

Amusing and Edifying Stories

From Aurbacher's *Ein Volksbüchlein* (Volume I), ed. Joseph Sarreiter (Leipzig: Reclam, 1878). The original appeared in 1827, 1832, & 1835 (a new, enlarged and improved edition). The order below is mine, with the best tales appearing first.

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King Peasant

A king, who had no heirs of the body, ordained in his will that his successor to the realm should be that man who first entered the city-gate after the event of his demise. Chance would have it that this was a simple countryman, who was visiting the city on business. The people at once surrounded and seized him, and jubilantly took him to the palace. And the man had no idea what this was all about. Once there, he was taken into a state-chamber and dressed in sumptuous clothes, and engirded with a sword, and adorned with sceptre and crown. That pleased him. After that, he was escorted, to the bray of trumpets and clang of kettle-drums, into a richly decorated great hall, and he was placed on the throne, and all those who stood around him reverently paid homage to him as their king and master. That pleased him yet more. Finally, he was brought into the dining-room, where the table was laid in the most lavish manner with every kind of dish and drink to be found. That pleased him most of all. And so he held court like a king, and ate and drank like a king, and slept at last in a lovely large apartment like a king.

But the following day, things took on another aspect: he was now expected to officiate as a king. And early in the morning, before he had woken up, the Kingdom's civil servants were standing in the antechamber and had themselves announced: If it pleased His Majesty, he might do them the favour of hearing their requests and reports. Then the first one revealed many defects in the administration of the state, and submitted very verbose plans for the improvement of the same in its various branches; the second one described the bad condition of the finances, and showed the necessity

of augmenting the state's revenues without imposing new burdens on the subjects; the third one brought forward grievances and requests and complaints, and nothing but complaints, from subjects who considered themselves to be oppressed by burdens, injured in their rights, and impeded in their livelihoods. And so there came one after the other, with this and that, and every one wanted to have a decision and a signature from His Majesty. King Peasant did his utmost, having, as he did, a good understanding, and an even better will; but everything that he had to hear and do there was simply too much for him, and he wished he could be back in his little room where nobody encumbered him. At midday, the food was no longer quite to his taste, in spite of there being all kinds of boiled and roast meats, and all the more so because he had to receive, before and after table, the respects of noblemen and other courtiers, whose society seemed to him to be certainly very splendid, but also very boring. And he yearned once more to be back at his paltry table, with the black bread that he was at least accustomed to eat in rest and peace. For the afternoon, there was arranged a great military parade of those who were to directly go to war against a haughty and powerful neighbour; and King Peasant, as he rode through the ranks of soldiers, reflected on the death and loss of so many young, vigorous men, and the imminent misery that would descend upon thousands of people, and that he, the king, would take on his shoulders the responsibility for the blood that was to be spilled and for all the sorrow that would be spread throughout the land. And in the evening he lay down with a heart full of cares, and he rolled around in his bed, agitated and tormented, and he could not sleep. Oh, how he wished to be back there

in his quiet little chamber, where it was permitted him, though his bed was hard, to slumber the nights away in refreshing rest!

And his decision was made. At break of day the next morning he had his peasant's clothes brought before his bed, which he put on at once; and when the officials had themselves announced, he walked in among them and said: "May he be king who wants to; I simply don't. As a countryman, I have only my own burdens to bear; as king, I'm supposed to bear the burdens of the entire population. And so may he be king, who wants to!" with these words, he left the palace, and after that time he was never seen in the city again.

This happened in distant lands and in time out of mind. But in our lands and in our age, things are certainly different: almost everyone wants to rule, and nobody wants to obey.

The Animals and Man

A heathen fable relates: After Jupiter, the highest god, had created the animals and, last of all, Man, the ass came before his throne and asked him: How long did he have to live, and what did he have to do? To which Jupiter replied: "Your life will last thirty years, and what you will have to do is to carry burdens, suffer hunger and thirst, and, in the event of your being idle, receive blows on top of everything." The ass heaved a deep sigh and said: "Oh, righteous god! if it has been decided that I must live so wretched a life, then at least shorten my years by twenty to ten." Jupiter granted him this, and the ass left that place, feeling contented.

Hereupon the dog appeared and asked likewise how long he had to

live and what he had to do. Jupiter replied: "Your life will last thirty years, and what you will have to do is to guard man and his possessions day and night and frighten thieves away with growls, barks, and bites." This did not please the dog, who would have liked to enjoy his freedom, and he asked of Jupiter that, if he was but born to slavery, his years might be shortened to ten. Jupiter granted his request, and the dog departed, feeling grateful.

After him the monkey appeared, who asked likewise how long he had to live and what he had to do. To whom Jupiter replied: "Your life will last thirty years, and what you will have to do is to serve as a spectacle to men and an object of ridicule to children, on account of your misshapen form." The monkey was enraged at this, and he said: "If I am to be of no use for anything more than that in this world, then at least shorten my years to ten." And this was promised him.

Last of all, Man appeared before Jupiter's throne, and he asked the god: How long did he have to live? Jupiter replied: "Your life will last thirty years." "How," asked the man, "only thirty years? Is this short lifespan worthy of the most complete being to have come forth from your hand?" And Jupiter said: "Very well, then I shall add to you the twenty years I have taken from the ass, and the twenty from the dog, and the twenty from the monkey. But now, what you will do and what you will suffer shall be as follows: From your thirtieth year to your fiftieth, you shall bear burdens and sweat, and go without, and endure, like the ass; and from your fiftieth to your seventieth year, you shall anxiously guard your person and your possessions, like the dog, growling and grumbling; and finally, for the further twenty years, up to your ninetieth, you shall serve as nothing more

than an object of ridicule for children, like the monkey.”

And so did it come to pass, tells the pagan fable; and we experience this every day in people who, like to beasts, consider and seek only the things of this world.

Bite Away!

A woodcutter had a habit of saying, with puffs and pants, at every stroke he made: “Bite away!” This was heard one day by the Count in whose forest he worked; and the lord called on him to explain why he always said, “Bite away!” The woodcutter answered: “By your leave, gracious lord! If Adam hadn’t bitten into the apple, we poor people would be in a better way, and I wouldn’t have to earn my little black bread in the sweat of my brow as I alas! have to do. And for that, I’m rightly angry with the old sinner, and say with indignation: Bite away!”

When the Count, who was an affable man, had heard these words, he said to the woodcutter: “If you had been in Adam’s place, you would without doubt have done just the same.” “May Heaven punish me if I could even think of doing such a thing!” said the woodcutter. “To have plenty, all over the large, magnificent garden, and to only have to say: ‘Tongue, take your pick!’ Isn’t that so, lord? It would never ever occur to me to taste of the Forbidden Fruit.” “Well,” said the Count, “as you are such a wise, upright man, I shall prepare a better destiny for you, one as good as you could possibly wish for. Come with me, and bring your wife; from now on I shall treat you in my castle in such a way that you could not have it better in Paradise.”

And that is what happened. The woodcutter and his wife were dressed in new clothes of the most sumptuous kind; they were moved in to beautifully decorated large apartments where they could sleep, eat, and live in comfort; and at noon, specially appointed servants placed one – two – three – four – five – six dishes before them, full of the finest and most delicious foods. Lastly, when they had long been satiated, a servant brought a seventh, of pure silver, with beautiful golden embellishments, and covered with a lid. The servant placed this on the table like the others, but said: “It is the lord’s strictest command that you must not open this, let alone taste of it.” The husband said: They had had enough anyway, he should take it away now. But the wife wanted to regard it a little more closely, and she could not admire the ornamentation too much; however, she had no desire apart from this, and the dish was carried away untouched. At noon the following day, the covered dish of silver was again brought last by the servant and left on the table. The wife regarded it with even greater pleasure than on the previous day, and the husband also seemed to take satisfaction in the exquisitely beautiful form of the vessel. “Strange!” said the wife, “what could the Count’s intention with this be? Simply for us to take delight in looking at it, that surely can’t be it. For in that case, wouldn’t we be allowed to look inside, where it’s undoubtedly much more beautiful than on the outside?” “Leave be with prattling,” said the husband; “be it whatever it be, don’t you touch it.” And with these words he left the table and lay down on the bolster. The dish was again taken away untouched.

With all this splendour, it was no surprise that the woodcutter forgot about his work, and Adam, and the: Bite away! And he was perfectly

content with God and his gracious lord. But the wife could get no sleep for almost the whole of the following night. The dish kept going around in her head, and she dreamed there was something – God knows what – astonishingly gorgeous inside: it seemed to her that it was inlaid with pure gold and valuable gems, and in between them there sparkled a large, pure crystal, a mirror from which all the future shone into her soul. Therefore, when the forbidden dish came to the table again the next midday, she could no longer conceal her craving. She first told her husband her dream, and described to him the treasures she had seen. Then she mentioned that it wouldn't cost anything to have a look, and there was no danger in it as nobody would observe them. Then she said that nothing would be touched or taken; she only wanted to look into the crystal and read the future in it. The man at first shook his head and said: No. But when she began again and would not stop begging and pleading: to lift the lid only a little to at last see what was inside; then, after he had looked all around to check that no one was observing them, he yielded to her, saying: "In the Devil's name! Then look, that I may have peace." She raised the lid a little, and behold – a little mouse leapt out and away, and scurried into the nearest hole. They looked at each other aghast; and while they sat there silent and still, as if lifeless, the Count approached and asked them: What was wrong? "Nothing!" the wife said, trembling. The lord, clearly perceiving what had happened, lifted the lid, then said: "So you have not heeded my prohibition?" "It was my wife!" the husband said angrily. "Your wife," replied the lord, "is an Eve, and you an Adam. Longing has led you, like the serpent our first parents, into temptation, which you were not able to resist."

Therefore, you shall now atone like them, and once again eat your bread in the sweat of your brow.” And so he and she had to take off their sumptuous clothes and leave the beautiful apartments at once, and return to their hut and to work. From that time, the woodcutter was never again angry with Adam, the old sinner, and for the rest of his days he never again said: “Bite away!”

