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FREEMEN.

Not as the prisoner toils
In slow unspeaking silence at his task,
But freemen at our work;
We know the pile we rear and fashion high
And send the word between the hammer blows
KATHARINE MELICK.

The Stroke of Uhard.

It was in the bad time when Heward had just died and left everything unsettled. The years before this had flown fast and in the country about there was no fighting as there has been ever since. Only some fretted in their castles and wished those good times over.

When he died, these drank themselves drunk at the news and piled their swords high on the table to be polished and threw their armor clanging on the floor to be fresh scoured. Even their horses, it is told about, neighed at it, but of this last I cannot speak with certainty.

Whether my master took it ill or well I cannot say for he is a silent man and speaks not over much. When the story of the death came to his ears he said nothing, although the muscles grew tighter on his face. I saw this the whole length of the hall; for I sat with the rest of those who wore the collar.

The week that followed was a strange one. The air seemed filled with something oppressive. I could not tell what it was, for I was young—only fourteen—and had worn the iron collar but a year. My father gave no answer to my questions, and, like all the rest, seemed to be waiting for something.

Master and his captains talked much together in low tones, and at every noise in the court or on the road his men would stop and listen and we would listen too.

Often times, I would see their fingers slip round the handles of their swords and grasp them tight and yet they knew it not; that much I could tell from the look on their faces. All this made me shiver and look around over my back.

It was on the morning that father and I had gone into the wood to cut logs that they might dry for the winter fire. The air was frosty and my collar burned cold on my neck, and it bothered me when I swung my ax. I had not yet grown used to it, though father said I would soon; and I could not help thinking of those who did not wear them and who did not have to chop.

Just before we finished the second tree, father broke his ax and must go to the castle and make a new handle for it. "I will finish before he comes back," I thought, and thought also of his praise. I worked until the collar became wet and warm. I struck harder and deeper than at any time that morning and at last the tree fell crashing down.

Not knowing which tree must next come down, I seated myself behind a clump of bushes and wiped the sweat from my collar, for I did not want it to freeze there and make my neck sore.

I had been sitting beneath the bushes a few moments when I heard off among the trees, voices. I did not know whom it might be so I drew down beneath the bushes to hide as much of myself as possible.

The persons stopped at the other side of the clump and went on with their talk. I peered through the dead leaves and saw my master and two other men. I had never seen either of them, but at the