

FREEDOM AT LAST

History of a Man Who Lived in
Misery and Torture

CHAPTER XIV.—(Cont'd)

With a sure hand the stranger bent the bows at a break but a yard wide in the reeds. The put went hissing through the narrow passage, pushing the reeds aside for a moment, only that they should spring back again after its passage. A few yards through the thick growth brought them into a circular pool or basin. This also was surrounded with reeds which towered up into the air. It was very small in diameter, and floating on its placid black water was like being at the bottom of a jar.

The place was full of the earliest sunlights and busy with the newly awakened life of the fen.

But what arrested the serf's immediate attention was a curious structure at the far side of the pool. It resembled nothing so much as a small house-boat. A wooden hut had been built upon a floating platform of timber, and the whole was moored to a stout pile which projected some three feet from the water.

A fire smouldered on the deck in front of the hut, and a cooking pot hung over it by a chain.

"This is my home," said the man, pointing towards the raft. "Where I go I take my house with me, and ask no man's leave. I have lived on this pool for near two years now."

They landed on the raft. "Now you shall fill your belly, Sir Wanderer," said the man, "and then I will hear more of you. Here is a mess of hare, marsh quail, and herbs. It's fit for a lord eke a thrall, for I see you wear a thrall's collar. Here is a wooden bowl, fill it, and so thyself."

He came out of the cabin with two rough wooden bowls, which he dipped and filled in the cauldron.

Then for a space, while the sun rode up the sky, there was no sound heard but the feeding of hungry men.

Hyla began to feel the blood moving in him once more, and the strength of manhood returning. The sun shone on his chilled limbs and warmed them, the night was over.

At the finish of the meal the tall man turned on him suddenly and without preparation. "How should Hyla of the long arms, thrall of Geoffroi de la Bourne, be making his way to Richard Espec? Is Geoffroi about to profess for a monk?"

Hyla stared at him stupidly with open mouth, and swift fear began to knock at his heart.

"I doubt me there is something strange here," said the tall man, with a sudden bark of anger. "There is something black here, my good rogue. I pray you throw a little light upon this. If ever I saw a man with fear writ upon him you are that man, Hyla. I beg leave to think there are others of you not far away! There are more from Hilgay about us in the fen."

Hyla glanced hurriedly round the quiet little pool. "Where? where?" he said in a tone of unmistakable terror. "Have you seen them, then? Are they in wait to take me?"

The other looked at him with a long searching glance for near a minute.

"We two be at a tangle," he said at length. "You are in flight, then from the Hilgay men?"

"For my life," said Hyla.

"Then you and I are in one boat Hyla, as it is said. I doubted that you had come against me just now. So they are after you? Have you been killing game in the forest or stealing corn?"

"It was game," said Hyla quickly; "big game," he added in an uneasy afterword.

There was silence for a minute. The long, lean man seemed turning over something in his mind.

"So you go to Icomb for sanctuary," he said slowly. "And Geoffroi sent his men after you. It is a long way through the fen to go after one thrall. And also they say Lord Roger Bigot is going to Hilgay with a great host. It is unlike Geoffroi de la Bourne to waste men hunting for a serf at such a time. He is growing old and foolish."

Hyla glanced at him quickly. He knew by the man's mocking tone that he was disbelieved. Hyla was but a poor liar.

"Then you know Lord Geoffroi?" he said, stumbling woefully over the words.

"I know him," said the man slow-

ly. "I am well acquainted with that lord, though it is eight years since we have met." Suddenly his voice rose, though he seemed to be trying to control it. "God curse him!" he cried in a hoarse scream; "will the devil never go to his own place!"

Hyla started eagerly. The man's passion was so extreme, his curse was so real and full of bitter hatred that an avowal trembled on his lips.

The other gave him the cue for it.

"Come, man," he said briskly, resuming his ordinary voice; "you are keeping something. Tell out straight to one who knows you and Grauch also—does that surprise you? There are no friends of the house of Bourne here. What is it, what hast done?"

"Killed him," said Hyla, shortly. "Splendeur dex!" said the man in a fierce whisper. His face worked, his eyes became prominent, he trembled all over with excitement, like a hunting dog scenting a quarry while in the leash.

Then he burst out into a torrent of questions in French, the foreign words tumbling over each other in his eagerness.

Hyla knew nothing of what he said, for he had no French. Seeing his look of astonishment, the man recovered himself. "I forgot for a moment," he said, "who you were. Now thank God for this news! So you have killed him! At last! At last! How and why? Say quickly."

Hyla told him in a few words all the story.

"And who are you, then?" he said, when he had done.

"I call myself Lisole to the few that I meet in the fen. But agone I had another name. Come and see."