Jack Awl (Hans Pfriem)

Jack Awl, the carter, had this bad habit about him, that he lambasted everything about other people, and nobody could do anything right in his eyes. When he drove down the road and met a cart, he would invariably stop and inspect the horses, the vehicle, the man, and he always found fault with something: now the horses were harnessed too tight, now the cart did not seem to him to be well loaded; and he shook his head, or said it out loud, so that the other man could clearly mark or hear the censure. He behaved in this way in all matters, even in those that did not pertain to his trade; and the innkeepers at whose inns he stopped off had a hard time of it with him, and they often said: “Even an angel in Heaven couldn’t do anything right for Jack Awl.”

Now at one time, he dreamt that he had died. He comes before the Door of Heaven and St. Peter lets him in, but with the admonition to keep silent at everything and not lambast or censure anything there, whatever he might see. Jack Awl promises this. Now when he found himself there in Heaven among the blessed angels and saints, and looked before him, he saw two angels go past carrying a beam crossways, so they kept bumping

into things with it. Jack Awl was quite of a will to criticise; but then he had second thoughts. "As long as they get through, at the end of the day it's all one whether they carry the beam this way or that."

A while later, when he looked up again, he observed two angels drawing water from a well with a perforated tub. Jack Awl thought to himself, mindful of the warning: "Hmm! Whoever happens to have nothing better to do may do something of that sort, if it gives him pleasure."

Soon afterwards, when he looked around, he perceived a cart that had got stuck in a deep hole; and an angel came up and harnessed two horses to the front and two to the back. When Jack Awl saw this, he lost all self-control and said: "Oaf! What do you think you're doing?" And he was about to set the angel to rights. But another one had seized him and now drilled him out through the Door of Heaven. Outside the door, Jack Awl looked in once more to see what had become of the cart. And behold! the cart was flying through the air, borne by four winged horses. Herewith Jack Awl awoke.

And now, what do you think, dear listeners, is to be learned from the story of Jack Awl?

The Father's Testament

A father had three depraved sons. The first one was a philanderer, the second a gambler, the third a boozier. Now when he was on the point of death, he devised in his testament that: the one of them who was found to be the most depraved was to be disinherited by the others. So a great contention arose among them, and every one made excuses for himself,

and none of them was willing to relinquish the least part of the inheritance to which he was, anyway, entitled. Finally, as they saw that their dispute was never going to have an end, they decided to entrust the judgement to a man who was known in the city to be a wise and irreproachable arbitrator. This man, having listened to their exposition of the matter, bluntly declared: He did not know which vice was greater, more sinful before God, and more ruinous to a man's body and soul, whether philandering, or infatuation for gambling, or drunkenness. And he now sought to represent to every one of them what was ignominious and injurious in his doings and deeds. The philanderer and the gambler soon accepted what he told them, and in the end they were able to offer nothing by way of excuse but their youth and their levity. Only the boozier tried to make all kinds of objections, and he wrapped a cloak around his vice to give it an entirely innocent appearance. Then the judge spoke, saying to him: "I shall tell you a story which illuminates what a truly terrible vice drunkenness is. There lived at one time a man who had left his house and home and gone into the wilderness to serve God there in poverty, through work and prayer. And he very soon attained to such holiness in his heart and his life that he was no longer conscious of having any impure emotion or any sinful thought. However, the old enemy, who never rests, crept at last into his heart, which was, admittedly, not free from pride and conceit. He appeared to him in the raiment of an Angel of Light, and said: "You think yourself high in God's grace, but you do not realise how deep you are, even deeper than those whose sins you are avoiding. Don't you know that he who falls into a sin and rises again is more pleasing before God than ninety and nine of the

Righteous? So if you wish to acquire the greatest good, you must commit a heinous sin. I'll name you three of them which carry weight: manslaughter, theft, and drunkenness." The devout man, when he heard this, was appalled at the proposal, and dismissed it from his thoughts, as much as he was able to. But from that time on, he felt uneasy, and he could not master the feeling; for the longing thought of attaining to the highest Grace through sin pricked his heart like a tormenting thorn.

Now it happened one day, in the dark of night, while it rained and blew a storm outside, that a traveller came to the lonely cell and asked for shelter. It was a merchant who had lost his way in the forest and could not go any further on his exhausted horse. The hermit opened, and the stranger came into the room with his bag and baggage after taking care of his horse. Now while the two of them sat opposite each other, the merchant brought out a few bottles of good old wine and invited the hermit to partake of the exquisite refreshment. The forest-hermit refused this at first; but when the merchant pressed him further, he accepted a tipples, and it was very much to his liking. The merchant now told stories of his travels and the adventures he had undergone, and every now and then he would pour more wine for the hermit, who did not complain. He gradually became aware, however, that the wine was going to his head, and he wanted to withdraw while the time was right. But he took so much pleasure in the stories and comic tales of his guest that he was unable to part from his company. And as the merchant kept on urging him to drink to his health, as a good host should, then he remembered that idea and advice to tempt God through an evil deed, and he thought to himself: is being tipsy not the

most innocent of all trespasses? And he drank and drank, until he almost lost his senses. Then he retired and went to bed. But he could not sleep. The spirits in the wine agitated all of his spirits. The pleasures of the world appeared before his eyes, and sensual desires, which had been sleeping up to that time, now awoke in his heart. And he was seized with an inexpressible disgust for his life in the wilderness, removed from the world and people, loveless and joyless; and he fixed on the resolve to leave that place with the merchant on the following day and return to human society. But now, while he was sorrowfully reflecting on his poverty and his inaptitude to get on in the world, an idea occurred to him which would have filled him with horror at any other time, but which now filled him with hope and joy. And he executed it on the spot; for he slew the man and stole his money and possessions. Thus did a drunkard become both a robber and a murderer at one and the same time.

“You see now,” said the judge, turning to the youth again, “how serious the vice of drunkenness is, as it is the beginning and the cause of all other vices, and of the worst of them.” The young man stood there abashed, and he expected to hear, at any moment, the severe judgement that would disinherit him as the most depraved. Then the judge spoke again, saying, “And so all three of you are equally condemnable, and none of you has reason to place himself above the others. But now listen to what, as I believe, your father meant by this last will of his. In all probability he intended nothing else by it but that each of you would reproach, threaten, and punish the others, and every one of you would do some soul-searching so as not to incur the threatened punishment. And now fulfil this last

testament to his love and foresight, and every one of you try to outdo the others in a laudable manner of life before God and man.” With these words he dismissed the three brothers, and every one of them now took great care not to fall into the old evil ways, from fear the two others would disinherit him. And so the first step towards their improvement was taken; as had been the father’s intention in his testament.

A Desperate Cure

An honest, worthy man had a son who was a rogue, which is no rare occurrence in the history of the world. Now when he was coming to the end of his days, he had the son summoned before his bed one last time, and he said to him: “Do not expect that I shall direct vain words at you, neither in kindness, nor in anger. I spared neither when the time was right; but it has all been to no purpose. I foresee the course and culmination of your life. You will squander and fritter away all of my money and movables in a short while, and at last you will be left with nothing but poverty and disgrace. But then only two ways will stand open to you: either to rob or to despair; and the end will be that you are hanged or you hang yourself. In the first case, the authorities will take care of everything; in the second case – look, dear son! – I have taken care of everything. In the back chamber up above, where the lumber is kept, I have, in these last few days, to save you trouble and money, fastened a rope to a nail, which will hold. You may then hang yourself on this; nobody will see you there, and nobody will care two hoots for your dying. So reflect on your father’s solicitude and fulfil his last will.” After these words, the father died. The son did what the father had said he

would. He squandered and frittered away all his money and possessions in a short while, and at last he was left with nothing but poverty and disgrace. And when he now considered what was to be done next, then he held it to be for the best that he hang himself, as had been his father's will. So he hurried up to the dark chamber and placed the rope around his neck. But in the moment when he pulled – behold! the trap-door in the ceiling fell open, and gold and silver coins trickled over him. Thus had the good man arranged it, and he was not disappointed in his hope. The son reflected on his father's sollicitude and now fulfilled his real last will.

Note: such a desperation cure is a very rare occurrence in the history of the world.

That's a Lie!

The neighbours were sitting together in the inn one Sunday evening, and the blacksmith, who had taken part in the recent wars, was expatiating to them on his campaigns, and they listened to him with pleasure, even though he lied like a trooper at times; for this was something new to their ears. Among other things, he related to them an anecdote from the campaign in Russia. "One day," he said, "I had to ride far afield to see where the enemy sentries were posted. It had snowed tremendously, and I often fell in so deep that I could only just see my horse's ears peeking out of the snow. Eventually I come to a dark cave. I couldn't avoid it to the right, or to the left; I had to go in. I ride on into the darkness – one, two, I ride six hours. Now it becomes light again. I come out, and now I see that I'd ridden into a river which doesn't have a drop of water any longer. The frost had

raised the water into the air, and it had frozen together over me into a thick ceiling of ice.” – “That’s a lie!” all the neighbours cried, except for the mayor.

“Well,” he said, “I wouldn’t be quite so quick to take it for a lie, because a tale often sounds like a lie but actually isn’t one.” – “Give an example, Old One!” the peasants cried. “I’ll do that. You all know the communal oven down in the village, don’t you? It will be five years now since bread was last baked in it, because the back of it is rather falling apart. It’s a crying shame the community doesn’t have it restored to working order. When I was a little lad, we would play hide-and-seek in the oven house. Five years, say I, it is since it was last heated. Yesterday, I’m about to walk past it, I stop, and then I fall into melancholy thoughts about how all human things and ovens crumble into dust. I don’t know why, but while thinking, I reach into the mouth of the oven, and – you can believe it or not – I get a burning feeling in my fingers.” – “That’s a lie!” cry all of the neighbours, except for the schoolmaster.

