



à Dieu chère, amusez  
vous bien - je suis  
votre fidèle ami -  
P. Toussaint

MEMOIR  
OF  
PIERRE TOUSSAINT,  
BORN A SLAVE  
IN  
ST. DOMINGO.

BY  
THE AUTHOR OF "THREE EXPERIMENTS IN LIVING," "SKETCHES OF THE  
LIVES OF THE OLD PAINTERS," "FAMILIAR SKETCHES OF  
SCULPTURE AND SCULPTORS," ETC.

*Mrs. Hannah F. (Lawyer) Lee.*

THIRD EDITION.

BOSTON:  
CROSBY, NICHOLS, AND COMPANY,  
111 WASHINGTON STREET.  
1854.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1853, by  
CROSBY, NICHOLS, AND COMPANY,  
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

C A M B R I D G E :  
METCALF AND COMPANY, STEREOTYPERS AND PRINTERS.

## PART FIRST.

---

THE records of distinguished characters are multiplied around us: the statesman who has toiled night and day for his country is held in grateful remembrance;— the hero who has fought for the land of his home and people justly wins the laurels that are showered upon him;— the scholar who devotes his pen to the instruction of his fellow-beings, the poet, and the historian gradually build for themselves monuments. But there is one class whose silent accumulation of good deeds is not computed, but which is daily increasing the amount of human happiness, and whose influence is like that of the crystal stream which wanders through the meadow, adding

to its uncounted portion of wild-flowers and verdure. Of such a one we would speak in the simple, unexaggerated language which corresponds to the subject of this memoir.

PIERRE TOUSSAINT was born in the island of St. Domingo, in the town of St. Mark, on the Plantation de Latibonite, which belonged to Monsieur Bérard. The grandmother of Toussaint, Zenobe Julien, was a slave in the family, and selected as a wet-nurse for the oldest son. This maternal office she also performed for his sister.

It was customary in the West Indies for people of fortune to send their children abroad, to secure to them better influences than they could obtain on a plantation. Sometimes, at the age of four and five years, sons and daughters were separated from tender parents, with a degree of heroic sacrifice for which nothing but the importance of the measure could give their parents resolution.

M. Bérard early decided to send his son to Paris to be educated; and to supply, as far as possible, the tenderness of a mother, Zenobe

Julien was selected to accompany him, and to remain with him several months. This proof of the father's confidence in the *bond-woman* sufficiently demonstrates the reliance which both parents placed on her. When she returned to St. Domingo, it was to conduct the two daughters to Paris, who were to be placed at a boarding-school.

On leaving them there, she again returned to St. Mark and resumed her attendance on her mistress. The parents so fully estimated the worth of this faithful domestic, that, as a reward for her fidelity and a proof of their entire confidence, they gave her her freedom. They well knew that her attachment to them formed the strongest bonds. John Bérard constantly wrote to her from Paris, sending her presents, and retaining his early affection.

Zenobe had a daughter whom she called Ursule. As the little girl increased in years, she became more and more useful to Madame Bérard, and was finally adopted as her waiting-maid and *femme de chambre*.

The subject of our memoir, Pierre Tous-

saint, was the son of Ursule, and became the pet of the plantation, winning all hearts by his playfulness and gentleness.

His grandmother, Zenobe, was particularly attached to him; yet when Monsieur and Madame Bérard concluded to rejoin their children in France, and called on Zenobe to accompany them, she did not hesitate for a moment, but gave them her *free* obedience, and cheerfully acceded to their wishes; for they no longer had the right to command. For the fifth time the faithful attendant crossed the ocean,—a more adventurous and lengthened voyage than now,—and after seeing her master and mistress settled in Paris, returned again to St. Mark. Here she had the happiness of passing the evening of her life in the service of her nursling, John Bérard, who came back to reside on his father's plantation after he had completed his studies, leaving his two sisters with his parents.

Pierre Toussaint was born before the elder Bérard quitted the country, and Aurora, his youngest daughter, stood godmother to the

infant slave. She was a mere child, and he could have no recollection of the ceremony; but as he grew older, he became more and more devoted to his little godmother, following her footsteps, gathering for her the choicest fruits and flowers, and weaving arbors of palms and magnolias. Toussaint's happiness was much increased by the birth of a sister, who was called Rosalie.