He took Hyla by the arm and led him into the cabin. It was a comfortable little shelter. A couch of skins ran down one side, and above it were shelves covered with pots, pans, tools, and fishing gear. A long yew-bow stood in one corner among a few spears. An arbalist lay upon a wooden chest. Light came into the place through a window covered with oiled sheep-skin stretched upon a sliding frame. In one corner was an iron fire-pan for use in winter, and a hollow shaft of wood above it went through the roof in a kind of chimney.

The place was a palace to Hyla's notions. No serf had such a home. The cabin was crowded with possessions. Unconsciously Hyla began to speak with deference to this owner of so much.

"See here," said the man. At the end of the cabin was a broad shelf painted in red, with a touch of gilding. A thick candle of fat with a small wick, which gave a tiny glimmer of light, was burning in an iron stand. In the wall behind, was a little doorless cupboard, or alcove, in which was a small box of dark wood, heavily bound round with iron bands. At the back of the alcove a cap of parti-colored red and yellow was nailed to the wall.

The man who called himself Lisole lifted the box from the alcove carefully, and as he did so the edge touched a bell on the end of the pointed cap. It tinkled musically.

"On this day," said the man, "I will show you what no other eyes than mine have seen for eight long, lonely years. I doubt nothing but that it is God His guidance that has brought you here to this place. For to you more than all other men this sight is due."

So saying, he fumbled in his coat and pulled therefrom a key, which hung round his neck upon a cord of twisted gut.

He opened the box and drew several objects from it. One was a great lock of nut-brown hair, full three feet long, as soft and fine as spun silk. Another was a ring of gold, in which a red stone shone darkly in the candle-light. There were one or two pieces of embroidered work, half the design being uncompleted.

"They were Isoult's," said the man in a hushed voice.

"Isoult la Guerisseur!" said Hyla.

"Isoult, the Healer."
"Then you who are called Lisole—?"

"Was once Lerailleur, whose jesting died eight years ago. It was buried in Her grave."

"God give her peace," said Hyla. "See you this scar on my arm? A shaft went through it in the big wood. Henry Montdefeu was hunting with Lord Geoffroi. I was beating in the undergrowth, and a chance shaft came my way. La Guerisseur bound it up with a mess of but cruhed leaves and a linen strip. In a week I was whole. That was near ten years ago."

"You knew me not?"

"Nor ever should have known hadst not told me. Your hair it is as white as snow, your face has fallen in and full of lines, aye, and your voice is not the voice that sang in the hall in those days."

"Ah, now I am Lisole. But thank God for this day. I can wait the end quiet now. So you have killed him! Know you that I also tried? I was not bold as you have been. I tried with poison, and then fled away by night. I took the poppy seeds and brewed them, and put the juice in his drink. But I heard of him not long after as well and strong, so I knew it was not to be. I never knew how I failed."

"I can tell you that," said Hyla, "it was common talk. Lord Geoffroi went to his chamber in Outfangthef Tower drunken after dinner in the hall. Dom Ansem led him there. On the table was his night-draught of morat in which you had put the poison. Geoffroi drank a long pull, and then fell on the bed and lay sleeping heavy among the straw. Dom Ansem, being thirsty, did go to take a pull at the morat, but had scarce put lip to it when the taste or smell told him what it was. Had been a surgeon, they do say, and knoweth simples as I the fen-lands. So he ran for oil and salt, and poured them into Geoffroi until he vomited the poison. But for two days after that he was deadly sick and could hold no food. I mind well they searched the forest lands for you and eke the fen, but found not."

"Aye, I fled too swiftly and too far for such as they. It takes wit to be a fool, and they being not fools but men-at-arms had no cunning such as mine. I built this house of mine with wood from Icomb, and have lived upon the waters this many a year."

"Ever alone and without speech of men?"

"Not so. Sometimes I get me to Mass at Icomb, and I am well with the monks."

It was a strange meeting. This man Lerailleur had been buffoon to Geoffroi, and had come with him from Normandy. His wife, Isoult, was a sweet simple dame, so fragrant and so pure that all the world loved her. She was a strangely successful nurse and doctor, and knew much of herbs. In those simple times her cures were thought miraculous, and she was venerated. The jester, a grave and melancholy man when not professionally employed, thought her a saint, and loved her dearly. Now one winter night, Lord Geoffroi being, as was his wont, very drunk, set out from his feasting in the hall to seek sleep in his bed-chamber.

Isoult had been watching by the side of a woman—wife to one of the men-at-arms. She crossed the courtyard to her own apartment, in front of Geoffroi de la Bourne. He, being mad with drink, thought he saw some phantom, and drew his dagger. With a shout he rushed upon the lady, and soon she lay bleeding her sweet life away upon the frosty ground.