“Well, well, I think I could tell you a similar tale from my practice,” said the barber. “A sick woman had fallen into the hands of ignorant charlatans who gave her loads of theriac and other trash. The woman became sicker and sicker, and decided not to take another drop. For five years, just as long as the oven was not heated, she kept her word, and no medicine touched her tongue during this time. But as she became more and more ill, she finally called for me. I immediately realised what the rub was. First, the false remedies must all come back out, I thought, and I gave her a strong emetic powder. What happens? The woman vomits terribly, and expels the theriac and the other trash from her body, and from that hour

on she becomes vigorous and healthy.” – “That’s a lie, that’s a lie!” cried all the neighbours, together with the mayor and the schoolmaster.

Listen, Neighbour Barber, said the schoolmaster, “we’re used to your boasts of being a cut above others, so just sit yourself down by the man who rode onwards under the ice for six hours. But you, mayor, what’s the story with your oven? You said: Your tale would sound like a lie but actually wasn’t one. Did you really burn your fingers, after five years?” “As I told you; I really burnt my fingers. Inside the oven, there had grown – stinging-nettles.”

Caspar the Coachman, or: Easy come, Easy go

Caspar, the coachman, entered the room of his master, the Count, one morning and said: He begged His Lordship for a year’s leave. To the Count’s question: Why and whither? Caspar answered: “Your Lordship should know that I’ve won 20,000 guilders in the lottery; and so the fancy has taken me to play the great lord for once; and I’ll buy myself a coach first of all, with a couple of black horses, and hire a coachman to serve me and the steeds, and then journey to Vienna in Austria, where I’ll live life to the full for as long as my purse lets me. And when it’s over and done with, then I’ll come back and beg Your Lordship that Your Lordship will accept and receive me back in your service.” The Count shook his head in amazement, and he tried to talk him out of his foolish resolve and move him to adopt the following course of action: He should rather invest the money at interest, and make his life more comfortable, and provide for his old age. But Caspar held firm to his resolve, and he said: He had sat on the boxseat quite long

enough; he just wanted to find out how it felt to sit inside the coach. And His Lordship should not take it amiss. The Count, seeing that Caspar was not to be persuaded, gave him leave, and as he knew him to be an honest sort, and had a lot of time for him besides, he graciously added: When he came back after some years, he would receive him back in his service.

So, a few days later, Caspar the Coachman set off in his own equipage towards Vienna. When he arrived there, he lodged at one of the most exclusive inns, where only Counts and Barons and rich merchants stay. Then he heard nothing but: “What does Your Lordship demand?” “Is there anything I can do for Your Lordship?” “At Your Lordship’s command!” And so Caspar came to truly believe that he was a well-to-do gentleman of rank, and he ate and drank and lived like a gentleman of rank. But the servants in the house soon realised whom they were dealing with, and they shuffled their cards accordingly. His Lordship, they said, would wish, they should think, to give parties, receive company, and live on a grand footing. Caspar, finding himself flattered, did not need to hear this twice; and now twenty people ate and drank and lived lives of plenty, like gentlemen of rank, at his expense. Before half a year had elapsed, half of the money he had won had been wasted in prodigal living, riches gone to rack. In any case, he had more or less sickened of the high life, and he now began to reflect on himself and his situation, and decided to retrench a little, that he might still, at the end of a year, have a small sum remaining for his old age. But the licentious companions already had him so tightly enmeshed in their net that he could not escape them so easily; and as he would not let himself be fleeced any longer, they devised other ways of plucking his feathers. One

day, His Lordship was asked: He might deliver this one and that one from deep distress by lending money; which His Lordship did indeed do in the kindness of his heart. Another time, His Lordship happened to be the victim of theft; and as His Lordship took this very badly, and made a great fuss, and even indicated a servant as the thief, he was threatened with an action for defamation, which he escaped only by means of a voluntary gift of a not inconsiderable sum. And the reckonings themselves became bigger, accordingly as his consumption of food and drink and his appetite became smaller. Finally, at the end of the eleventh month, when he saw that his money was close to exhaustion, he decided to leave Vienna and return to his home with the small remains of his fortune, at a leisurely pace and by roundabout ways. But on the morning that had been decided for his departure, his coachman, who was a scoundrel and had been in league with the others, bought him a great number of receipts for drinking-bouts outside the house that had supposedly not been paid, and false accounts from saddlers, smiths, tailors, shoemakers, and merchants, so that in order to pay these debts and not, as he had been threatened, to run into unpleasantries, he had to sell his equipage, carriage, and horses. The amount realised was so small that he had barely as many guilders left as he had had thousands. So he set out on his journey home on foot. After arriving in the city where his lord, the Count, lived, he went to him the very next day, in high spirits, and in the sure expectation of being allowed to enter his service again. "Here I'm back, Your Lordship," he said on entering the room, "I, Caspar, the coachman; and I now ask Your Lordship that Your Lordship once more accept and receive me into your service." The Count,

being a genial lord, smiled and said: "Well, Caspar, as you've kept your word, so I shall keep mine also. But tell me first of all, how did you fare? And how did you like the life of a grandee?" Caspar answered: "The life of a grandee, Your Lordship, is not exactly a grand life. I've tried it now, and it's not that I regret it; but I wouldn't like to try it a second time; for what do you have from it at the end but a pimply face, a sour stomach, and half the heart of a rogue? But all of that will right itself once I'm in my rightful place again, by the horses and on the boxseat." The Count laughed, and he said: He was to go to his work, as before, and attend to his job well. And he did that, and he remained, until he was far advanced in years, when his lord allocated him a handsome settlement, Caspar the Coachman.

The Seven Correctors

In a former Imperial City a court of seven reputable citizens had been appointed, who were called the Seven Correctors, and all kinds of slight matters pertaining to slander and disputes were arbitrated and decided there. Now it happened one day that two citizens fell into a quarrel in the open street; and as they were going their separate ways, after lengthy wrangling, one of them said to the other: "Everyone knows you well, what kind of bird you are." The other took these words in bad part, indited him before the Seven Correctors, and filed a complaint against him. The accused gave the reply: He could not deny that he had said the words; and he did not think he had spoken amiss; for his accuser was called Finch, and everyone knew what kind of a bird a finch was. Notwithstanding this excuse, he was fined a shilling (6 kreuzer). He paid the fine readily, but said at the

same time: If he might ask something? The gentlemen said: Certainly. Then he continued, "My benevolent lords, I beg your pardon, but as there are seven of you, I would just like to know how you will divide these 6 kreuzer among yourselves?" The lords took this for a ludification and fined him another shilling. After he had paid the money, he left, and in his indignation he shut the door rather hard behind him. The judges had him fetched back and fined him another shilling for this defiance. He paid and went his way, and closed the door very softly, but soon opened it again and asked, "Lords, was that the right way?" The judges took this to be a caustic dig and fined him another shilling for it, whereupon he walked out nice and quietly. Once outside, he said, "I do believe, if Our Lord came before the Seven Correctors, He would be punished by them." A tipstaff happened to hear these words and reported them to his superiors. They had the man called back, gave him a sharp reprimand, and fined him another shilling. Hereupon he left very humbly.

The Beggar's Will

In the not so distant past, the poor would wander from land to land and support themselves by begging; in our day, every community must support its poor itself. And this is quite right, too, when it really happens. Now those beggar families had, it is true, neither house nor belongings, and it was truly said of the children: He was born in Staufen, and she in Vils, and this one in Kempter Forest.¹ But they were at home everywhere in the world, and in every Christian land they got lard as well as salt, and flour as

¹ In the Allgäu region of Bavaria.

well as bread; and they were able to sit at table in the forest and under the blue tent of the heavens; and Princes were no richer than they. And this was proven by the beggar-mother, the wife of one Zundler, whose will is the stuff of legend. When she was lying on her deathbed, she summoned her eight children to her to tell them her last will and testament. And she said: "Be at peace and united, and do not disturb one another in your trade." After that, as if she could, like a Duchess, divide and apportion lands and people, she continued: "You, Toni, move around Constance Valley; you, Käthe, go into Walser Valley; you, Jörg, stay in Hindelang Valley. And so she allocated to the others their share: Rettenberg Valley to the fourth one, Oberstorf Valley to the fifth, Bregenz Forest to the sixth, Lech Valley to the seventh, and Schüttentobel to the eighth.² Then, once the distribution was complete, she had every one of them give her their hand, in pledge that they would honour and fulfil her will; and she passed away in the serene conviction that her children were all provided for, and her line would flourish for time without end.

Legends from South Bavaria: King Watzmann

In days long gone, there lived a King Watzmann; he had a wife and seven children. He himself was a mighty hunter, and proud and cruel withal; and it was his greatest pleasure, accompanied by his wife and children, and with his dogs and servants following, to roam all over the mountains, hunting chamois and stags, and feasting his eyes on their blood and gloating at the moans and groans of the dying creatures. One day, it

² All of these are in Baden-Württemberg, Allgäu in Bavaria, or the Vorarlberg in Austria.

happened that King Watzmann, the wild hunter, came before the hut of a poor herdsman; she was sitting in front of the door rocking her little baby in her arms, and beside her lay her faithful dog, who protected her herd and hut. Straightaway the King's wild hounds fly at the sheepdog, one of them tears the infant to pieces, another lays the mother low. The King is there and watches the terrible spectacle with delight. At the mother's screams, the father comes out of the hut, his bow in his hand; and when he perceives the horror, he fells one of the raging hounds with an arrow. But now the cruel King boils with wrath at the fall of his hound, and he sets his servants and dogs on the shepherd and the shepherdess, who now, lacerated by the furious hounds, sink down on the corpse of their child. But King Watzmann, and his wife and his children, look at the innocent victims of frenzy with sneering laughter and gloating. Then a roaring rises up from the bowels of the Earth, and the tempest breaks; a pillar of fire shoots up, it spins around the barbarian and his brood, and transforms their giant bodies into stone. – And they are there still, Watzmann and his wife, together with their seven children, as colossal rocky mountains, a reminder and warning example that God's revenge overtakes all of those who trample the weak into the ground and murder the innocent.

