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THE POOR SCHOLAR.

HIS LEGENDS AND TALES.

BY WILLIAM BERNARD MAC CABE.

CHAPTER III.—THE MAGICIAN—A LEGEND.

It was midnight, and the miserable Francis was pacing up and down the dark dungeon in which he had been immured, dragging, at every step, a long chain which was fastened by a letter to his right foot. He had been foodless for more than a day; for, so delighted was he with his new white horse that he had never thought of descending from its back to take refreshment; and then followed the races, his triumphs, his disaster, and now his imprisonment for many hours! The pangs of hunger were gnawing him, when he heard the clank of chains outside the door, a heavy bar withdrawn, and he saw the gaoler enter his cell followed by a small animal, the size or nature of which he could not distinguish.

'Here,' said the gaoler, laying down a pitcher of water and a small loaf of bread—'here, foul magician, is the last refreshment you shall ever receive from the hands of a Christian. I have come, however, less for the purpose of supplying you with food, than to enjoy the pleasure of telling you, that in twelve hours from this time you shall be burning at the stake.'

So speaking the gaoler hurried out of the cell, drew the bolt, and again fastened up the door on the outside with heavy chains.

'My good man,' cried Francis, whilst the harsh sound of the clanking chains rattled in his ears, 'you have quitted the cell so hastily that you have left your dog behind you.'

'I am not the dog of the gaoler; I serve a more generous master,' spoke a voice behind Francis, and when he turned round he saw standing smiling before him the young man with the bushy red beard.

Francis' hair stood on end, his teeth chattered together, and his knees seemed to sink under his weight, at this strange voice and this unexpected appearance—his tongue with difficulty articulated the single word:—
'Heliodorus!'

'Yes,' replied the young man with the bushy, red beard—the same—your friend—Heliodorus, who so generously gave you his noble white horse, and made you be hailed as the winner in so many races.'

'Avast! fiend—tempter—deceiver—foul magician!' said Francis, turning away in horror from Heliodorus.

'Come, come, Francis, be more complimentary to your friend than to bestow upon him the same names which have so lately been applied to yourself. But please yourself, my friend. It cannot be so bad a thing to be a magician, when even the virtuous Francis is designated as a member of the fraternity.'

'And why am I so,' exclaimed Francis, bursting into tears, 'but that in a moment of weakness I listened to your proposal, and yielded, even without one evil intention on my part, to your temptations.'

'Well,' replied Heliodorus, 'in what respect are you worse than if you had resisted the generous and disinterested offer I made you?'

'Look at these chains,' answered Francis, bitterly; 'look at myself—a prisoner, starving, and doomed to die an ignominious death in a few hours, amid the execration of my fellow-creatures.'

'Oh,' said Heliodorus, 'if you have determined thus to put an end to your life, I admit, I can not prevent your doing so.'

'I have made up my mind to no such thing,' rejoined Francis. 'I must submit to what I can not avoid; I must bear a doom from which there is no escape.'

'There is a mode of escape,' whispered Heliodorus.

'From this prison—from these chains?' asked Francis, anxiously.

'Aye,' replied Heliodorus—from both—and that in one moment.'

'And how can that be done?' inquired Francis. 'Tell me but the way, and I shall forgive you all the injuries you have done me.'

'The way in the most simple in the world; it is,' said Heliodorus, 'to take service with the same master to whom I have bound myself.'

'I understand you,' answered Francis. 'Let me think—let me think for a few moments on the position in which I am placed.'

'Very well,' said Heliodorus, 'think as long as you like; but whilst you are thinking I shall be doing something to serve you.' As the magician spoke these words he advanced to the bench on which the gaoler had deposited the water and bread, and there muttering a few words over them, the water was changed into warm, rich, spiced wine, the times of which filled the cell with a rich odor, and the bread was metamorphosed into a roasted capon that was embedded in a jelly-like sauce, that would tempt the most fastidious appetite.