We can scarcely imagine a more beautiful family picture; it was a bond of trust and kindness. Slavery with them was but a name.

About the time of Pierre Toussaint's birth, 1766, and several years later, the island of St. Domingo, or Hayti, as it was usually called, was in its most flourishing state. The French colony was then at the height of its prosperity. The tide of improvement had swept over the land; forests had been cleared, marshes drained, bridges built over rivers, torrents converted into picturesque waterfalls. The harbors were made safe and commodious, so that large vessels could ride at anchor. Beau-



tiful villas and cottages bordered the sea, while palaces and magnificent public buildings adorned the interior. Hospitals were built; fountains refreshed the air. Scarcely could imagination reach the luxury of this island, which seemed to contain in its bosom the choicest treasures of nature. Such an earthly paradise could not fail to attract foreigners. The French were proud of their colony, and it became a fashion with them to emigrate to the island. Some settled as planters, others passed to and fro at their pleasure, promoting commerce, good-will, and the arts of refinement.

The terrible events which followed this flourishing era are too painful to record; yet we can hardly forbear touching upon the history of Toussaint L'Ouverture, though bearing no other connection with the subject of our memoir than accidentally arises from similarity of name, color, country, and being both born in slavery, and on the same river. Toussaint L'Ouverture, so famous in history, was born in 1745, about twelve years before Pierre Tous-

saint, but had arrived at mature life before he became conspicuous, and was till then only distinguished for his amiable deportment, his humanity, and the purity of his conduct. His discriminating master, Comte de Noé, early perceived the power of his intellect, and had him instructed in reading, writing, and arithmetic; and he allowed him the use of his books, from which he culled a surprising amount of knowledge. It is well known, that, in the insurrection of the negroes, he refused all participation, until he had effected the escape of M. Bayou (to whom he was coachman) and his family to Baltimore, shipping a large quantity of sugar for the supply of his immediate wants.

The subsequent career of Toussaint L'Ouverture was a noble one. His superior capacity gave him complete ascendancy over the black chieftains, while his natural endowments of manner and person inspired respect and deference, and enabled him to keep in check their wild and revengeful passions.

In 1797 Toussaint L'Ouverture received a

commission from the French government of commander-in-chief over the armies of St. Domingo. From 1798 until 1801 the island continued peaceable and tranquil under his sway. His measures were mild and prudent, but his discipline was strict. In 1801, when the independence of Hayti was proclaimed, he sent his two sons to France for an education.

Bonaparte sent them back some time after, accompanied by Le Clerc, with orders not to give them up, but to retain them as hostages, if Toussaint refused to abandon his countrymen. With a magnanimity that equals the records of ancient history, the father suffered them to return. It is not in accordance with our present plan to trace the dark and treacherous snares which enveloped him. It is well known that, notwithstanding the most solemn assurances of safety, he was seized and conveyed in the night on board a vessel, and transported to Brest. After imprisonment in the Chateau de Joux, he was carried to Besançon, and confined in a subterranean prison, where he languished in cold and darkness through

the winter,—he who had been reared under the tropical sun of his beloved island!—and died in 1803.

The treacherous, cruel, and unjust imprisonment of Toussaint drew upon Bonaparte severe and just condemnation. We have only to study the closing days of the conqueror, and to see him “chained like a vulture” on the rock of St. Helena, a spectacle for the world, to turn almost with envy to the dark and dreary winter prison where Toussaint ended his life, heroically and without one complaint;—

“That dungeon-fortress” never to be named,  
 Where, like a lion taken in the toils,  
 Toussaint breathed out his brave and generous spirit.  
 Ah, little did *he* think who sent him there,  
 That he himself, then greatest among men,  
 Should in like manner be so soon conveyed  
 Athwart the deep, — and to a rock so small  
 Amid the countless multitude of waves,  
 That ships have gone and sought it, and returned,  
 Saying it was not!” †

---

\* The Castle of Joux in Franche-Comté.

† Rogers's “Italy.”