How Eulenspiegel³ Gives Good Counsels which Turn Out ill

When Eulenspiegel was travelling through the land one day, he caught up with several wandering students who were on the same road; and he joined them at once and amused them with his ingenious conceits

³ Till Eulenspiegel, the legendary German prankster and roving rascal, whose exploits first appeared in print in the 16th century; initially called "Owleglass" in English translation.

and waggish tales. After some distance, they wanted to stop off and have a snack at an inn. Then a young companion, who had left his mother's nest for the first time, walked up to him and addressed him with the words, "Master, from your words you seem to me to be a clever man. So be so good as to advise me how I should manage my words and gestures so I don't have to pay too high a reckoning; for I'm poor and yet young and inexperienced." Then Eulenspiegel said, "All you need to do is praise the innkeeper, as well as everything he serves up." The companion then did this in plentiful measure; and, while they ate and drank together, he said very loudly, so the innkeeper might hear him, "How tasty this bread is! And how delicious this beer is! Now this is what I call an inn." The innkeeper was pleased at this; and when the companion paid the reckoning last of all, he received his good penny back, and a bad one in addition. But outside, before the inn, the comrades scolded and reproached him for the eulogies he had paid the innkeeper, and they said: One should not praise even the best things in front of innkeepers; and one of them gave him a hard rap on the head as a remembrancer, so he would be wiser in his speech in future.

At midday, before they stopped off again, the good companion turned to Eulenspiegel once more and said, "Master, your counsel served me badly; give me another and better one." So Eulenspiegel said, "Then you may rather criticise the innkeeper, as well as what he serves up." The simple-minded companion then did this; and when the soup came, he said out loud, that the innkeeper might hear: "This soup is too salty, and has sat too long!" And when the meat was served up, he held his nose and said, "Ugh! How rank the meat is. This is a fine inn we've entered!" These words

pleased his comrades; but the innkeeper scowled and said, "If you don't like my food, look for some elsewhere." And he showed him the door. So he had to retire without having eaten. The comrades, coming after him, praised him for his courage; but this did not satisfy his stomach.

In the evening, when they stopped at another inn, intending to spend the night there, the companion went up to Eulenspiegel again and said, "Master, your counsel has gone awry twice, so please be so kind as to give me the right counsel this time." Then Eulenspiegel said, "What further advice can I give? If neither praise nor criticism is of any use with people, then it's probably best just to keep silent." The other resolved to try this, and he held fast to his resolve. Now when the host of the inn at which they had stopped served them cheese, and they tasted it, he asked the companion, who was sitting next to him: "How is the cheese?" The companion said nothing and kept chewing, like a donkey eating dough; for the cheese was exceptionally bad. Then one of the comrades said, "Well, say something!" thinking that he would, like the monkey, pull the chestnuts out of the fire.⁴ But the companion kept silent. They interpreted this as defiance on his part, the comrades and the innkeeper. As repeated demands could not get him to open his mouth, they drove him from the table and threw him out the door.

On the following morning, as the company passed by the place where he had spent the night in the open, he stopped Eulenspiegel and reproached him for having now made a fool of him three times with his counsel. But Eulenspiegel replied, "He who cannot be helped cannot be

⁴ i.e. pull himself out of the hole which he has dug for himself, save himself from the difficult situation he has created.

advised.” With these words, he left him standing there and continued on his way. And what became of the companion? If you don’t know, I don’t either.

Of the Relations between the Nobles and the Peasants

In an old book, one can read a good comic tale about the relations between the nobles and the peasants. The nobles, mindful of their station and their honour, wished to acquire more income; and they therefore decided to apply to the right man, to St. Peter, to whom, as they knew, the keys to all the splendours of Heaven and of Earth had been given by the Lord. The Prince of Heaven received them with every honour, as those who had been distinguished from the rest of mankind from birth by God Himself; and he granted them everything that they requested: Entry- and Departure Money,⁵ Heriot,⁶ Socage, Tenement Rents, Escheat,⁷ Kitchen-Tax, Laudemium,⁸ Right of Bondage, Land-Rent, Steward’s Dues, Inheritance Tax, Tithes, Greater- and Lesser Tithes, Blood Tithes⁹ and Tithes in Kind, and yet many other taxes and duties, whatever name they may bear. So they took their leave with thanks and returned, satisfied with their rights and powers, to their homes. The peasants very soon felt distress, and they sighed heavily and all but succumbed under the burdens that were imposed on them by the nobles. And when they complained to their masters, they received, in the mildest case, the instruction that all had been decided thus

⁵ Auffahrtsgeld: tax paid when receiving a farm through marriage rather than inheritance. Abfahrtsgeld: money paid by persons emigrating; a charge for returning a lease before the appointed time.

⁶ Besthaupt (elsewhere Hauptfall, Sterbehaupt, Sterbefall): the lord’s right to take the best head of cattle when the tenant dies.

⁷ Heimfall: the reversion of property to a lord if the owner dies without legal heirs.

⁸ Laudemien: money paid by a tenant to a new landlord on the death of the old one.

⁹ Blutzehnten: paid in livestock.

in Heaven regarding the relations between nobles and peasants. Then the vexed and oppressed peasants finally hit upon the idea of likewise going to Heaven, to St. Peter, and requesting favours of him; and they set their resolve in motion without delay. St. Peter received them gracefully also, and patiently heard their petition; and after listening to their request, he handed them a long script of paper on which everything was noted down that he had the power to bestow and confer. The peasants looked through the register, diligently and exactly, both the front and the back, but they found everything that people might wish to have for this earthly existence to be crossed out. Only Heaven was left over and still stood open. So the distressed peasants requested at least Heaven for themselves of St. Peter, as a particular favour and Peasant Privilege; whereas the nobles, the scourges of peasants, were to have Hell as their inheritance. This was granted them, and they returned, happy, to their homes. Now when the nobles perceived that the peasants had returned home in such good spirits, they asked for the cause of this joy, and what good could possibly have fallen to their share, as St. Peter had had nothing left to give away. The peasants replied to them, "And shouldn't we be happy, now that we've received Heaven from St. Peter?" Then the nobles said, "Damn it! We didn't think of Heaven."

Mark: This is a comic tale, and nothing more; but the peasants can learn something from it, and so can the nobles too.

A Proven Method to Raise Children

The recipe was not discovered and applied by any Doctor of

Pedagogy, but by a simple Tyrelese countryman who held his Golden wedding in the year 1825 at Gries, in the Seltrain Valley, and experienced the joy of seeing twelve well-brought-up children around him, together with a numerous progeny of grandchildren. Now when a man, who was sitting as a guest at his feast of honour, asked him over the table how he had managed to raise so many children without any of them becoming a black sheep, he replied: "It's a simple matter; you only need to raise the first one well, the others raise themselves." "What do you mean by that, old one?" asked the schoolmaster. "I mean," the countryman replied, "that the children raise each other, while all the parents have to do is keep an eye on them." "Explain yourself clearly," said the schoolmaster, "we of younger generations can always learn something from you old ones." "Well," said the old man, "how shall I explain it to you? Such a thing is easy to do but not to describe. In short: Hansel there was the first boy, and Lenel the first girl, we had; and as parents are fondest of their first and last children – they're also fond of the middle ones, of course – so we, my wife and I, really took great pains to raise them to be upright, in the fear of God. But raising children is not something that can be learned, as our writers say, but is something you just have to know, and the heart does more than the head. We both kept to the way in which we ourselves had been raised by our good parents – God rest their souls! – and that served us well. Hansel and Lenel – I shouldn't praise them in their presence – were so good, even as children, that everyone took delight in them, and the two of us the most. Now after that, the smaller stock followed, now a boy, now a girl. Then it was a case of: Hansel, look after your brother! and: Lenel, look after Dien!

And they did it, better than we could have done ourselves. Children are actually, you should know – God forgive me the expression! – true apes, and what one sees another do, they imitate, both the good and the bad. And in that, you see, dear neighbours lies the secret how children are raised by children. But the second secret is: that the parents themselves always lead the way, setting a good example – for words don't work. And the third and greatest secret is –" (and here, he raised his cap) "– that God gives his blessing; which we cannot lack when we have done our part. That is everything," he concluded, "that I can tell you, dear neighbours!" The neighbours drank to his and his wife's health, and the children and children's children came over and gave their parents their hand, and they gave it with all their heart.

The Bridal Dance

Two poor, old people, a husband and wife, were working one day in their little field, which lay beside the road. And they delved and hoed from early morning until noon without a break; and when noon came, their hunger was great but their bread was little. Then the wife said with a sigh: "Ah, God, what have we done wrong, to have to live so miserably?" The husband, who was always of a cheerful humour, said: "I suppose it must be that we've forgotten how to do our bridal dance. What do you say, Annamarie, to setting things right now?" And he straightaway grabbed his wife round the waist and turned her, and she could not help but laugh. And because the field was very uneven, they went onto the road, and they danced there, up and down and back and forth, until they finally became

dizzy, and both fell down into the ditch. There they lay... ; and the husband laughed, and the wife cursed the crazy bridal dance. But when they stood up, the husband noticed a money pouch lying at the side, and it was full of coins. Then the husband shouted: "Yippee!" as if he were at his wedding.

However, soon afterwards a merchant came down the road, and he asked the couple, who were back at work by this time, if they had not found a money pouch. The husband had an answer pat, and said: "Oh yes! At the time when we did our bridal dance." Hereupon the man said, "It isn't so long ago that I lost it," and went on his way.

As for what happened next, the narrators disagree. Some say the story took place in Ober-Erlingen and the poor man restored the pouch to the merchant, whereupon he received a handsome present for his bridal dance. Others, however, claim that it happened in Unter-Erlingen, and the man kept the money and the pouch to boot. And the benevolent reader is free to believe whatever seems best to him.

Ursula, or the Wife as she should be

It is not house-rules which make a household run smoothly but the good will that follows the rules. A young husband wished to instruct and train his housewife so she would regulate everything she did according to the precepts he gave her; and that she might remember it all the better, he wrote everything out for her, and drew up a whole book, and gave the book the title: *Ursula, or the Wife as she should be*. And that was good. The housewife, to keep the peace with her obstinate master, followed his instructions exactly, and cooked e.g. according to the cookbook he had

recommended to her, and salted the soup with the amount mentioned in the book.

