

FREEDOM AT LAST

History of a Man Who Lived in
Misery and Torture

CHAPTER VII.

It was a holy and wonderful evening-time, as the boat glided on through the vast shining solitudes. The heavenly influence stole into the souls of the three serfs, and purged them of all fear and sorrow. Imagine the enormous change in their lives. A curtain seemed to have fallen over all that they had known. The noise of the horrible castle, the sharp orders, the lash of the whip, the foetid terrors of the stoke, had all vanished as if they had never been. Before them might lie a wonderful life, possible happiness, freedom. At any rate, for the moment they were free, and the sky shone like the very pavements of heaven.

All three of them noticed the beautiful sunset with surprise, as if it were a thing that had never been before their eyes till now.

Day by day, as their work at Hilgay was drawing to a close, the sky had been as beautiful as this. The sky had been all gold and red, and copper green and great purple clouds had passed over it like a march of kings. But they had never seen it until now. Freedom had come to them and whispered in their ears. She had passed her hands over their eyes, and they began to know, with a sort of wonder, that the world was beautiful. Nor was this all of the gracious message. Everything was altered. Hyla, it will be remembered, had a face of little outward intelligence. He had, in fact, the face of a serf. But the latent possibilities of it had been made fine realities within the last few hours. What he had done, his own independent action, woke up the God in him, as it were. His voice was not so slipshod. Round his mouth were two fine lines of decision, his lips did not seem so full, his eyes were alert and conscious.

Gurth was a sunny-haired, nut-brown youth, straight as a willow wand, and of a careless, happy disposition. But he had been cowed by the stern and cruel subjection under which he had lived. One could see the change in him also. He flung his arms about as he punted, with the graceful movements of a free man who felt his limbs his own. Little smiles rippled round his lips, he looked like a young man thinking of a girl.

It is obviously most difficult for us to project ourselves with any certainty into the mood of these three men. The whole conditions of our lives are so absolutely different. But we can at any rate imagine for ourselves, with some kindness of spirit, how joyous these tremulous beginnings of freedom must have been! The modern talk of "freedom," the boasting of nations that enjoy it, does not mean very much to us. The thing is a part of our lives, we do not know how much it is. But who shall estimate the mysterious splendor that irradiated the hearts of those three poor outcasts!

The long supple poles went swishing into the water and the boat leapt forward. They rose trailing out of the water, and the drops fell from them in cascades of jewels, green, crimson, and pearl. Every now and again the turnings of the passage brought them to a stretch of water which went due west. Then they glided up a sheet of pure vivid crimson, and at the end the fiery half-globe of the sun.

Just as the sun was dipping away they rested again for half-an-hour, and when they went on it was dark. At last, when the night was all velvet black and full of mysterious voices, they turned a corner, and suddenly the punt poles could find no bottom, though they went on with the impetus of the last stroke.

A greater silence suddenly enveloped them, they saw no reeds round them, the horizon seemed indefinite.

"This is Wilfrith Lake," said Cerdic, "and we are near home."

Now an unforeseen difficulty presented itself. The lake was far too deep to punt in, and they had no oars. For the next hour their progress would be slow. Cerdic came to the rescue. With his knife he cut a foot of wood from each punt pole, with infinite labor; then he fashioned the tough wood into four stout pegs. Gurth drilled two holes in the gunwales of the punt, with the dagger which had been

taken from Pierce. Then they hammered the pegs into the holes and made rough rowlocks. There were no seats in the punt, and the thin poles did not catch the water very well, but by standing with their faces towards the bow they were able to make slow but steady progress.

It was a little unnerving. They could not be sure of their direction except in a very general way. It was chilly on this great lake, and very lonely. Hyla, and Gurth also, began to think of the great black hand. Who knew what lay beneath those sombre waters?

Never before in their lives had they spent such an exciting day. Hardy as they were, inured to all the chances and changes of a rough day, they began to be rather afraid, and their nerves throbbled uncomfortably. Indeed, it is little to be wondered at. They were men and not machines of steel. Once a great moth, which had strayed far out over the waters, flapped into Hyla's face with an unpleasant warmth and beating of wings. He gave a little involuntary cry of alarm, which was echoed with a quick gasp from the other two.

"What is that?" said Cerdic. "Only a butterfleece," Hyla answered him. "For the moment I was fearful, but it was nothing, and as light as a leaf on a linden tree."

"Hist!" said Gurth suddenly. "Listen! Cannot you hear anything? Wailing voices like spirits in pain!" They shipped the poles and bent out over the boat listening intently.

Something strange was occurring some half a mile away, judging from the sound. A long musical wail came over the water at regular intervals, and it was answered by the sound of many voices.

As they watched and listened in terror, they saw a tiny speck of light on a level with the water, which appeared to be moving towards them. The voices grew louder and then with a gasp of relief the fugitives heard the tones of men singing.

"They are the fathers from Icomb," said Hyla; "they are locking for us, and have come out in their boats."

The boat of the fathers was now quite close to the serfs. The lantern in the bows sent out long wavering streaks of light into the dark, and the many voices were full, and clear, and strong.