Francis, whilst this change was taking place, was again pacing his cell, his senses were thus assailed, his hunger and his thirst attacked by these luxurious means of pacifying both, he yet had the resolution to resist them, and turning away his head from them, lest his eyes even should take the pleasure in looking at them, he addressed Heliodorus in these words:

'I am aware that I am doomed to die by fire in the course of a few hours; that from that dreadful death there is no mode by which I can escape but one—that one you offer to me. If I avail myself of it, I can escape from the danger which otherwise is inevitable. Is it not so, Heliodorus?'

'You have stated the case precisely as it is. I am happy to perceive you view things exactly as they are; and that, therefore, you will come to the conclusion, which any man who had a regard for his life would arrive at,' answered Heliodorus.

'I know,' replied Francis, 'I have in this affair with you acted like a fool; and before I go further, I should like to know what you mean by serving the same master as yourself; I would like particularly to be informed how it is that you yourself have become a magician, and wherefore it is that you have beset a weak, poor, ignorant creature like myself—and these questions I now call upon you to answer truly—I call upon you to do, so in the name of God, of the blessed Pope Gregory, and of all the Saints.'

Heliodorus turned pale when he heard himself thus adjured; his red, bushy beard seemed to be changed for an instant into one mass of fire when the name of God and his Saints were pronounced, but the fire was extinguished as speedily even as it had been ignited. His countenance, however, retained the expression of agony, which would be shown by a man who had been subjected to an instantaneous but intensely severe pain.

'Thus appealed to, Francis,' he said, 'I must answer truly every question you put to me. I have assumed no fictitious form in appearing before you. I am, like yourself, a man. You have already recognized me as Heliodorus, the son of the noble and virtuous matron, Barbara, of Catania. In my youth I was ever vicious, and as I grew up to manhood I added to my other sins that of being ambitious. I desired to become Prefect of my native city; but I soon was taught, when I tried to attain that office, that I had made myself so notorious by my vices, that I would strut up a mutiny in Sicily, if, by bribery or other base means, I obtained the appointment from the Emperor. I saw that by human means the gratification of my desire was impossible; and therefore I determined to see if I could not be aided by the practitioners of magic. With this intention I repaired to a Jew doctor, who was notorious amongst all the wicked men in Catania as a necromancer, and I asked his advice. I readily obtained from him that which I sought for. He gave me a paper on which were written the words of the *Pater Noster*, and said—'Take this with you to the burial ground of the heathens; ascend the high pillar that stands in the midst of all the tombs; and when you have climbed to the top, tear this paper and scatter the fragments in the air. You will soon see a strange being before you, who will use various devices to tempt you to descend to him. Disregard them all; for if you yield to them he will tear you to pieces on the spot. He will ask you wherefore you have come here? Tell him that he knows that already. He will then ask you to consent to certain conditions; if you comply with them you can descend in safety, and he will be your friend forever afterwards.' Such were the words of the Jew doctor. I acted as he had directed; and when I had torn the paper, I saw rise from the earth the form of a huge dark man, whose skin was as black as ebony, and on whose head was a high crown of sparkling flames. I need not tell you of the various artifices he used to induce me to descend from the pillar;—but at last, finding all his efforts to be vain, he put to me the question I had wished for:—'Wherefore art thou here?' 'Thou knowest already,' I replied. 'Then,' said the demon, 'I will do my utmost to serve thee, on condition that thou wilt now, from thy heart and with thy lips abjure Christ. Do this, I will give thee one of my own favorite imps—the ready Gaspar—to wait on thee and to do thy bidding.' I did as he desired—I abjured Christ.'

'Oh God!' exclaimed Francis, unable to restrain his feelings of horror and terror.

'Again the bushy, red beard of Heliodorus flamed up as with a furious fire, and again it resumed its natural appearance.

'I beseech you,' said Heliodorus, 'not to mention that name again; it causes to me the most dreadful torture. But to continue. I descended from the pillar; I kissed the right hand of the demon as my lord and master; and he bestowed upon me, as my constant attendant, Gaspar. See how I cherish him.'