We quit this melancholy contemplation for the subject of our memoir, and go back to the happiest period of Pierre Toussaint's life. John Bérard successfully cultivated the plantation, treading in his father's footsteps, and with patriarchal care exacting a due proportion of labor, which he rewarded with kindness and protection. Wealth flowed in upon him. He was tenderly attached to his cousin, and finally married her. She had resided much on the plantation, and partook of his attachment to the slaves, particularly to Zenobe and her descendants.

"I remember her," said Toussaint, "when the bridal took place. She was very pale; her health was always delicate, but she looked so lovely, and we were all so happy! and Rosalie and I were never tired of gathering flowers for her, and we used to dance and sing for her amusement." In one year after her marriage she began to droop. "Ah!" said Toussaint, "I can see her as she lay upon the couch, panting for air, — all so beautiful, outside and in; then Rosalie and I would stand

at opposite corners of the room and pull the strings of a magnificent fan of peacock's feathers, swaying it to and fro, and we would laugh and be so gay, that she would smile too; but she never grew strong,—she grew weaker.”

She expressed a wish to go to Port-au-Prince;—probably her near relations resided there. She took Toussaint and Rosalie with her.

About this time the troubles in St. Domingo began. The revolutionary doctrines of France could not fail to influence her colonies. Hayti looked at the contest for liberty and equality with the keenest interest. The wealthy proprietors joined in the universal cry. But they had no idea of participating these blessings with the free-born colored people; they still meant to keep them in a subordinate state. A large number of wealthy and intelligent merchants, but a shade or two darker than their aristocratical brethren, stoutly contended for an equal share in administering the affairs of the colony, and claimed

their right of representation, of sharing in the distribution of offices, and all the immunities of free and independent citizens. This was by no means the idea of the nobility of St. Domingo; and when France subsequently espoused the cause of the mulatto free population, and when the Abbé Grégoire spoke eloquently for them in the National Assembly, the hatred of the whites knew no bounds. As yet only private attempts at annoyance had arisen on both sides; but a dark storm seemed threatening, for the disaffected had talked of offering their colony to the English. No fears were entertained of the slaves; they were considered as machines in the hands of their masters, and, without principles, wills, or opinions of their own, they were neither dreaded nor suspected; and so the contest seemed to be between the nobility and the free people of color.

Monsieur Bérard willingly consented to the change his young wife proposed in going to Port-au-Prince, hoping she might derive benefit from it. But no favorable symptoms oc-

curred ; her decline was rapid, and in one short month from her arrival she breathed her last, in her twenty-first year.

Toussaint and Rosalie returned to Latibonite at St. Mark's. It was most touching to listen to Toussaint's description of his young mistress, as he saw her every day declining, yet then unconscious that he should soon see her no more !

The attachment of these two classes, of mistress and slave, might almost reconcile us to domestic slavery, if we only selected particular instances. But without suggesting whether there are few or many such, we may all understand the danger of institutions which leave to ignorant, passionate men the uncontrolled exercise of power. It is not, however, on the ground of individual treatment that the philanthropist, the statesman, and the moralist found their strongest arguments against slavery ; it is on the eternal rights of man, on the immutable laws of God ; and till it can be proved that the negro has no soul, we cannot plead for him merely on



the score of humanity, or place him simply under that code of laws which, imperfectly it is true, protects the noble horse from abuse. It was for *his divine right* that the Abbé Grégoire spoke so successfully.

We now arrive at what formed the great era of Pierre Toussaint's life. He had hitherto lived in the midst of luxury and splendor; for the apartments of Monsieur Bérard, as he describes them, were furnished in a style of expense that exceeded even modern prodigality. All the utensils of his mistress's chamber were of silver lined with gold; the dinner service was of the same metals. In St. Domingo, the tropical climate yielded its abundant fruits, and the hardships of winter were never known.

Monsieur Bérard married a second wife, and still all was successful and prosperous. But this was not long to last. The troubles had now begun. He earnestly wished to preserve a neutral position; but he found this impossible. His immense property became involved; his perplexities increased in various

ways; and he determined to quit the island, and repair to the United States to pass a year, meaning to return when the storm was over and tranquillity restored. He took with him five servants, including Toussaint and his sister Rosalie.