One day they went together to a fair in a village where friends of theirs lived, and they were in high spirits and ate and drank, the husband being beforehand. He took in a quart or measure of wine more than he could handle and became drunk. Now as they were heading home, they had to take a narrow footbridge over a brook, and as the footbridge did not run this way and that, like the man, but rather straight ahead, he fell down off it and yelled, "Wife, come and help me!" His wife said, "I'll go home first, and I'll see if Ursula or the Wife as she should be is supposed to help you." By this time, the water was entering his mouth, but he managed to creep out himself. And when they came home, he threw the book into the fire, and said to his wife, "You do what you think to be right." And that was even better. And from that time on, they lived with one another very peacefully and were, without instructions, husband and wife, as they should be.

Honest Hans and Crafty Grete

There were two brothers, each of whom possessed a very considerable farm. They lived not far apart and visited one another often, when they would talk about their households and the state of their affairs; and the one could not praise the honesty of his farmhand enough, and the other the craftiness of his maid. Now the elder brother had a magnificent stallion in his stable, and the younger one an equally beautiful mare, both of the same colour and size. They repeatedly ended up talking about these, and the one wanted to strike a deal with the younger for the mare, the other

with the older for the stallion; but they never could reach an agreement, and each one declared that his horse was not for sale at any price. One day, when they were again discussing this matter, the younger one said finally: "I wager that I'll get your stallion without your knowing it; and your servant will bring it to me himself." Then the elder said: "And I wager stallion against mare that this won't happen; for even if he wanted to steal it himself, he would tell me; so greatly do I trust in him and his honesty." So the bet was made, and the brothers parted from one another.

On the next morning, the younger brother summoned his maid and told her what had been negotiated between him and his brother, and that he now trusted to her cleverness and wiliness. Grete said: "Just leave it to me." And she went over to the farm that same evening and sought out the farmhand, Hans. "Good evening, Hans!" "Thank you kindly, Grete!" "Not at leisure yet?" "No hope of that!" "I just wanted to have a look round at your work, and see how you keep the stable. People praise your orderliness." Hans found himself flattered; he invited her to join him; she helped him with his work; Hans noticed that Grete was a lovely girl.

The day after that – it was Saturday – Grete came again. "Good evening, Hans!" "Thank you kindly, Grete." "Is it all right by you that I'm here again?" "Why, of course!" "Have you finished work already?" "Everything has been done; I thought that you might come." They sat down together, and chatted for an hour, and Hans noticed that Grete, the minx, was a clever girl. And he invited her for the next Sunday when he would like to take her to the dance. Grete came, and Hans went with her, and they danced until late in the evening. Then Grete said all of a sudden: "It's got

late! I should be home by now. What will the master say? Go, saddle the stallion, and ride home with me!" Hans did not need to be asked twice, and he took her up with him on the steed and rode away into the darkness. She had her arms tightly clasped around him. And now she believed the moment had arrived to come out with her proposal, and she disclosed to him: That her master wanted to have the stallion, that he had promised her a big reward, and that she would then marry Hans. "Will you, dear Hans?" she asked, and gave him a kiss. Whether Hans wanted to do it or not, he had to, and now it just remained to think of a way to throw the wool over his master's eyes so he did not mark the theft. "You'll lie to him," said Grete, "you lost your way when returning home, then wolves attacked you and devoured the steed, which you had to abandon to them. As for the bones, I'll take care of that; the knacker has them in abundance, with all kinds for the choosing. They'll be lying on the spot tomorrow."

So the matter was settled, and Hans left the stallion behind and returned home on foot. But Hans could not sleep. He could not stop thinking about what he would impart to his master, and how, concerning the stallion the next morning. Thinking to prepare himself at once for the onerous task and, as it were, to rehearse, he went out the door, knocked, entered, and turned towards a broom in the corner, which represented his master. "Good morning, Hans!" "Thank you kindly, Sir!" "How is my black horse, the stallion?" "Oh Sir, the stallion - - -" Then his tongue stuck fast, and he could not go on. He went out the door once again, and did as he had done the first time. "Good day, Hans!" "Thank you kindly, Sir!" "How is my black horse, the stallion?" "Oh dear Sir, the stallion - - -" Then his tongue

stuck fast again, and the lie would not come out of his throat, and it fell down onto his heart like a hundredweight stone.

The next morning, he entered his master's room early. "Good morning, Hans!" "Thank you kindly, Sir!" "How is my black horse, the stallion?" "Oh Sir," Hans said, "the stallion, the black horse - - -" Here he stopped short; but he pulled himself together and said: "The stallion is stolen, and I'm the one who was the thief. Now have me hanged right away." He hereupon related what had happened, and how Grete had talked him into it, the enchantress, and where the black horse was now, namely in his brother's stable. The master was delighted at the proven honesty of his farmhand, and he not only forgave him, but promised him the same reward that his brother had given his maid. "And," he added, "if you're still in earnest about marrying, then take Grete and bring her into my house. That way, I'll have a crafty maid along with an honest farmhand." This was fine by Hans; and so honesty won the wager, and the other brother, who had reckoned on craftiness, suffered the loss of his maid and his mare, and it was no less than he deserved.

A Strange Hunting-Lease

A mean trick which a man plays on another is a mean trick, even if it wears a comic jacket like a clown. But one cannot help laughing, all the same.

Such a merry trick is told of a Frenchman, who, as the reader will mark, was a regular devil. He was billeted in a peasant's house. In the afternoon, as he lay behind the stove – the flies giving him no rest nor

repose – he killed time by thinking of how he could play a prank on his host and nicely conjure a fat dollar or two out of his pocket. It is easier to come upon bad notions than good ones, particularly in an idle hour. So he said to the peasant: “Host, I want buy off you ze flies in ze room.” The peasant thought the soldier was pulling his leg, and said he would give him them for free, and he was welcome to kill them all – that would be doing him a favour. “No,” said the soldier, “I don’t want for free, but I want buy them, if you want, for a fat dollar.” The peasant thought to himself: If the soldier’s a fool, he’s *my* fool; and he said, If that was his wish, it was perfectly fine by him. The soldier gave him the dollar, and the peasant pocketed it, laughing. But he soon had more cause to weep than to laugh. For the soldier now fetched his musket from behind the stove, loaded it with shot, and fired, without so much as a by-your-leave, at the wainscoting, where most of the flies were squatting, with a bang that set the windows rattling. “For Heaven’s sake, what are you doing?” cried the startled peasant. “I’m shooting dead ze flies I buyed from you,” the Frenchman remarked in dead earnest, as if it went without saying; and he loaded again and took aim once more. Then the peasant grabbed his arms and fell to his knees and begged him by all the saints to spare his house and not plunge him into misery. The soldier gave him to understand: If he were to renounce his right, then he must have compensation, and profit to boot; and he demanded as much again as he had given the peasant. The latter, having to like it or lump it, consented to the deal and paid what the other wanted. And so he realised too late that the Frenchman was no fool – or if he was a fool, he was *nobody else’s* fool. The trick is funny, and you cannot help but laugh. Yet the honest reader will

think at the same time: He was a devil, though, that Frenchman – and I think so too.

The Talisman

A Prince and Princess were having their honeymoon. They felt exceedingly happy and content; only one thing unsettled them at times – the thought whether they would always feel this way. So they wished they might obtain a talisman that could make them proof against every kind of dissatisfaction in marriage.

Now they had often heard about a hermit who was regarded as a wise man by the people, and who readily offered everyone advice on the troublesome matters of life. The Prince and Princess therefore betook themselves to him and laid their concern before him. The hermit, when he had heard their request, said to them: “Travel through near and distant lands, and wherever you find a contented married couple, ask them for a piece of their shirt, and once you have received this, carry it on you evermore. This is a proven means.”

The Prince and Princess rode away, and soon they were told about a knight who lived with his wife in great conjugal felicity. They came to his castle and asked the couple if they were as wholly contented in their marriage as report would have it. They received for answer: “Yes, but for the one thing that we have no children.” The talisman was therefore not to be found with them, and the Prince and Princess had to travel further in search of a perfectly contented married couple.

They next arrived in a town where they heard there was a citizen of

that place who lived with his wife in great harmony and contentment. They went to him and asked him likewise if he was really as contented in his marriage as people said. The man replied: "Yes indeed! We live happily with each other and are also contented, but for the one thing that we have so many children, who, it must be admitted, occasion us much care and anxiety." So the talisman was not to be expected from them either, and the Prince and Princess travelled further through the land, and made inquiry after contented married couples everywhere; but there was no further mention of any.

One day, as they were riding by fields and meadows, they observed a shepherd not far from the road, who was playing his pipe very merrily. And then they saw a woman walking over to him, bearing a baby in her arm and leading a boy by the hand. And the shepherd, seeing her, went towards them and greeted them, and he took the baby from the woman and kissed and hugged it; and Phylax¹⁰ came up to the boy and nuzzled against him, barking and rejoicing. Meanwhile, the woman set out ready the pot she had brought and said, "Father, now come and eat!" And the man sat down and helped himself; but his first bite went to the baby, and the other bites he shared with the boy and Phylax. All of this was seen and heard by the Prince and the Princess; and they came over and addressed the people, saying: "You must surely be man and wife, and a truly happy and contented man and wife at that?" "Yes," said the man, "that we are, God be thanked, and Princes and Princesses could not be more so." "Well, in that case listen," said the Prince, "and grant us a small request. You shall not regret it

¹⁰ A Greek name meaning "sentinel" and given as one of several appropriate names for a hound by Xenophon in his *Cynegeticus* ('On Hunting').

if you gratify us in this. Give us a little piece of your shirts.” The shepherd and shepherdess looked confounded by these words; at last the man said, “Well, we would give you not only a piece but the whole shirt, only too willingly. But, alas! We have none.”