"Aho! aho!" shouted Cerdic in tremulous salutation.

The singing stopped suddenly. "What are you?" came over the water.

"Hyla of Hilgay, with Cerdic and Gurth."

There was a full-voiced shout of welcome, and the great boat came alongside with a swirl of oars.

Very soon they came to the opposite shore of the lake.

The shore sloped gradually down to the lake's edge in a smooth sweep of grass sward which met the water without any break. A few yards up the slope high trees fringed a road which led to the Abbey on the hill-top. Icomb was, in fact, a low island about half a mile square. Its highest point was hardly out of the fen mists. Round about in the country, the place was always spoken of as an Abbey, though it was, as a matter of fact, no more than a Priory, and of no great importance at that.

Icomb was the most lonely place in all the Eastern counties that the monks could have chosen for their retreat from the perils and unrests of this world. The low, tree-crowned island hill, surrounded by vast waters, protected by savage swamps, hidden in the very heart of the fen, was ideal for their purpose.

No better sanctuary could be found for fugitives. Richard Espic, the prior of Icomb, was always ready to extend a hand of welcome to the oppressed. The time was so black and evil, such a horrible cloud of violence hung over England, that he felt it his bounden duty to make his house a refuge.

The two boats were hauled up the slope, and the party went singing up the hill in the moonlight. The dark trees which lined the road nodded and whispered at their passing, as the holy song went rolling away among the leaves. The three

serfs felt wonderfully safe and happy. The dark depths of the thicket had no suggestion of a lurking enemy, the moon shone full and white over the road, and above, the tall buildings of the Priory waited for them. The hand of God seemed leading them, and His presence was very near.

CHAPTER VIII.

They buried Geoffroi de la Bourne, the day after his murder, in a pit dug in the castle chapel, under the flags. The bell tolled, and the pillars of the place were bound round with black.

It was not a very impressive ceremony. I do not think that the little chapel made it appear sordid and tawdry. It was not the lack of furniture for ritual. Some more subtle force was at work. God would not be present at that funeral, one might almost say.

After the service was over Fulke summoned Lewin and Anselm to him in his own chamber. The squires were not there, for the preparations for the siege were being pushed on rapidly, and they were directing them.

The three men sat round a small, massive table. "Well," said Fulke, "it is most certain that it was this theow Hyla. Everything points to that. As far as we have found, he was the chief instrument in the plot. For, look you, it was to him, so that boy said before he died, that the others looked. He seemed to be the leader. By grace of Heaven all the rogues shall die a very speedy death, but for him I will have especial care."

"The thing is to catch him," said Dom Anselm, "and I wist no easy job. Are you going to pull down Icomb Priory?"

"I would do that, and burn every monk to cinders if I had time and men enough."

"That is impossible," said Lewin. "My lord, it's in the middle of a lake, up a steep hill, and with a great moat and twin outer walls. We could never come by Icomb."

"Also," said Anselm, "we have but a week at the most before we are within these four walls with no outgoing for many a day."

"What's to do?" Fulke asked gloomily.

"This is all I can think of," said Lewin. "These serfs have fled to Icomb, and, no doubt, have been taken in very gladly by the monks. We are not loved in these parts, Lord Fulke. But Richard Espic is not going to keep them in great case with wine and heydegwyes. They will work for their bread. Outside the monastery walls there is a village for the servants, on the edge of the corn-lands. Now see, lord. A man may go begging to Icomb, may he not? For the night he will sleep in the hospitium. After that, if he wanteth work, and will sign and deliver seisin to be a man of Icomb for three years, I doubt nothing but the monks will have him gladly. They do ever on that plan. He will live in the village. Well, then, that night let there be a swift boat moored to the island, and let the first man come to it and tell those therein where this Hyla lies. The rest is very easy. A man can be bound up and thrown into the boat in half-an-hour, and then we will have him here."

"Ventail and Visor!" said Fulke, "that is good, Lewin, we will have him safe as a rat. But I have another thought too. I had forgotten. The man's daughter Elgifu is still in the castle. It is not fitting that she should live."

"'Tis but a girl," said Lewin, the sentimentalist. Fulke snarled at him. "Girl or no girl, she shall die, and die heavily. By the rood! I will avenge my father's murder so that men may talk of it."

His narrow face was lit up with spite, and he brought his hand down upon the table with a great blow. "Perhaps you are right, my lord," said Lewin; "it is as well that she should be killed. I only thought that she is a very pretty girl."

"There are plenty more, minter."

He went to the door and opened it, shouting down the stairs. A man-at-arms came clattering up to him, making a great noise in the narrow stone stairway. He ordered that the girl should be brought to him, and presently she stood in front of them white and trembling, for she saw their purpose in their eyes.

"You are going to be hanged, girl," said Fulke, "and first you shall be well whipped in the castle yard. What of that? Do you like that? Hey?"

She burst into pitiful pleadings and tremulous appeals. Her voice

On the Farm

THE OBJECT OF PRUNING.

Why should we prune a fruit tree? There are many people who can scarcely give a reason for pruning. If they cannot give a reason this is good evidence that they do not understand pruning.