As the magician spoke these words he opened his vest, and there, on the very centre of his

chest, and buried in the flesh, as if it had formed for itself a nest there, Francis perceived a round and minute globe of ever flickering flame, not larger than the top of a man's finger. It burned on incessantly; and, as if sportively, sending forth now and again a long dart of fire which reddened with its heat the skin that covered the heart of Heliodorus.

'It pains,' said the magician—it pains very much, but not so intensely nor so constantly as my conscience and my remorse, if I were to consent to part with it.'

'And is there no mode by which that fire can be extinguished?' asked Francis, his feelings of pity overcoming both his surprise and horror.

'There is but one water in the world could put out that flame,' replied Heliodorus: 'it is the water of repentance; the bitter tears of a sinner sorrowing for his offence, and resolved to live virtuously for the future.'

'And oh! why not repent?' asked Francis.

'The remedy would be worse than the disease,' said the magician. 'What! give up the pleasures of this life to be, as you are doomed to be, burned at the stake. No—no! But come, Gaspar, show what it is to have a servant such as you to command; come, come—be active.'

The spark of blue flame dashed from the breast of Heliodorus to the bench on which the food of Francis lay, and no sooner did it alight, than it started up in the form of a man, but still no more than an inch in height, and still retaining seemingly, the substance of the flame.

'Break the chains of Francis,' said Heliodorus. The minute imp ran through the links of the heavy chain. As it touched them they melted as if they were wax, and fell in fragments to the earth.

'With the same quickness with which Gaspar has broken your chains he could release you from prison: Wherefore, then, not accept the offer I have made you, and be again free. Gaspar, vanish.'

The imp disappeared as the word was spoken, and Heliodorus placed his hand at his breast as if to indicate that the imp had returned to its resting place.

'I have asked you two questions,' said Francis. 'One of these you have answered; but to the other you have as yet given no reply: Wherefore have you placed temptations and trials in the way of one so humble as myself?'

'It is a question,' said Heliodorus, 'which I am obliged to answer with perfect truth. It is connected with my own fate and fortune, and future success. For a time after I had taken service with the demon, I was successful in all my undertakings. I could indulge in every sin I wished; and in every vice I desired. Over all who committed sin I had power; it is only the sinless that could ever be safe from my direct attacks. If an enemy displeased me, I could easily get rid of him by poisons, so cunningly contrived, that his death appeared to be natural; and then I had boundless wealth at my command. Such was my situation when your master was appointed Bishop of Catania. His virtues, his charities, his care of the poor, his tenderness towards orphans and widows, his prayers, his fastings, his religious exercises are winning souls to heaven, are sanctifying every portion of the city of Catania; and I find that, wherever he has been, I am without power. Either he or I must quit Catania. There is not the slightest chance of my ever being a Prefect, if he should remain here as a Bishop. I cannot make a direct attack upon him because he is sinless, and, therefore impervious to my assaults; but I may attack him indirectly; that is, through the weaknesses, the follies, or the vices of those for whom he has a human affection. Thus, I have twice distracted his sermons—twice prevented him from bringing them to a conclusion, by means of the idle curiosity of his congregation; and thus, too, I have been able to attack him through your boyish vanity as an equestrian. If I can persuade you to become a magician, it may disgust him with the world—induce him to abandon his bishopric, and thus leave Catania free to me to exercise my art, and gain by it that high and distinguished office that I covet.'

'And so,' remarked Francis, 'to obtain the Prefectship of Catania for yourself, you would sacrifice my soul.'

'I have sacrificed my own,' said Heliodorus—'should I care more for you than for myself?'

'But wherefore intermeddle with Bishop Leo. He knows nought of you—has never injured you.'