New York was their place of destination. Monsieur Bérard, by the kindness of a friend, found a house ready furnished, of which they took immediate possession. He brought sufficient funds to enable them to live in good style for more than a year. Madame Bérard also brought over her sisters, one of whom had married General Dessource.

They formed at this time a gay and united family, with plenty of society and amusement. "I remember," said a lady who was well acquainted with them, "Toussaint among the slaves, dressed in a red jacket, full of spirits and very fond of dancing and music, and always devoted to his mistress, who was young, gay, and planning future enjoyment."

All went on pleasantly with them for a

year; but intelligence from the island grew more and more alarming, and M. Bérard thought it necessary to return to St. Domingo, to look after his affairs. Previously to his going, he mentioned to Toussaint that he wished him to learn the hair-dressing business, and a Mr. Merchant, who dressed the hair of Madame Bérard, engaged to teach him for fifty dollars. M. Bérard, placing the property he had brought over to this country in the hands of two respectable merchants, took leave of his wife, as he thought for a short season. In the mean time, she remained tranquil and hopeful, talking over her plans of living with Toussaint, telling him her projects for the time to come, and concerting pleasant surprises for her husband when he should arrive. She was much pleased with Pierre's success as a coiffeur, and said how gratified M. Bérard would be to find he had succeeded so well. Those who have known Toussaint in later years will easily comprehend the manner in which he was adopted into the confidence of his employers through life. His

simple, modest deportment disarmed all reserve; he was frank, judicious, and unobtrusive. A highly cultivated and elegant woman said, "Some of the pleasantest hours I pass are in conversing with Toussaint while he is dressing my hair. I anticipate it as a daily recreation." The confidence placed in him by his master and mistress he considered a sacred trust.

Melancholy letters arrived from M. Bérard. His property was irreclaimably lost; and he wrote that he must return, and make the most of what he had placed at New York. This letter was soon followed by another, announcing his sudden death by pleurisy.

Madame Bérard had not recovered from this terrible shock, when the failure of the firm in New York to whom her property was intrusted, left her destitute.

"Ah!" said Toussaint, "it was a sad period for my poor mistress; but she believed — we all believed — that she would recover her property in the West Indies. She was rich in her own right, as well as her husband's,

and we said, 'O madam! you will have enough.'"

But this present state of depression was hard indeed to one who had always lived in luxury. The constant application for debts unpaid was most distressing to her; but she had no means of paying them, and she could only beg applicants to wait, assuring them that she should eventually have ample means.

Toussaint entered into all her feelings, and shared her perplexities; and though he had scarcely passed boyhood, he began a series of devoted services.

He was one day present when an old friend called on her, and presented an order for forty dollars, thinking her husband had left the money with her, and by no means divining her state of destitution. She assured him he should have the money, and requested him to wait a short time; she considered it peculiarly a debt of honor. When he went away, she said to Toussaint, "Take these jewels and dispose of them for the most you can get."

He took them with an aching heart, con-

trusting in his own mind her present situation with the affluence to which she had always been accustomed. He had by industry begun to make his own deposit; for, as a slave, he was entitled to make the most of certain portions of his time. In a few days he went to his mistress, and placed in her hands two packets, one containing forty dollars, the other her own valuable jewels, upon which the sum was to have been raised. We may imagine what were her feelings on this occasion!

At another time, the hair-dresser of whom Toussaint had learnt his trade called on Madame Bérard for the stipulated sum. Toussaint heard her reply, with faltering voice, "It was not in her power to pay him; he must wait." Toussaint followed him out, and entered into an engagement to pay the sum himself, by instalments, and at length received an acquittal, which he presented to his mistress. She was at first alarmed, and said, "O Toussaint, where can you have got all this money to pay my debts!" "I have got some customers, Madame," said he; "they

are not very fashionable, but Mr. Merchant very good,—he lets me have them; and besides, I have all the money that you give me, my New Year presents,—I have saved it all.” She was much surprised, and told him she did not know when she should be able to repay it. He told her it was all hers, that he never wanted that money again; that he had already good customers, and expected every day more and more. “My poor mistress,” said Tous-saint, “cry very much.”