And so the Prince and Princess had to travel on, their aim unfulfilled; and as they had grown tired of the long, bootless peregrination, they went back the way they had come. Now when they returned to the hermit’s hut, they reproached him for giving them such bad counsel and told him their story. The hermit smiled and said: “Have you then travelled that road to no purpose, and do you return no richer in experience?” “No,” said the Prince, “I have learned that contentment is a very rare possession on Earth.” “And I have learned,” the Princess then remarked, “that to be content, one needs nothing more than – to be content.” Then the Prince and Princess took one another’s hands and looked at one another with loving eyes. And the hermit blessed them and said: “You have found it, the true talisman, in your hearts. Look after it with care, and the evil spirit of discontent will be powerless against you until the end of time.”

The Little Bird¹¹

A pious monk read in the Bible one morning: Before God, a thousand years are as a day. His weak understanding could not grasp these words and their meaning, and the more he considered them, the mistier and more confused his thoughts became.

¹¹ A better version of this story can be found in Ludwig Bechstein’s *Deutsches Märchenbuch* (Book of German Fairy Tales, 1845-53), translated elsewhere on this site (No 61). It also appears as ‘The Monk of Afflighem’ in Volume 3 of Benjamin Thorpe’s *Northern Mythology* (London: Edward Lumley, 1852).

Then he went, to divert himself, into the garden; and while he regarded the flowers and the trees and the blue sky and all the works of God with rapture and reverence, he perceived a singular, surpassingly beautiful bird on the top of a tree; and when it spread out its brightly coloured wings and let its supremely beautiful voice be heard, a feeling of the most heartfelt bliss, such as he had never had before, flashed through the man, and he stood there like one out of his senses, unable to turn his eyes and ears from the enchanting figure and the soulful song of the little bird. It hopped from branch to branch and flew from tree to tree, and the colours of its feathers quivered iridescent as it fluttered, and melodic strains poured from its euphonious throat; and it flew, singing all the while, out of the garden into the adjoining forest; and the monk, no longer conscious of himself, followed it, and turned neither eye nor ear from it, and stood at last in the heart of the forest like one enchanted, not seeing the wilderness for the splendour of the rainbow that flowed around him, and not hearing the waterfall for the wondrous song that enraptured him. But what words could describe something like this? As when, in the early morning, with the breaking dawn, a point of small cloud is suddenly visible over the highest peak of a mountain, which then gradually flows apart in tender strips of wool: the first ray of the rising sun magically transforms it into pure gold: then the cloud expands and condenses, and streaks of gold flash through it, like bolts of lightning, and embellish it all around its edges, as with shining rubies; and clouds then detach themselves from this cloud and float into the sea of the azure firmament, and lights and colours change and blend into endless gradations, and then pass out of them again, and the eye is no

longer able to survey all the splendid forms, or to grasp and comprehend the radiance and the comprehensiveness and the manifoldness of the heavenly manifestation: just so manifold, so alluring, and so enchanting was the song of the little bird; its melodies lay around the listener's heart like a golden web, ensnaring it completely, as with a magic net, and penetrated and filled it, so it was quite intoxicated with a sensation of ecstasy.

Finally, the little bird fell silent, and was suddenly no more to be seen; and the monk, full of the happiness he had received, returned to his monastery.

According to his reckoning, an hour might have elapsed since the phenomenon appeared to him; and he stood before the gate, still in the early morning, and rang the bell. The porter appeared. They did not recognise each other. The monk gave his name; the porter said: There was no monk of that name in the monastery. They went to the Abbot; he also knew neither the man nor his name; but he added, "As the chronicle relates, a hundred years ago a monk of this name suddenly disappeared from the monastery, and since that time no more has been heard of him." Then the monk realised that he had been vouchsafed a great miracle from God, and he fell at the Abbot's feet and made his confession and related what had happened to him.

And after he had received the sacrament in that same hour, he did not utter another word to anyone, but abided in silent prayer until midnight, when he passed away in the Lord.

Conjugal Obedience

A man was marrying a widow who, as he well knew, had not lived on the most peaceful of terms with her previous husband. He thought to himself: "Either she did not truly understand them, the words of the nuptial blessing, or she forgot them. I'll see to it, one way or the other, that this doesn't happen again" – So he said, and he confidently led her to the altar. Now when, during the nuptial benediction, the priest came to the words in the Bible: 'And he shall be thy ruler!'¹² the man interrupted him, saying: "Reverend Father, be so good as to read out the words one more time, and more slowly and more loudly, that she may clearly hear that it is written in the Bible: Thy ruler, and not: Thy fool." The benevolent reader, had he been there, would no doubt have laughed at this bridegroom's zeal and thought to himself: "It could not hurt in any case if women were urged to do their duty." The priest thought so also, and, without laughter, but in full and sacred earnest, he said once more to the woman: "God said to the mother of all living things, to Eve: 'Submit yourself unto your husband, and he shall be thy ruler.'¹³ And to Abraham, He said –," with these words he turned to the bridegroom, who was curious to know what God had said to Abraham, "– and to Abraham, the Father of all the Faithful, God said: 'In all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice!'¹⁴ Thus does the Lord will it," the priest continued, "that the wife obey the husband, and the husband in turn obey the wife in right and reasonable things. And if you do this, then you shall be, following the Apostle's exhortation, one soul in two bodies."¹⁵

¹² Genesis 3:16, "he shall rule over thee."

¹³ Ephesians 5:22.

¹⁴ Genesis 21:12.

¹⁵ Ephesians 5:28-31, the Apostle being Saint Paul.

Of Women's Love and Fidelity. A Comic Tale.

When women have a mind to be all too very vainglorious of their love for, and fidelity to, their husbands, one will do well to tell them the following good old comic tale.

A woman lost her husband, who died young. They had lived together in great peace, and now that he had died, it seemed that her wailing and lamenting would have no end or limit. She did not leave his grave, neither by day nor by night, and even the priest could not console her sorrow. Now not far from the graveyard there stood the gallows. A man had recently been hanged there, and for fear that the body might be stolen by his relations, a sheriff's deputy had been posted there at night to keep guard over the body. Now when he heard the wife's crying and whimpering, he wanted to look and see what this was; and having heard the cause of her grief, he spoke words of friendly comfort to her and exhorted her to forget death and to come to love life again. He repeated this so often, and persisted until the time came when they reached an accord. In the meantime, the thief was stolen from the gallows. The deputy took great fright at this, for his life depended on it. He came hurriedly to the woman and told her his plight, and asked her for true counsel. The woman said: "Save your sorrow; I have an idea how you can be helped." She then bid him fetch the rope from the gallows; meanwhile, she dug her husband up from his grave and gave his body over to the sheriff's deputy for him to hang in place of the thief. The deputy spoke: "O dear woman! It is in vain; for the thief had a bald head." "That can easily be rectified," the woman said,

and she speedily pulled out all of her husband's hair, then helped the deputy to hang him on the gallows. Afterwards, the deputy took her to wife, and thus did she profit from the love and fidelity she had shown her lord and master.

This story is written down in old books; and so it must needs be true, dear, faithful wives!

The Hermit

He who takes his leave of the world and moves into the wilderness does not become a saint just by doing so; for as long as there is an inclination to evil inside, it will easily find an allurements from the outside, and sin is perpetrated. This was learnt by one of whom an old story makes mention. This man was of a very irascible nature; but instead of seeking the reason for this in himself, he laid the blame upon the people who provoked him to anger, and he thought: "If that's how it is, then the world does me harm, and it's better that I leave it than that I lose my soul." He therefore bent his steps into the wilderness and built himself a hut in the heart of a forest, close by a spring; and the bread he ate, he had brought to him every day by a boy who had to put it down on a rock that was far from the hut. And things went very well for several days, and he seemed to himself to have become the most placid and best-tempered of men. One day, he went, as usual, to the spring with a jug, and he set it down so that the water would run in. But the ground being stony and uneven, the jug toppled over. He set it down again, and more cautiously; but the water, bubbling irregularly, knocked it over again. Then he wrathfully grabbed the vessel and pitched it

violently against the ground, so that it burst into pieces. Now he realised that his old choleric disposition had broken out again, and he thought: “If that’s how it is, the wastes do not avail me aught, and it’s better that I seek forthwith to save my soul in the world by means of avoiding evil and doing good.” And he returned to the world.

Note: there are evil inclinations which one can overcome by fleeing the occasion; and there are others which one must overcome through resistance. However, to accomplish the one as well as the other, one does not need to leave the world, but only oneself.

A Worthy Household Servant

A Christian has the right to procure himself a respectable entertainment on Sundays and holidays and other festivals with his hard-earned weekly wage, as we all know. But when he has the opportunity to relieve the distress of an unfortunate wretch with it, then he should rather deny himself the entertainment and do some good; and we all know that but we don’t all do it. A household servant, however, did it. He was all ready to go to a wedding; and he had on his Sunday best, and when he inspected himself, in his fine attire, from head to foot, he thought to himself: “You’re a handsome fellow, that’s true, and your girl must be delighted with you when she sees you tricked out like this – as I am with my girl likewise.” And he turned his hat round on his head and could have whooped with expectancy in the joy of his heart. Then a man he did not know walked into the room and asked for a Christian’s charitable contribution for those people brought to ruin by fire. Now this was one of those moments when how people stand

with regard to piety and love of one's neighbours is put to the test. Our household servant stood the test well. He did not ponder for long, but simply thought: "Ah well! If I go to the wedding, first of all, that's three guilders down the drain; secondly, I'll bring a tired and weary body back home; and thirdly – my girl thinks I'm a Christian, and if I tell her about this, she'll look askance at me. In short, I'll let the wedding be, and give the money to the unfortunate ones!" And that is what he did. And when he went up to the bedroom and took his clothes off again, he could not quite stop thinking about the wedding and his being a handsome fellow. But much stronger and sweeter was the thought: "You behaved like an honest fellow, and God will recompense you for it up in Heaven."

This happened in Tyrol, in the year 1824. The name of the worthy servant did not appear in the newspapers, but it is recorded in the Book of the Father of the Poor.