You know why we prune the hedge. It is for the purpose of keeping the hedge dense and low. Why do we not trim our oaks, maples and elms? For the reason that we desire them to be densely headed, thus it cannot be said we trim our apple trees to make them more beautiful. Should we trim our elms, maples and oaks back to make them longer lived or more fruitful? No, it is not natural for trees of any kind to be pruned for they are not apt to be so long lived after pruning nor so handsome to look at.

The main object of pruning is to be able to produce larger and better fruit than could be secured without pruning. If a fruit tree is filled with branches thickly, the tree will have twice as much fruit as it can bring to perfection. If each year we thin out a few of the branches we thus thin out the fruit and at the same time permit the rays of the sun to penetrate so as to color the fruit and bring it to perfection. If too many branches are taken out and the sun admitted too freely in the top of the tree it may be injurious. If there are too many branches in the tree and they are too close together the air cannot circulate among the branches and the fruit will not be as attractive nor as good in quality. Sunshine and circulation of air are as necessary to the fruit tree as fertility in the soil.—Green's Fruit Grower.

WATER SUPPLY IN PASTURE.

Cows need a constant supply of water. In the summer time when the days are warm and the amount of moisture perspired by the animals is large, there is a more urgent demand that water be convenient to the animals abundant. The common practice of shutting the animals in the back pasture lot from early morning till milking time in the evening without a chance to get to water, is wrong. Either arrangements should be made so the cows may come to the barn for water or, better yet, a supply should be had in the pasture lot. A windmill can be easily and cheap-

rang in agony through the room. "I cannot die, lord," she said. "Oh, lord, kill me not. My lord, my lord! my dear lord! I cannot bear it!"

The brute watched her with a sneer, and then turned to the man-at-arms. "Tie her up to the draw-well, strip her naked and give her fifty stripes. Then hang her, naked, on the tree outside the castle gate."

(To be continued.)

ly installed over a well in the field. The absence of buildings near will make a low derrick sufficient to get good results. With an overflow pipe properly arranged to carry away excess water, the mill may be left in gear constantly, and will usually keep the animals well supplied with fresh water. The only care required is to keep the pump packed and the mill oiled. Nothing, of course, surpasses springs for this purpose, but these are only to the few. A running stream is excellent but the practice of making the cows go to stagnant pools for water cannot be too severely condemned both on account of the health of the animals and the wholesomeness of the milk.—A. H.

SUMMER CARE OF ORCHARDS

The Indiana Experiment Station has sent out a circular under the above heading, which is very timely. It calls attention to the fact that, notwithstanding the fruit crop may have been badly injured, or even totally destroyed, trees and plants should be given good care, so that fruit buds may be formed for next year's crop.

This circular says that many farmers in Indiana planned to give their orchards proper care this season, in the way of spraying, cultivating, etc., but that with the destruction of the crop, they became discouraged, and were ready to give up trying to keep trees healthy and vigorous. This is a mistake. Buds for next year's crop are formed this season, and trees cannot form fruit buds unless they are kept healthy and vigorous. Take care of your trees every year—then there will be fewer off seasons.

ARISTOCRATIC SEWERS.

Devoting Themselves to Embroidery and Tapestry Making.

English women of position, following in the wake of Lady Carew, Lady Elcho and Lady Edward Tennant, are devoting themselves as much to needlework as did ever their grandmothers and are engaged upon embroideries and tapestries. Lady Carew and her sister, Mrs. Cory, have not yet finished the great panels wherewith they mean to decorate the walls of the former's Irish home, Castle Boro, at Wexford, and every morning they devote some hours to the work.

Other ladies are becoming home dressmakers and, according to the Gentlewoman, lay out on exquisite quality of hand woven brocade, velvet and crepe what they would otherwise expend on labor.

Lady Ilchester has a swannery at Abbotsbury of some 1,100 birds, to say nothing of eider ducks. The beautiful white down collected from the birds is all sewn on to a quilt and each is lined with the predominating color of the bedroom for which it is intended, with pink, blue, yellow or other gay satin or soft silk. The white down is sewn on to the uppermost side of the quilts, and the effect of them in the different rooms is simply charming.

The satirist can talk about the "average man" with impunity, because every man considers himself above the average.

MAPLEINE A flavoring used the same as lemon or vanilla. By dissolving granulated sugar in water and adding Mapleine, a delicious syrup is made and a syrup better than maple. Mapleine is sold by grocers. If not send 50c for 4 oz. bottle and recipe book. Crescent Mfg. Co., Seattle, Wa.

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MOTOR CARRIAGES

AWARDED DEWAR TROPHY.

The Dewar Challenge Trophy is awarded yearly by the ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB for the most meritorious performance of the year under the general regulations for certified trials.

The New Daimler engine has now been in the hands of the public for nearly 18 months, quite long enough to prove its merit; owners are sending in testimonials by every post and we should like to forward to any person or persons interested a complete set of literature fully explaining this marvelous new motor. Send also for our new illustrated booklet, "The Dewar Trophy and how it was won," a history of the Greatest Engine Test on Record.

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