

# FREEDOM AT LAST

History of a Man Who Lived in  
Misery and Torture

## CHAPTER XV.

Brother Felix, the monk who had come to them from Icomb, bade them rest another day before setting out over the lake.

"Ye have had a shrewd shog, Lile, in the news that Hyla brought and he also has gone hardly of late. Let us rest a day and eat well, and talk withal. It is good to rest here."

His merry black eyes regarded them with an eminent satisfaction at his proposal. It was his holiday, this trip from the Priory, and he had no mind to curtail it.

There was yet a quaint strain of melancholy humor about the ex-fool. The joy had gone, the wit lingered. His sojourn alone among the waters had mellowed it, added a new virtue to the essential sadness of the jester.

And Felix was no ordinary man. He had been an epicure in such things once. What the time could give of culture was his. He had been a writer of MS., a lay scribe in the house of the Bishop at Rouen; he had illuminated missals in London, was a good Latinist, and, even in that time, had a little Greek. A day with Lisole, was a most pleasant variant to a life which he lived with real endeavor, but which was sometimes at war with his mental needs.

So they sat out on deck, among all the medley of the jester's rough household goods, on deck in the sunshine, while the monk and the prospective novice ranged over their experiences.

Hyla had never heard such talk before. Indeed, it is not too much to say that through all the years of his life he had never, until this day, been present at a conversation. Nearly all the words the serf had heard, almost all the words he himself had spoken, were about things which people could touch and see.

He and his friends, Cerdic notably, had touched on the unseen things of religion—"principalities and powers" who dominated the future—in their own uncouth way. But conversation about the abstract things of this earthly life he had rarely heard before.

For the first hour the novelty of it almost stunned him. He listened without thought, drinking it all in with an eagerness which defied consideration. It was his first and last social experience!

"Will not be so lonely in the cloister, friend," said Felix.

"Say you so?" answered the jester. "Yet to be alone is a powerful good thing. I have but hardly felt lack of humans this many a year. Many sorry poor ghosts of friends, gone to death back-along, come to me at night time."

Hyla noticed that a curious change had taken place in his host's face. The strained, brooding look in his eyes had disappeared. Already it was calmer, happier.

The sun seemed to draw out the latent humor on the jester's countenance.

The jester had a thin metal rod in his hand, part of his cooking apparatus, his poker in fact, and all unconsciously he began to use it to emphasize his remarks—the fool's baton of his happier days. Now that the pressure on his brain, the dead-weight of hate, had been removed, a kind of reflex action took place. He became a little like his former self.

Hyla sat at the edge of the little deck and looked on, wondering, his hard brown feet just touched the water. His face had sunk once more into its old passive unemotional aspect. A gaudy marsh fly, its livery of black and yellow, had settled upon his hand, but he made no movement to brush it away.

The trio were beautifully grouped against the background of vivid green reeds, surrounded by the still brown water. To any one coming suddenly upon the quaint old boat lying among the white and yellow water-flowers, and its strange distinctive crew, the picture would have remained for long as an unforgettable mental possession.

The accidents of time, place, and color, had so beautifully blended into a perfectly proportioned whole that it seemed more of design than chance.

Lisole smiled down at the big man. "My jesting days are long gone by," he said. "But, messires,

I will try my hand for you this noon if perchance it has not lost all cunning. Once I had knowledge of the art of legerdemain, by which the hands, moving very swiftly and with concealed motions, do so trick and deceive the eye that he knows not what a-hath seen."

Brother Felix sat up and propped himself against the cabin. Hyla drew nearer, with attentive eyes.

Lisole left them for a moment and went inside the cabin. He came out with several articles in his hands, which he put beside him on the deck.

He showed them his bare hands, and then suddenly stretching out his right arm he caught at the empty air, and behold! there came into his right hand, how they could not tell, a little rod of black wood a foot in length or more.

A swift change came into his voice. It sank a full tone and became very solemn. His face was very grave. Hyla watched him with wide eyes and parted lips.

He turned to the serf, "Now Hyla," said he, "art about to witness art magic, but none of Satan's so be brave. Take you this little wand of enchanted ebony-wood and say what dost make of it."

Very timidly, and with a half withdrawal, Hyla's great brown paw took the toy. He examined it, smelt it like a dog, and then with some relief gave it back to the owner.

"'Tis but a little stick of wood," he said.

"Nathless, a stick of magic, thrall, for 'twas of this wood that the coffin of Mahound was built."

Lisole cleared a space on the deck in front of him, and laid the wand upon it. Then he stretched out his hand over it, as though in invocation. "By the Garden of Alamoot where thou grew," he cried, "and by the virtue of the blood of Count Raymond of Tripoli, whose blood fell on thee as he died in that garden, I command thee to do my will, little black stick."

