Henry Fuqua's Friends in Baton Rouge Recall Deeds of Life of Achievement

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Life As Penitentiary Manager and Hardware Store Owner Related

This is the second of a series of three intimate stories of Henry L. Fuqua, written by a member of The Item staff. The third will appear during the week.

In the center of Baton Rouge on Third street, which is the main street of the town, is the Fuqua Hardware company, organized by Henry L. Fuqua 30 years ago. He was then 28 years old and he had a wife and child and home.

He had left the state university to try his hand at surveying with a gang which was laying the Louisville & Nashville tracks between Baton Rouge and Vicksburg, and he had left surveying to enter a hardware store. He loved the town and he loved his wife and the little baby girl, and he dreamed of building up a business in the heart of Baton Rouge.

The company which he organized as soon as he had learned all there was to learn about his business was a stock company in which he held the most shares and the position of manager of the company. With him for the last 30 years has been Frank Jones, who started in at the bottom, rose to a clerk, accountant, salesman—went on the road for the company, and now for the last seven years has held the position of manager. He took over this job when Henry Fuqua was appointed by Governor Pleasant to the post of manager of the state penitentiary.

Knows Him Well

"I think I can say that I know Henry Fuqua better than anybody else in the world," said Mr. Jones. "Yes, even better than his own wife knows him. A woman can never know a man as his best friend does. And Henry Fuqua has been my best friend for the last 30 years. We've not only worked together but we've spent our vacations together, hunting and fishing.

"See that picture"—and the gray-haired manager indicated a large framed photograph hanging over his desk. It was a picture of Mr. Fuqua standing in a swampy field, dressed in a rough corduroy suit. The tall, reedy grasses brushed against his legs, the sky looked overhanging. There was a gun in his hand and a dog by his side.

"I don't know which one of those creatures I love the most," Mr. Jones laughed. "Jack, the bird dog, is dead now and I'll never find another to replace him. That dog had a human heart and he understood every word you said to him. And it wasn't by intonation either. I'd

just say in an ordinary conventional tone of voice, 'Go get in the car and wait for me, Jack.' and he'd walk out of the room and do as I said.

Another Trip Promised

"Every year Fuqua and I would go out shooting quail and Jack enjoyed himself as much as we did. But we haven't had any shooting or fishing yet this year. As soon as we had persuaded Fuqua to enter the race for governor I gave up everything else, summer vacation, fishing and hunting, and have been working night and day for him. But our time is coming. As soon as this thing is over we'll be out in the saddle." And Mr. Jones sighed and seemed to luxuriate in the thought.

There were other pictures around the walls of woods and fields and dogs and baseball teams. "Fuqua always was a man who was great for outdoor life," said his friend. "He likes sports of all kinds and played on the baseball team of the university when he was a kid. Baseball wasn't the national game then as it is now and there were no big games. No, that isn't his team which you're looking at. They didn't even have uniforms."

Recalls Old Furniture

The office in which we were sitting was not a spick and span, up-to-date business office. The furniture was old and battered and crowded into the glass-enclosed office. The room had more the look of a man's den than an office.

Outside of the office stretched the store, which fronts two streets. There was a smell of leather and a general gleam of many sharp, shining things.

Frank Jones isn't the only man who misses the daily companionship of Henry Fuqua. With him for the last seven years has been Judge G. A. Killgore, who has been connected with the penitentiary for the last quarter of a century and has held the position of secretary to the manager ever since the manager replaced the old board of three. Since October of last year, Horace Wilkinson Sr., has held the position which Fuqua resigned to run for governor.

Tells Story of Flood

"I've known Fuqua ever since he was a youngster, and I've been his secretary for seven years, and I can't say that there is another man in the world whom I love and admire more. Everybody who comes in contact with him feels the same way."

Judge Killgore told again the story of the flood, told with pride for his friend, how, when the men were being taken off the steamer which rescued them from the flooded country, each one of them had some cheerful, hearty word for the manager of the state penitentiary.

"It wasn't only him encouraging and exhorting them," said Judge Killgore. "They were showing him how much they liked him and how they meant to stand by him and do all that they could to help him in this misfortune. Fuqua was never a man to show off his authority. The prisoners felt it, but they did not feel it necessary to ingratiate themselves or do any bootlicking around him. He was a man who brought out their manhood, and he made them feel that he was a man working among men, and not just a penitentiary superintendent, bossing them around."

Given Medical Care

Other things Judge Killgore told. For the first time in the history of the penitentiary men were given adequate medical attention, he said. "I don't suppose I should tell this because it might establish a precedent, which other released prisoners would like to follow. But anyway, it shows you what sort of a man Fuqua is. There was a prisoner who was paroled and, after leaving the penitentiary and taking a job which we got for him, he fell sick and a major operation was necessary. When Fuqua learned that the employers couldn't see the man through, he readmitted him to the penitentiary—that's a funny way of putting it, isn't it?—and called in the best specialist in the state who had volunteered his work whenever it was found necessary for the convicts. That man would have had to pay three or four hundred dollars for doctor's bills alone if he had been a free man. But of course he wouldn't have been able to pay it and he would have died. It's a good many lives which Governor Fuqua has saved."

The Honor System

With the honor system which was instituted by Henry Fuqua, terms are greatly shortened, according to Judge Killgore. Prisoners who are sentenced to a life term can be released at the end of 10 years for good behavior. Twenty year sentences are reduced to seven or eight years, fifteen years to three.