From this time he considered his earnings as belonging to Madame Bérard, except a small deduction, which he regularly set aside, since he had a purpose to execute which he communicated to no one. His industry was unceasing,—every hour of the day was employed; when released, his first thought was his mistress, to hasten home and try to cheer her.

In this way he alleviated the burden of her troubles; his affectionate, loving heart sympathized in all her sorrows. His great object was to serve her. He was perfectly contented

with his condition. Though surrounded in New York by free men of his own color, he said that he was born a slave, — God had thus cast his lot, and there his duty lay.

Two of Madame Bérard's sisters died, and the family was thus broken up. A gentleman from St. Domingo, Monsieur Nicolas, who had left the island about the same time with the Bérard family, cherished the hope, which many entertained for years, of recovering his property. In the mean time, like other unfortunate emigrants, he found himself obliged to convert those accomplishments which had made a part of his education to the means of living. For some time he performed as a musician in the orchestra of the theatre, and gave lessons in music to a number of scholars. He was a constant friend of Madame Bérard, and they at length married. For some time they were sanguine in the hope of returning to the island, and taking possession of their property, but constant disappointment and perpetual frustration of her hopes wore upon Madame Nicolas's naturally delicate frame, and her



health became much impaired. Monsieur Nicolas was a kind and tender husband, and did all in his power to alleviate her indisposition, and administer to her comfort.

Toussaint, in the mean time, was industriously pursuing his business as a hair-dresser, and denying himself all but the neat apparel necessary for his occupation, never appropriating the smallest sum of his earnings to his own amusement, though at that season of youth which inclines the heart to gayety and pleasure. Belonging to a race proverbially full of glee, and while on the island, among his sable brethren, first in the dance and song, he now scrupulously rejected all temptation for spending money, and devoted his time to his mistress. We have before alluded to the care with which he hoarded his gains. Besides the pleasure of surprising Madame with little delicacies, he had evidently another object in accumulating, of which he did not speak. He was successful, and took a respectable stand as a hair-dresser. His earnings belonged in part to his mistress; but as she

grew more sick, he delighted to add voluntarily the portion which belonged to himself. His sister Rosalie was a constant and faithful attendant, but Toussaint was both a companion and friend. Madame Nicolas had an affection of the throat, and was obliged to write rather than converse; to this faithful friend she used to express her wants on little scraps of paper, and he invariably supplied them, while she consoled herself with the idea that he would be fully indemnified eventually from her own property. He had no such belief; he wished for no return. In later years he said, "I only asked to make her comfortable, and I bless God that she never knew a want."

He strove to supply her with the luxuries of her tropical climate,—grapes, oranges, lemons, and bananas; he regularly procured jellies and ice-creams from the best confectioners, and every morning went to market to obtain what was necessary for her through the day. His business of hair-dressing proved very lucrative, and kept him regularly employed. He attended one lady after another,

in constant succession, and when released from his duties hastened to render new services to his invalid mistress. She felt that influence which a strong and virtuous mind imparts, and communicated to him her perplexities. He often read to her, and, adds one of his most cherished and faithful friends,\* "Perhaps this scene, so touching to his feelings and elevating to his heart, in contemplating a being honored and beloved, gradually wasting away, may have been the foundation of that piety which has sustained him through life, and become deeply seated in his breast. He is a Catholic, full in the faith of his Church, liberal, enlightened, and always acting from the principle that God is our common Father, and mankind our brethren."

Toussaint seemed to understand the constitution of Madame Nicolas's mind; he reflected that she had always been accustomed to

---

\* Mrs. Philip J. Schuyler, whose death took place in 1852, preceding Toussaint's about fifteen months. She was the daughter of Micajah Sawyer, M.D., of Newburyport. To her notes the author of this memorial is principally indebted.

society, and that the excitement of it was necessary for her. "I knew her," said he, "full of life and gayety, richly dressed, and entering into amusements with animation; now the scene was so changed, and it was so sad to me! Sometimes, when an invitation came, I would succeed in persuading her to accept of it, and I would come in the evening to dress her hair; then I contrived a little surprise for her. When I had finished, I would present her the glass, and say: 'Madame, see how you like it.' O, how pleased she was! I had placed in it some beautiful flower, — perhaps a japonica, perhaps a rose, remarkable for its rare species, which I had purchased at a greenhouse, and concealed till the time arrived." Sometimes, when he saw her much depressed, he would persuade her to invite a few friends for the evening, and let him carry her invitations. When the evening arrived, he was there, dressed in the most neat and proper manner, to attend upon the company; and he was sure to surprise her by adding to her frugal entertainment ice-cream and cakes.