He took a little pipe of reed from his belt, and, stopping one end with his finger, blew softly through it.

A mellow flute-like note quivered through the air. Hardly pausing for breath, the jester continued the monotonous cooing sound for several minutes.

Hyla watched the wand with fascinated eyes. Suddenly it began to tremble slightly and to roll this way and that. The pipe changed its notes and broke into a lilt of a simple dance. Simultaneously with the change the little stick rose up on its end and inclined itself gravely to each of them in turn. Then it began to hop up and down, retreating and advancing, in time to the music.

Hyla's tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. His lips were hot and dry, his throat seemed as if he had been eating salt.

A horrid fear began to rise within him, such strange fear as he had never known, as he watched the devilish little stick—how human it was!—in its fantastic dance.

Suddenly the music stopped. The stick ceased all movement, standing upright upon its end. Then—horror!—very slowly, but with great deliberation, it began to hop towards Hyla. Nearer and nearer it came, in little jumps of an inch or so. The tan of the serf's face turned a dusky cream color, he put out both hands to ward off the evil thing.

But it hopped on relentlessly.

It came within a foot or two, and Hyla's terror welled up within him so fiercely that he gave a loud cry, stepped back, and with an echoing splash disappeared into the water over the boat side.

He rose almost immediately, spluttering and gasping, the shock depriving him of his senses.

Peals of laughter, echoing uncontrollable peals, saluted him.

Hyla trod water, staring at them in amazement.

"Come aboard, man! Come aboard!" cried the monk at length. "'Twas naught but a jest, a jongleur's trick." His laughter forbade speech once more.

They helped the poor fellow on deck once more, and reassured him. But it was long before he began

to like his company again. He remembered the shrine inside the cabin, the sudden appearance of the jester's torch through the mists of night, and longed most devoutly to be back at work on the good brown fields.

Till evening fell and supper-time was at hand, Lisole entertained them. Never had he been more skilful and more full of humor than on this, his "farewell appearance," as he would have called it now-a-days.

In his hands a wild duck's egg came, and changed. Water poured into an earthen jar changed into chopped straw in a single moment. Never were such wonders before on earth.

But as day went, so gaiety went with it.

Then they all said the Lord's Prayer together, and so to sleep.

But Hyla's rest was fitful and disturbed. Strange broken dreams flitted through it. Often during the night he lay awake and heard the heavy snoring of his companions. The sound rought little sense of companionship with it. He was alone with his thoughts and the night.

In the early morning they set forth gravely, as befitted the solemn business they were about.

They set slowly out, down the brown channel among the rushes. The birds were singing.

Lisole was very silent now that he had left everything. His thoughts were sad, for he was but human. That little refuge had been Home. He had been alone with the memory of Isoult there. They forged the creek towards the lake, and his eyes fell upon the iron-bound box.

Then his face brightened. He set it towards the Island of Icomb. Nor did he look back any more.

About half-way over the lake they rested, and ate some bread and boiled fish. Till then Hyla's strong arms had rowed them, and now Lisole prepared to relieve him.

They were busy with the victuals in the bottom of the boat when a shout floated over the water, sudden and startling. They had thought no one near.

Looking up they saw a large boat manned by many oars, but two hundred yards away. It was strange they had not heard the rattle in the rowlocks.

A man in a shirt of chain mail stood upright in the bows, and a levelled cross-bow threatened them.

They gazed stupidly at the advancing terror. In forty seconds the boat was lying motionless beside them. Hyla saw many cruel, exulting, well-known faces. Lisole grasped the iron-bound box.

Suddenly Hyla became aware that a harsh voice was speaking. "We have no quarrel with you, Sir Monk, nor with your boatman. Nathless, unless you wish death, you will give that serf Hyla up to us without trouble. We are in luck to-day. We but thought to find the bodies of dead friends."

The rapid pattering Latin went on unceasingly, Hyla was lifted from the punt by strong, eager arms. A push sent the smaller vessel glid-

ing away, he saw the distance opening out between—the ripples sparkled in the sun.

The wail of a farewell floated towards him, and then some one struck him a heavy blow upon the head, and everything flashed away.

## CHAPTER XVI.

Dom Anslem was strolling about the courtyard of the castle at Hilgay.

His hands were behind his back, and his head was thrust forward and slowly oscillated from side to side.

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, and he was pretending to take an intelligent interest in the activity all round. He regarded four great bundles of newly made arrows tied up with rope in the manner of a connoisseur. He even took one out from its bundle, felt the point, and held it on a level with his eye to make sure that the shaft was perfectly straight and true.

Then he went to a heap of raw hides and felt their texture. This done he stood before a mangonel, which was being hoisted up upon the walls by a windlass, and surveyed it with an affectation of the engineer and a flavor of the expert at home. But he did it very badly, and the whole proceeding was an obvious effort. After that, feeling that he had done his duty, he went to the draw-well in the centre of the courtyard, and, sitting on the ground on the shady side—for it was a structure of masonry some four feet high, like all Norman walls—composed himself to sleep.