They buried her with great pomp and few dry eyes, while Lerailleur bided his time. The rest we have heard.

Hyla and Lisole sat gravely together on the deck of the boat. Neither said much for several hours, the thoughts of both were grave and sad, and yet not wholly without comfort.

They seemed to see God's hand in all this. There was something fearful and yet sweet in their hearts.

The "midsummer hum"—in Norfolk they call the monotone of summer insect life by that name—lulled and soothed them. There was peace in that deep and secret hiding-place.

In the afternoon they broiled some firm white fish and made another meal. "Come and see my field," said Lisole afterwards.

They got into the small punt and followed a narrow way through the reeds, going away from the wide stretch of water on the further shore of which they had first met. At a shelving turfy shore they disembarked.

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On the Farm

SWINE ON DAIRY FARMS.

On dairy farms where the skimmed milk can be retained for use, the feeding of it to pigs can be made very profitable where the farmer has arrangements that are suited to the purpose all the year around. There should be suitable accommodations for cold weather, as with these and a fair supply of milk and grain and proper care the business can be made as profitable in winter as in summer, and often more so. And first there should be the selection of the breed thought to be best, all things considered, for the locality, paying particular attention to that of the sow for breeding purposes. These should be of the best type and form, docile and quiet, that will make good mothers, then keep them several years. This will be found more satisfactory than making frequent changes.

There should be at least two good litters of pigs in a year. The sows should have suitable quarters in winter, ample, comfortable and kept dry and well bedded. In summer she may run in a yard or small field where it will be better for sow and pigs than in a pen. The sows should be well cared for at all times, not fat, but in a thrifty, healthy condition.

A farmer with an average-sized dairy should have at least one good brood sow or more where needed. One will usually furnish enough pigs to grow up and fatten on the farm, at least, and this means quite a saving when otherwise they would have to be purchased. From the returns from this one sow a good sum should be realized either from pigs sold at weaning time, or as fattened on the farm.

My attention was lately called to a thrifty, good-looking Berkshire sow, that the owner stated had reared 21 out of 28 pigs for the first year. These had either been sold or were valued at \$69 at four to five weeks old at going prices. This would more than equal the average product of the dairy cow, while the cost of keeping would be considerably less.

This is certainly a good record for the first of any year, and at usual prices.

On 20-cow farms there should be an income of from \$100 to \$150 from pigs grown and fattened on the farm. There should be two broods of these and each should be grown and fattened in six months' time. This will require some grain along with the milk, but the process should be continuous from weaning to slaughtering time, and this will require some attention and care.

The prices for meats are now proportionally higher than for grain, so it will pay to feed as liberally as seems to be necessary.

And then there is another thing that should be considered in connection with this business, and that is the making of quite a large amount of excellent manure, that is so much needed on about every farm.

The crops grown from the use of this manure should go a long way in furnishing or growing the grain that will be needed in fattening the pigs. This is something that should be well considered.

Farmers should raise more pigs. Go into the business understandingly, give it all needed attention, and see if the results are not satisfactory, as the writer has found them to be.—E. R. Towle, in Hoard's Dairyman.

MANURE FOR HAY LAND.

Wheat, corn and other crops are no more improved by rotation than hay. The Minnesota Experiment Station shows that a plot continuously cut for hay the past fifteen years has given an average yield of 1.73 tons per acre, while on a plot, under a three-years rotation of wheat, clover and corn, hay has yielded, the past ten years, an average of 2.9 tons per acre. In a five-year rotation of wheat, timothy and clover, pasture, oats and corn, the hay has yielded an average of 3.9 tons per acre, since 1900. Eight tons of manure per acre were applied once in five years on the five-year rotation plots. There is money in manure.

VEGETABLES.

Green Tomato Mincement.—One peck of green tomatoes; chop fine, squeeze and drain off juice. Cover with hot water and two tablespoonfuls of salt. Boil a few minutes, then drain off. Do this three times, then add one-half peck of chopped apples, three pounds of yellow "C" sugar, one cupful of vinegar, one cupful of chopped suet, two tablespoonfuls of cinnamon, one tablespoonful of cloves and one nutmeg, one pound of raisins, and one pound of currants. Then boil till apples are done. Can in fruit cans and seal tight.

Cabbage Without Odor.—Cut a cabbage into quarters and remove the core. Put the four pieces into a pot of violently boiling water, dropping in one at a time gently so as not to stop the boiling. Cover with a plate or weight to keep the cabbage under water, add a pinch of soda, some salt and boil fast for twenty-five minutes. Put the cabbage in a colander and press the water out and cut it up. Serve with vinegar or cover with a white sauce.

A COMMON HABIT.

If he can get 10 cents for nothing a man is generally willing to give up a chance to earn a dollar.

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