It appeared his great study to shield her from dependency, — to supply as far as possible those objects of taste to which she had been accustomed. In this constant and uniform system, there was something far beyond the devotion of an affectionate slave ; it seemed to partake of a knowledge of the human mind, an intuitive perception of the wants of the soul, which arose from his own finely organized nature. In endeavoring to procure for her little offerings of taste to which she had been accustomed, he was unwearied : not because they had any specific value for himself, but simply for the pleasure they gave to her. All he could spare from his necessary wants, and from the sum which he was endeavoring to accumulate, and to which we have before alluded, was devoted to his mistress. “ Yet one rule,” said he, “ I made to myself, and I have never departed from it through life, — that of not incurring a debt, and scrupulously paying *on the spot* for every thing I purchased.”

But not all this affectionate solicitude, nor

the cares of a kind husband, for such was Monsieur Nicolas, could stay the approach of death. Her strength rapidly declined, and every day Toussaint perceived a change. At length she was confined to her bed. One day she said to him, "My dear Toussaint, I thank you for all you have done for me; I cannot reward you, but God will." He replied, "O Madame! I have only done my duty." "You have done much more," said she; "you have been every thing to me. There is no earthly remuneration for such services."

A few days before her death, she called Toussaint to her bedside, and, giving him her miniature, told him she must execute a paper that would secure to him his freedom. Monsieur Nicolas, who was present, said, "Save yourself this exertion, — every thing you wish shall be done." She shook her head, and replied, "It must be done *now*."

Her nurse from infancy, Marie Boucman, had accompanied her mistress to New York. She was aunt to Toussaint. Free papers were given to this faithful domestic by Ma-

dame Bérard and her sisters in St. Domingo, in which we find this sentence: "We give her her freedom in recompense for the attachment she has shown us, since the troubles which afflict St. Domingo, and release her from all service due to us."

This woman, whom she tenderly loved, she committed to Toussaint's care in a most touching manner. "As you love my memory," said she, "never forsake her; if you should ever quit the country, let her go with you."

The deed was legally executed which secured to Toussaint his freedom, and which she had strength to sign. She then desired him to bring a priest, made her confession, received her last communion, and died at the age of thirty-two.

She was a most gentle, affectionate woman, and deeply attached to those around her. We think a letter of hers, addressed to her negro nurse, will not be uninteresting in this connection. It appears that Marie, after seeing her mistress safely settled in New York, returned

again to see her family, as among Toussaint's papers the following letter is found from Madame Nicolas:—

“New York.

“How, my dear Marie! is this the way you keep your promise? You told me you would write to me as soon as you reached the Cape. Every one has written, but I find no little note from you. Have you forgotten me, my dear Memin? This thought makes me too sad. I was sorry to part with you, but I would not tell you all I felt, lest you should have changed your mind, and passed the cold winter here. So now you are at the Cape.

“I hear you reached there after a voyage of thirty days. Were you ill, my dear Memin? How are you now? I am impatient to hear from you. Tell me news of your children. If it had not been for this last intelligence, we should by this time have been at the Cape; as soon as the French troops arrive, we shall return. If you are not well off, come back to me, and we will all go to St. Domingo together. You know that you are a second



mother to me; you have filled the place of one. I shall never forget all you have done for my poor sisters, and if efforts could have saved any one, I should now have them all. But God has so ordered it, and his will be done! Ah, dear Memin, your religion will support you under all your sufferings,—never abandon it!

Adieu! Write me soon, or I shall think you do not love me any longer.

“ I am, always, as you used to call me, your  
“ BONTÉ.”

The little fancy names of endearment were peculiar to the West Indian mistresses and slaves. Marie Boucman returned again to New York.