'Fool! every pious act he performs is an injury to me; every man he converts from vice to virtue is a soldier taken from my ranks, and changed into a foe. Day by day he is lessening the number of my adherents; and, hour by hour he is pushing me out of every place in Catania, in which I was entrenched as in a fortress. There is not a spot on which he sprinkles holy water that is not taken away from me; for there my charms no longer can work. Before he came to Catania I considered myself as omnipo-

tent; whereas now, I am almost a fugitive; for wherever he has been my incantations can be of no avail. And what is the result? That I, who but a short time ago was esteemed as a wonder-worker, am now denounced as a cheat. Formerly men fancied I bestowed upon them gold, and jewels and magnificent ornaments; but when Leo looks upon what these, my dupes, imagined were precious gifts, his touch, the sign of the cross, a prayer, exhibits them as they really are—pieces of rotten wood, clay, pebbles, sea-shells—things either disgusting, contemptible, or valueless. Thus it is that Bishop Leo has injured me—nay, more, for the powerful adjuration that you used, and the name with which you have appealed, compels me to tell you the truth—compels me in my own despite to tell it all to you; and therefore I must declare, that though he knows it not, I am animated with a mortal hatred towards him; for it is by him alone, and through his means alone, that I can be deprived eventually of life. There is no chain, no fetter, no gyve of any kind that mortal man can fabricate, sufficiently strong to bind my limbs as a prisoner. I can be held and tied down as weak and helpless as an infant by one thing alone, and that is by the stole of your master, the pious Leo.'

'Indeed!' said Francis pondering on the fact thus disclosed by Heliodorus.

'Aye!' continued Heliodorus, 'and therefore do I strive to drive him out of Catania. My life, my ambition alike depend upon his defeat. Already he has placed me in peril; already, through his means, I have been placed in presence of the emperor, and accused of the crime of sorcery.'

'I knew not that,' observed Francis. I never heard of the circumstance before.'

'I have already told you that my cheats have been discovered by the pious exercises of Leo,' continued Heliodorus. 'Without knowing my name, he has pointed one family where my hand must have administered poison; in another, that I have abstracted its wealth, and replaced it by some trumpery, the worthlessness of which he exhibited; in another, that I had corrupted the minds of the young; in a fourth that I was contaminating all the relations of life by my words and my example. Upon these charges I was arrested, and I permitted myself to be carried from Catania to Constantinople. Once out of the jurisdiction of Leo, my omnipotence was restored to me, and when brought into the presence of the emperor I derided his threats, and scoffed at his declaration that he would slay me. Give me,' I said, 'but some water to drink, and then you may do with me what you please.' They brought into the presence of the emperor a large cask filled with water. I saw it—bounded into it, and said to the emperor—'If your Majesty wishes to slay me, you must seek for me in Catania.'

'With these words I plunged into the water, and vanished from their sight. My faithful Gaspar rendered me invisible to their view. He can do the same for you if you will become, like me, the servant of the same master. What say you, Francis?'

'Let me see,' answered Francis, 'which is the more powerful of the two—the master that I serve, or that to which you have given your allegiance.'

'The master you serve leaves you to be burned at the stake, and provides you meanwhile with but stale bread and cold water to satisfy the cravings of nature. The master I serve will preserve you from the prison and the stake, and supplies you with rich viands and with costly wine. But come, taste of Gaspar's cooking; I see you are almost fainting with hunger.'

'I am—I am,' said Francis, in a low voice, and now weakened with hunger; 'but still, starving as I am, I must now, as I have ever done, bless myself before I eat.'

And speaking these words he made the sign of the cross on his forehead, and as he did so, that which had seemed to be capon changed into a piece of foul carrion, and the pitcher of wine was changed into rancid water, in which earth-worms and slugs struggled as if in deadly contention with each other.

'Better to die of hunger than taste of such food as that,' said Francis, pointing to those loathsome objects.

'Curses on your mummery and your superstition!' exclaimed Heliodorus; 'no arts of the demon can withstand them. I leave you, miserable slave of the priests; to die perishing with hunger at the burning stake.'

With these words Heliodorus vanished; but before Francis was conscious that he was alone, he had thus replied:

'And if I do so die, it will be but fitting punishment for my folly, in having listened to you. God grant that heaven may accept it as a sufficient penance for my sins.'

CHAPTER IV.—RETRIBUTION.