All round him activity was being pushed to its furthest limit, and in all that hive he was the only drone. The squires passed him with a jest, the waiting maids threw a quip at him. Lewin alone was friendly, but the minter had but little time to spare. That quick brain and alert eye for the main chances in life were very valuable at Hilgay, and Lewin was in constant request. The man suggested, advised, and directed operations which were the wonder of all who saw them.

But he said nothing of the crack in the orchard wall.

The precious couple were quite resolved upon the treachery which they had plotted in the fen. In truth Fulke was a bestial young fool, and offered no inducement to his followers to be faithful. Roger Bigot was a bigger man in the world, and reputed to be very fair with all his people. Lewin certainly would gain by the change. As for Dom Anslem, he knew perfectly that Roger would never need a priest, for—a strange fact even in those dreadful days—he was an open sceddler.

So he and Lewin laid their plans together.

(To be continued.)

## Proving a Statement.

A certain minister, who is an emphatic preacher, is at times at a loss to give his utterances proper weight. For instance, he'll say:

"This statement is as true as is the night which will follow day," or "as true as that the trees will bud in spring."

Sometimes it happens that the doctor has more statements than he has illustrations to give them weight. On one such occasion he remarked, "This is as true as the"—Here the doctor halted. He paused a few moments, and then his face illumined—"as true as is the statement that some member is yet on his or her way to church."

A few moments later a lady entered the edifice and swept grandly up the aisle. The doctor's face assumed an "I told you so" appearance. The congregation began to smile, then to laugh. Sympathy for the embarrassed lady, however, soon subdued the apparently uncontrollable mirth.

## The Parrots of Mexico.

What the wild pigeon once was in point of numbers to the United States the parrot, of varying shades of color and all sizes, is to old Mexico. Flights of these birds frequently darken the midday sun in the hot country, and they become so tame around the camps of engineers that the birds are given individual names and soon become regular pets. Whenever the parrots desert the forest and alight on the ground in the open spaces of the jungle the natives recognize their actions as sure warning of an impending earthquake. American engineers endorse this belief and assert that serious accidents which might have been averted have resulted when the warning of the birds was noted, but unheeded.

## A Line on Mother.

"I don't see how I'm ever to get a chance again with this boy around," wailed the little widow with the small son. "The other day a man I like awfully well asked me how old the town was that we came from. The boy spoke up without giving me a chance to put in a word:

"I don't know just how old it is," he said, "but it must be pretty old because mamma was born in it."—New York Press.

## Had His Hands Full.

Judge—Why didn't you seize the thief when you found him?

Policeman—How could I? I had my club in one hand and my revolver in the other!—Flagg's Blatter.

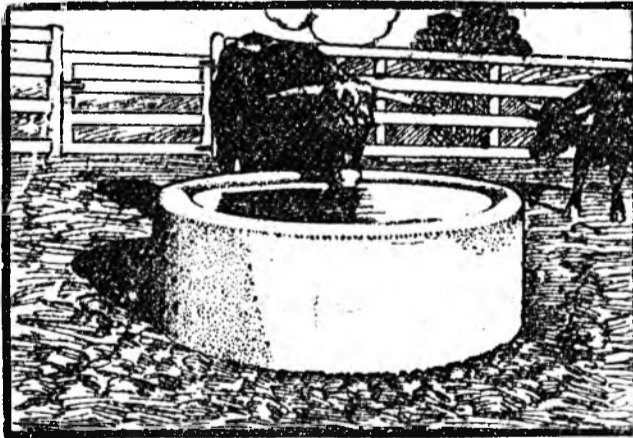
## A Disaster.

Hostess—Mr. Squibs is going to sing a comic song. Guest—I knew something would happen. I upset the salt at the dinner table.—Stray Stories.

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Sloppy, leaky wooden troughs, or clean, durable Concrete?

Wooden drinking troughs are about as reliable as the weather.

They are short-lived and require replacing every few years—not to mention continual patching to keep them in repair.

The best of wood cannot withstand, for long, constant dampness and soaking. Its tendency to rapid decay soon shows itself in leaks and stagnant pools of water around trough.

Contrast with this the durability, cleanliness and well-ordered appearance of Concrete.

Which?

The dampness which destroys lumber only intensifies the strength and hardness of Concrete.

You can impair a wooden trough with comparatively little use; but it takes a powerful explosive to put a Concrete water tank out of business.

## Which

is your choice—expense-producing Wood, or money-saving Concrete?

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|----------------|----------------|------------|
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| Dairies        | Horse Blocks   | Stalls     |
| Dipping Tanks  | Houses         | Steps      |
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