sister was poring over her work, which she was just finishing, when a gleam of greenish light made both look up. It came from a large meteor which sailed past towards the mountains, whither were tending also the huge masses of cloud which gather about the high peaks previous to the season of rain and hurricanes. There was nothing surprising in this meteor, for the sky was full of them in August nights; but it was very beautiful. The globe of green light floated on till it burst above the mountains, illuminating the lower clouds, and revealing along the slopes of the uplands the coffee-groves, waving and bowing their heads in the wandering winds of that high region. Génifrède shivered at the sight, and her brother threw himself upon her lap. Before he had asked half his questions about the lights of the sky, the short twilight was gone, and the evening-star cast a faint shadow from the tufted posts of the piazza upon the white wall of the cottage. In a low tone, full of awe, Génifrède told the boy such stories as she had heard from her father of the mysteries of the heavens. He felt that she trembled as she told of the Northern Lights which had been actually seen by some travelled persons now in Cap Français. It took some time and argument to give him an idea of cold countries; but his uncle Paul, the fisherman, had seen hail on the coast only thirty miles from hence; and this was a great step in the evidence. Denis listened with all