The faith, the humility, and the sincere penitence of Francis were not unrewarded; for no sooner had Bishop Leo heard of his arrest, which

was not told to him until the following morning, than he visited the prison in which Francis was confined. There his servant made a sincere confession to him of all that had passed between himself and Heliodorus, and thus was Leo apprised, that the only chance of restoring Catania to perfect virtue was by ridding it of a magician, who had deroted himself body and soul to the service of Satan.

In accordance with the request of Leo, the Prefect directed the instant liberation of Francis, and at the same time sent four of his soldiers to the house of Heliodorus to arrest him.

The orders of the prefect were in both instances punctually executed. Francis was set free, and the soldiers were on their way from the mansion of Heliodorus with its master as their captive.

Heliodorus inquired who was his accuser before the tribunal of the prefect, and when he was informed that it was the bishop Leo, he trembled with fear.

'Then it is in accordance with the wishes of Leo, that I am now your prisoner,' said Heliodorus to the soldiers.

'It is,' answered the soldier, 'and his charge against you is, that you are a magician.'

'Alas!' thought Heliodorus, 'I am now helpless, unless I can practice upon the weakness of these men, and induce them to fail in their duty.' He turned then boldly round to the soldiers, and said, 'I wish to escape from you.'

'Then we shall take care you do not do so,' cried all the soldiers with one voice, and each at the same time seizing hold of him.

'Yes,' continued Heliodorus, laughing in the faces of the soldiers, 'I tell you plainly what I wish, because I intend that you should consent to my escape.'

'Consent to your escape?' cried the leader of the soldiers. 'Is it that the centurion should break our backs with the blows of his vine sapling; or that the tribune should touch us with his stick, and our fellow soldiers knock us on the head like so many dogs, and despatch us with stones and clubs. Let us escape!'

'It is as much as our own lives are worth.' 'Not at all,' said Heliodorus, 'unless you are all such pious youths that you are afraid to tell a lie; and so very rich that you will refuse to receive a pound of solid gold a man.'

The soldiers looked at each other when this tempting offer was made to them.

'A pound of gold a man!' they all cried with one voice, and their eyes glistened with cupidity.

'Aye—a pound of solid gold each. Mind you—I do not promise you that which I am not prepared to give you this very instant; for I have the gold buried close by where I stand.—You have to promise me that you will tell a lie about my escape, and in a minute afterwards the gold shall be in your possession.'

The men whispered together for a few minutes and their leader then replied, 'We consent to tell the lie on condition you give us the gold this instant.'

'Very well,' said Heliodorus, 'dig with your swords in the earth—on the very spot where I now stand, and you will there find the gold. I waited until we should get thus far before I asked you to let me escape.'

The soldier drew his sword; but scarcely had he moved the earth with its point when the yellow glittering metal was seen sparkling beneath the surface; and at the same moment the other soldiers dug their swords into the earth, and each unloosed a mass of gold which he eagerly clutched up in his hand.

'Fly now wherever you choose,' said the soldiers all together.

'But what lie shall we invent?' asked their leader.

'All I desired was your consent to tell a falsehood, and to let me escape. Having done so—you may repeat what you now witness; it will not be contrary to the fact; but still it will not be the real reason why I have escaped from your hands.'

As Heliodorus spoke this—he stamped his foot—and the wondrous horse 'Cæsar,' such as it had appeared in all its beauty to Francis, bounded into the road, and Heliodorus jumping upon its back, both horse and rider vanished from the sight of the soldiers.

It was with the tale that Heliodorus had, by means of a magically fabricated steed, effected his escape from their custody, that the soldiers appeared before the prefect and Bishop Leo.

'I do not believe in any such magic horse,' said the Prefect.

'But I do,' observed the bishop, 'although I have not seen him, and your eyes have looked upon him.' Do you so soon forget the white horse with which Francis won so many prizes in your presence?'

'Ah! it is true,' said the Prefect. 'I forgot that. Go, soldiers. You cannot be censured, because you could not catch a magician when so mounted.'

'Go, soldiers,' said the bishop in a low voice