"You can ask any one of them how long he has to serve," said the judge, "and he will tell you not only the number of years, but the months and the days left of his sentence. Naturally the greatest desire in the heart of every prisoner is for freedom."

Fuqua accomplished more by his abolition of the stripes than the mere bolstering up of the prisoners' self-respect, Judge Killgore pointed out. He provided occupation and a trade for prisoners in making the new khaki outfits, which provided them with the means of earning a living when they left the penitentiary. And not only are the men provided with an entire outfit on leaving prison, but they are given $10 to face the world on. $5 more than any other state provides.

Rupture With Parker

In the course of the conversation, the judge went on to say that not only the Fuqua family but the town itself was grieved at the rupture between John Parker and Fuqua.

"They were personal friends for 20 years, but Parker has created a breach and it's hard to understand why he did it. We all have our surmises, of course, as to why Parker sponsored his lieutenant governor and didn't want Fuqua in the race. He seemed to think that Fuqua owed his position as manager of the state penitentiary to him, forgetting that Mr. Fuqua had held the office for four years before Parker reappointed him."

The subject was mentioned but indirectly to the retiring governor.

In the governor's office of the old state house, which was built in 1847, destroyed by fire during the Civil War when it was occupied by federal troops who used it as a barracks and prison, rebuilt, and used as the seat of government since 1882, Governor Parker sat alone. A fire burned quietly in the grate and cast a soft glow over the heavy carpet and fine old gleaming furniture. From the long windows you could look down over the terraced lawn which was sere and withered. You could look far down the river, which gleamed cold and

impassive in the fading sunlight, conscious of its own greatness and indifferent to the fading fortunes of the old man who sat at his desk in the state house. Probably the same age as the new governor, yet his head seemed bent and there was no spring in his step nor light in his fine old eyes.

Dreams of Campanile

He had said that he was very busy with only time for a few moments' talk, but before him on the mahogany desk were only many catalogues of chimes over which he was poring, comforting himself with the thought of the campanile of the new university in which the chimes will play, morning and evening through the reign of many governors.

"It is my dream," he confessed. "We must have dreams. The most beautiful part of this dream of a greater state university is this plan for the campanile, a dream which is being shared by the thousands of donors from every section of the state. It is to be 174 feet high and in it there will be tablets bearing the names of all the soldiers and sailors of the state who lost their lives in the war. There will be a clock to strike the hour and chimes to play morning and evening simple and homely tunes like 'Over There' and 'Tipperary,' which are great in their associations.

"Yes, it is my dream which I am dreaming for the young men and women of the state. And now I am being reviled by the press and every hand is turned against me," he said bitterly. "Friends that I had are no longer my friends," and probably he was thinking of Henry L. Fuqua.

Adores Grandchildren

"But I'll show you whom I'm working for," he added, handing us a paper weight under the glass of which laughed the faces of three youngsters. "My grandchildren," he said proudly. "I've worked for them and for the young people of the state, so I do not care what they are saying about me."

And as we left, he bent again over the catalogues on his desk and the rays of the setting sun crept in over river and valley and lit up his white hair and the furrows on his cheeks.

Mr. Fuqua came into the hotel that evening with swinging step. The fight was on and he looked as though he was enjoying it. During our brief talk he was interrupted by men who came up to shake him by the hand, to grab him affectionately by the shoulder. Invitations by the archbishop to attend a meeting at Knights of Columbus hall—invitation to attend the ceremony at St. Joseph's church the next day. "Sure. I'll be there" he said to all of them.

Wife Hates Politics

"How do you like my wife?" he said boastfully. "No, she didn't want me to run for office—just like a woman, worrying for fear I'll wear out. She doesn't like politics anyway—I just have to force her to go and vote—and the idea of a long and bitter political fight distressed her. But she stands by like a brick always, ready to do anything in the world for me.

"What is it you wanted? Pictures of me when I was a baby?" and Mr. Fuqua looked startled and blushed. "If there are any pictures of me in that state—and I don't know of any—my wife has them—and I know you won't get them from her. But sure, you can have the one of

me and Jack out hunting. It's just after six o'clock and the store is probably locked, but I've a key, so we'll go down there and rifle the place."

All the way down Third street Mr. Fuqua was stopped and congratulated and beamed at. Baton Rouge has known him for 58 years and what they know and think of him can be seen by the light on their faces when they speak to him.

Hold On to Picture!

Frank Jones was still in his office and shouted heartily at his friend as he came in. "If anything happens to that picture!"—he warned as he took it down from the wall and dusted it affectionately. "Remember when that was taken, Henry. That was a great day, all right. I wonder when we'll get a chance to have another like it."

Governor Fuqua looked at the picture of the baseball team on the wall and laughed. "Say, Frank, do you remember my pitcher—you know the chap, but I can't think of his name. At every meeting down in New Orleans, there he was grinning at me from the end of the hall. When I first saw him, I was so tickled that I just shouted out at him.

"I'm new to the political platform—never did much speech-making," he turned to us, "so whenever I see my friends in the audience, I'm delighted."

Wrapping up the picture, the governor carried it back to the hotel, although he was so jostled by friends whom he met on the street that he almost dropped it once or twice.

"Your wife telephoned and says you're to come right home and get your dinner," the hotel clerk told him, and looking as hungry as his own growing son could look, and as anxious to see his wife as though he had been away from her four months instead of four days, Mr. Fuqua slipped from the detaining hands of his friends and hurried away.