Gaiety over Goods

There was once a poor handicraftsman, a linen weaver, who was up and sitting in his workshop and working first thing in the morning. And being in high spirits at all times, he would sing, to amuse himself while working, many a pretty secular or religious song, just according as the mood took him; and he had so clear and sonorous a voice that his neighbours needed no house-cockerel to wake them up. But this was disagreeable to the rich merchant who lived next to him; for not being able to sleep before midnight from worries about money, he was compelled to stay awake after midnight by his neighbour's cursed caterwauling. He therefore began to give serious

thought to how he could put an end to this nuisance. He could not forbid him it; for singing, like praying and working, is one of the householder's rights, which no one can be prevented from exercising. So he had to use other means. Summoning the handworker, he asked him what price he would put on his singing. The other said it was certainly worth a day's wages, as it made his daily work so easy for him. The merchant asked further: How much would that amount to? He replied: So much and so much – and yet it was not much. Then the merchant said: He would pay him for a month in advance, not for his singing, but for him to be quiet and keep his mouth shut. And he really did lay down the money. The linen weaver thought to himself: He couldn't possibly earn it more easily; and he took the money and promised he would be as quiet as a mouse in his workshop. When he arrived home with the money, he delightedly counted it over, and it was all good coin, and such an amount as he had never had at one time. In the evening, before he went to bed, he cast loving looks on his treasure for a good hour, and at night he placed it under his pillow, that a thief not be able to rob him of it; and at midnight it was still in his head, and he mused on what he could do with it and how much he could earn on capital and interest; and in the morning, when he got up, all of his limbs felt leaden; his head was muddled from vigils and worries, his hand was heavy and indolent, and it refused him its service; and he was not allowed to sing. The time passed slowly and sluggishly, so that he could barely wait for the day to end. In the meantime, he thought things over, and soon made up his mind. For the man standing in the merchant's shop as early as eight o'clock was none other than our linen weaver. "Sir, with your permission –" he said,

throwing the money down, “here is your trash back; the hobgoblin won’t let me sleep.” And before the merchant could make a reply, the weaver was out the door, and singing:

“A light and happy mood’s
Worth more than gold and goods.
Trilirum, tralarum!”

The Blue Mountains

Not far from some mountains, there lived a peaceful, pious community. The people fed on the fruits of the earth that they cultivated, and on the milk of the animals they tended; and when they ate and drank, they did so in contentment and with thanksgiving. In particular, they went out into the open every morning and, their countenances facing the east, they prayed to the invisible god who made the Sun rise for them out of the beautiful blue mountains and made torrents rush down to water their fields and meadows, and whose storms thundered and flashed full of majestic splendour.

But there was a man in the community who had a mind to look around in the mountains more closely, and to investigate the secrets of the sunshine, and the torrents, and the winds and storms. And he departed one day and did as his spirit seemed to command him. After some time, he returned, and he spoke before the assembled community: “What you, dear people, have up to now thought and believed of the blue mountains there and the god above, it is not true, and you are greatly mistaken. I have looked at everything close up and found the truth to be completely different.

The mountains which shine at you so beautifully blue, are nothing but rugged, infertile stone; and the waters which pour out of their ravines are wild, devastating mountain torrents, and the winds and storms are natural atmospheric phenomena which generate themselves and destroy themselves. And the Sun, it rises far, far behind those mountains; and as for the god, of whom fable tells, there is no sign to be seen anywhere in the blue mountains.”

The community were startled at the speech made by the man, whom they honoured as a sage. And some of them said in great ill-humour: “So our fathers beguiled us into believing fairy-tales to be truths!” And after that time, they no longer went out to pray to God, He who performed the wonders in the blue mountains; and from that time on, they worked morosely and lived at variance with one another. But many of them now went into the mountains themselves, to see what was to be believed; and they exhausted themselves to no purpose in ascending and descending, and many fell into the abysses or lost their way in the wide mountains, where they perished of hunger. Only an old man in the community did not pay any heed to the sage’s speech, but believed what his father had told him about the blue mountains and the god who lived in them; and he went out into the open every day as before, and prayed there, his countenance facing the east, to the Invisible One who made the Sun rise for him and made the torrents to rush down, and whose storms thundered and flashed in the blue mountains. And every time when he had prayed thus, full of reverence and faith, he went to his day's work invigorated, and the work of his hands was blessed and every wish of his heart satisfied.

Of an Obliging Wife

“Prepare a supper for us, for me and my friend. But be quick! It must be ready in an hour.” Thus did the master of the house call to his wife through the window as he walked past; and then he walked on with his friend. The housewife thought to herself: “My husband is curt today. That isn’t his usual manner. But God knows what thoughts of a vexing kind are occupying his head! Perhaps he drank a glass too many at his friend’s this lunchtime. Well, be it what it will! He shall find his table laid.” And she laid the baby in the cradle and betook herself to the kitchen to cook a soup and prepare a pancake, her husband’s favourite dish.

The two friends had in the meantime gone away to digest the vexation they had suffered at midday. The master of the house had dined at his friend’s. The food would have been good, and the wine not bad; but the wife, whom this invitation displeased, made so sour a face that everything she served up tasted of vinegar. Consequently, the two of them went away out of humour; and our friend said, “If you’ll make do with a little, then dine at my house this evening. You’ll at least see a cheerful face and hear friendly words from my wife, however inopportune the coming of a guest may be to her.”

The appointed hour had passed in the meantime. The wife laid the table. The baby became restless. She put him on the table and let him have the shining spoon so he could play with it. Then she went back into the kitchen to serve the soup. The men were talking before the front door now. Then, as she laid down the soup and removed the baby, she noticed that he

had left something behind on the table which did not belong there. The men now opened the parlour door and entered. But she had presence of mind enough, and putting the candlestick over the thing, she received the men with friendly demeanour. The master of the house asked in dissembled earnest: Whether the meal were ready, and whether there were enough there? The wife said: More than enough, she thought. After the soup had been taken, she served the pancake, her husband's favourite dish. But he scolded her, saying: That was an everyday food, and no dish for a guest. But the guest ate it with relish, more to oblige the friendly wife than on account of hunger. And the pancake did taste good. Afterwards she brought ham, and smoked tongue, and cold roasts and cheese. The man pulled a sulky face at everything, and in the end he asked: If she had nothing more than this? "Yes, what more would you like, my heart?" the wife asked. "A turd," said the husband. "Here you have it, my love!" the wife said very cheerfully, and lifted the candlestick away. The friends laughed out loud when they saw this seasonal gift. "Now you'll need to take the baby from me," said the wife, "so I can get rid of that thing there." And now she told them how it had happened. And the master of the house then told her how he had come upon the idea of ordering a supper. And the friend was full of praise for her goodness and kindness and obligingness. So the three of them sat together in friendly conversation until late into the night. Then the master of the house accompanied his friend home. There, they perceived that the friend's wife was still up, and was sitting with a company of female neighbours and gossips over tea and punch and wine; and there was the buzz of chatter and a great deal of laughter. The two friends took their leave

of one another, each of them thinking his own thoughts.

Of a Jealous Man

A wise and erudite man has written: He is guarding grasshoppers in the wagon-basket and pouring water into the well who guards his wife so that she remain pious and faithful.¹⁶ By this, he would have it understood that such a guard is entirely unnecessary and vain; unnecessary for the good wives, and vain for the bad ones. Here is a good comic tale on this matter.

Some time ago, there was one such jealous husband in a small town, and he had a very pretty wife. He had a great deal of anxiety on her account, and he could not bear other men, or even any of his associates, talking with her and being in high spirits. He also only rarely, and unwillingly, let her join the other neighbours when they sat out in the alley in summertime. And they almost never went to weddings or other amusements. The fantasist was perpetually afraid that she might leave him for love. Some jesters and mockers were quick to perceive this, and so they walked by the house where the wife lived all the more often. And when the good woman sat with her neighbours, they were there too, merrily joking and bantering with them. This and the like almost drove the noodlehead out of his wits. But he would not let this show to his wife, for it was not unknown to him that: if you venture to dissuade or forbid a woman from doing something, you simply make her desire it. The woman, however, who well perceived how he was minded from all of his behaviour, cared about it the less, the more time went

¹⁶ Sebastian Brant, *Ship of Fools* (1494), XXXII 'Of Guarding Wives.'

by; and she diverted herself with everyone all the more openly and freely. Now when the stupid zealot noticed this, he thought of means and ways by which the mischief could be remedied. Quickly taking a resolve, he bought a house in another small town, hurriedly collected his belongings, loaded them on carts and wagons, and made preparations to depart. The good wife, who had more sense than her husband, let the matter be and acted as if it were quite to her liking; for thus was she able to learn from her husband, in a respectable manner, the reason for his removal. He confessed it to her, saying: How very odious it was to him to have such fellows around his house every day; and although he neither suspected nor believed any evil of her, nevertheless, he did not want to see any; there was no other reason at all for his moving away than this particular one. The wife let these words sink in. Now when they were travelling away from the small town with their household goods, and had come far out into open country, the wife leaps from the wagon and says, "Alas, Hans! I've left the most necessary thing of all behind. Stop a little!" The man asks what it is that she has forgotten. "Well," she says, "I haven't brought any fire with me." "You great fool," he says, "do you think we're moving to a place with no fire? You'll find fire, wood and straw there as soon as we arrive." "If that's so," says the woman, "then you're far more foolish than I am. If we find fire there, then we'll doubtless also find such people who will mark your jealousy and go past your house to defy and mock you. Therefore, my advice would be that you let us remain in our home, and in the place where the people know us, and we know the people." So the fool did some soul-searching, saw that his wife's advice was good, and returned to his old lodging. And from that time

on, he let go of his jealousy and became a worthy husband.

The Legend of the Knight, Saint George

In the Kingdom of Libya there lies a city called Selene. Not far from the gate is a large lake, and the sole approach to the city and to the rest of the country lies between this lake and the mountains that flank it. Now it happened that at one time a dreadful lindworm took its residence in the lake and killed and devoured everyone who travelled that road. And when it lacked food, it dragged itself up to the walls of Selene and blew its poisonous breath into the city. This was the work of the old Enemy, Satan, so that the glad tidings of Christianity might not enter this land; and it happened with God's permission, and as punishment, because the inhabitants of the city and the entire land worshipped the most abominable idols, even offering them human sacrifice. To keep the lindworm away from the city, the inhabitants decided to bring two sheep to the shore of the lake for its nourishment every day; and when the number of sheep was diminishing by the day, they held counsel and agreed to give the worm only one sheep a day, and a child in addition to the sheep; and the child on whom the lot fell was to be given up. Then it happened that the lot fell at last on the King's only and matchless daughter. The King took this very badly and said to the people: "Take all my gold and silver and half of my kingdom, and leave me my daughter." But the people grew angry and replied: "You yourself, King, ordered this decree; so it is only fitting that you too obey it. We loved our sons and daughters too, but we gave them up all the same, as the gods ordained their fate. Do what the law demands, or we'll burn you

and your house with fire.” Whether the King wished to or no, he had to hand over his child. His daughter donned royal garments, and adorned herself with pearls and the most exquisite jewellery. Then she fell at her father’s feet and asked for his blessing. The father threw his arms around her neck with a thousand tears. “Woe is me,” he cried, “my beloved child! Is it for such a cruel destiny that you have grown so tall and beautiful? Is this the wedding I have prepared for you? Is that the bridegroom for whom you have been saved? Must I give my only child to the dragon to feast on? I wish by the gods I had died rather than have to live through such heartbreak.” The pious daughter comforted her father, saying: “Be at peace, dear father. Am I not dying for your good and that of the Kingdom?” The father hereupon gave her his blessing, after which she broke from his embrace, walked confidently out the city gates, and betook herself to the lake strand. The people watched from a distance.

Now while the maiden weepingly awaited the dragon’s arrival, divine providence happened to send a stately knight dashing her way on a snow-white steed; his shield was adorned with a blood-red cross, and a golden dove hovered with outspread wings over his helmet. The knight approached the maiden, dismounted, walked up to her with aristocratic grace, and said: “I implore you, noble lady, to discover to me the reason why you are waiting here so woefully.” She answered: “Gallant knight, seat yourself hurriedly back on your horse, and flee from here, so you do not die an ignominious death.” The knight said: “Have no concern on my behalf; only discover to me the cause of your sorrow.” The maiden replied: “I see that you are of a noble disposition. And for that very reason, you should not

perish with me. I beg you, flee with all haste." The knight said: "I will not stir from this spot until I have learned what ails you, and how I may be of service to you." The maiden thereupon discovering the whole course of events to him, he said: "Be of good heart! With God's help, I shall be sure to overcome the lindworm." "Oh no," cried the maiden, "noble knight, you would perish, without having saved me; so I beg you, flee, and let me die alone." While she was speaking, the water stirred, and the dragon raised its terrible head out of the middle of the eddy. When the maiden caught sight of the dragon, she trembled all over. But Saint George swiftly leapt onto his steed, crossed himself, and rode at the dragon. It rushed at him with fury in its movements. Saint George commended his soul to God, couched his lance, and struck the worm in its neck so hard and forcefully that it crashed to the ground on the instant. The knight said to the maiden: "Come over here quickly, throw your girdle around the dragon's neck, and do not be afraid." The maiden did as the knight had bidden her. She placed her girdle around the monster's neck, and the dragon followed her like a tame little dog.

When the people watching realised that these two were coming their way with the dragon, they fled into the mountains and forests, crying out: "Let us flee, or we shall all die." But the knight signalled to them and said: "Do not fear. God has sent me to you to free you from the dragon. Believe in Christ, and I shall kill the dragon." Now when the King and the people declared that they would happily believe, the knight drew his sword, killed the dragon, and commanded that it be taken out of the city; four pair of oxen were barely able to drag the monster into open country, where it was

burned with fire. On this day, more than twenty thousand people were baptised, not counting women and children. The King was delighted to have his daughter back alive, and he said to Saint George: "You have done us great good and given us peace of heart, so we shall do your will." And he would have given him much gold and silver from the treasury. Then Saint George said: "If you would give money and possessions to me, then give them to the poor instead; thus shall you serve God." The King then ordered a beautiful cathedral to be built in honour of Our Lady, and he had an altar made in the cathedral which honoured St. George also. Then God gave a great sign in honour of His dear mother: for a spring of clear water spouted from the altar, and this water had the power of healing any sick person who drank of it. The Christian faith was greatly fortified among the people by this sign, and they diligently retained all that Saint George taught them. And they had him very dear and held him in the highest esteem. This troubled the saintly knight, and he decided not to stay there any longer. So he took his leave of the King and his daughter and departed that place.

Now this knight, Saint George, was a Margrave of Palestine and the son of Christian parents. He had inherited great estates from them; but he had made over his entire inheritance to his brother and passed into foreign lands to fight the enemies of Jesus Christ and spread the Church of God over Earth. Many a land had he seen, many a kingdom had he conquered; and the world rang from one end to the other with the fame of his deeds. After he had slain the dragon at Selene, he headed at last for the Court, which was the seat of the heathen abomination, and he resolved to give

there, as it were, the coup de grace to unbelief, with the grace of God. The Emperor was just then holding a major tournament before the city, and many kings and princes and counts were assembled in camp and diverting themselves with exercises in arms and other knightly pastimes. The knight George pitched his tent beside the camp and hung his shield with the red cross in the field. But nobody knew this knight. Now when the Emperor heard that a Christian knight had arrived, he had it proclaimed: If any man here believes in Christ and in His mother, let him say so publicly, and he will suffer sorely for it. – Then the knight George went before the Emperor and said: “Lord, I come here at your mercy, so grant that I might bear myself as a knight.” The Emperor said: “So be it.” Then Saint George walked into the lists before all the lords there present, and he said: “If any man is an enemy to Christ and His mother, I will fight him. For I am a Christian. Will anyone contest me for this?” Then the Emperor said: “Had the Margrave of Palestine uttered those words, they would be bold enough.” The knight said: “I am the Margrave of Palestine.” Then the Emperor leapt out of his seat and received the knight with courtesy; for he hoped to bring him away from his belief. He invited him to live in his palace and promised to endow him with lands and servants and to treat him like his own son; but he must renounce his god and make a sacrifice to the god of the Emperor and the Empire. Saint George asked: “And who is your god?” The Emperor said: “Apollo, who is a Sun-god.” The knight replied: “The Sun is worthy of every honour; but now it is eventide, and it shines no more. Give me grace until tomorrow, then I shall see what I have to do.”

That night, the knight Saint George put up at a poor widow's. When

he walked into her shack and asked for lodging, the woman fell at his feet – for he appeared to her like a god – and she said: “Oh, lord! How may you take lodging with a poor widow? This hut will not shelter you well. Also, I have no bread to give you. And, wish as I might with all my heart to be of service to you, yet I could not be; for look, this little boy of mine has been blind from birth and his whole body is paralysed, and I must nurse him by day and by night.” Saint George said: “Be comforted! To the God I believe in, no thing is impossible. Will you believe in Christ if He cures your little boy through me, His servant?” The widow said: “Oh yes, lord!” The knight kissed the child, and he was at once healed of all his infirmities. Filled with delight, the mother took her child, ran out of the hut, showed him to all her neighbours, and told them what great mercy had come to her lot. When she returned, bringing bread and wine for her guest, an even greater miracle was revealed to her eyes. The wooden pillar that supported the hut had become a green tree, which had grown high above the house; the boughs spread out and bore lovely green leaves, and from these leaves, flowers sprang up; the tree also covered the house completely with its branches, and in these branches there sat many thousands of birds singing most delightfully, and the flowers burst open and smelt like real roses and violets. The widow was astonished at this sight. “What is this?” she asked, “outside, snow lies before every door, and here inside it’s a day in May.” The knight spoke: “Let us eat, for I am hungry.” The woman was about to lay the table. Behold – there was a ruby table under the tree, and a tablecloth, as if woven from lilies, was spread over it. In the meantime, the blossoms had borne fruit, the fruit had ripened, and it fell upon the table. The taste of the

apples was remarkable; one needed only to crave a dish of any kind whatsoever and they immediately had that taste. And so Saint George and the widow ate together with the little boy, and they were happy in the Lord. By this time, the report of the miracle that had happened in the widow's house had spread throughout the city and reached the Imperial Palace. The Emperor's wife set out at once with her ladies-in-waiting to take a look at the miracle. And as she gazed at it in wonder, she came to be in the Spirit, and she said: "Noble knight, I believe in Jesus Christ, and I ask you to let me partake of holy baptism." When she had spoken these words, a light cloud of dew floated in through the window and hung over the Empress's head. Saint George recognised the will of God in this. And while he spoke the words of blessing, the cloud lowered itself onto the Empress, and she was baptised in the cloud. After the baptism was completed, the Empress parted from that place in delight. The knight repaired to rest.

On the following day, the Emperor assembled all the princes and grandees of his court that they might witness the foreign knight sacrificing to his god. And he had the Margrave of Palestine summoned to his presence, sending a large escort of knights to bring him thither. A throng of people conducted him to the Emperor's Palace. But when they arrived at the market, St. George saw a stone coffin there; the coffin was firmly sealed, and on the lid were engraved these words: Whoever touches me, be it man or woman, will die. – Saint George asked what the story behind the coffin was. "We do not know," said the bystanders; for no one had yet dared to inspect its contents on account of the menacing inscription. The knight

Saint George approached it and knocked on the lid of the coffin; the lid instantly burst asunder and the coffin was seen to be full of human bones. Then Saint George said to the crowd who accompanied him: "You have seen how Nature has borne witness to the might of Him whom I serve and whom I worship; now Death also may bear witness to Christ, who is lord over life and death." And he walked to the coffin and said in a loud voice: "I command you, you dry bones, in the name of Him who created and redeemed you, to come back to life and walk out of the coffin." Immediately there was a commotion inside the coffin; the bones came back to life, and many men walked out, who immediately fell at the knight's feet and craved baptism. The knight drew a cross on the ground with his sword, and a fountain instantly sprang up on the spot. In this fountain he baptised the men in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Afterwards he said to them: "You are free and quit of Hell. Now make haste and bed yourselves back down in the coffin, and enter into Paradise, and greet my dear mother Alexandra for me, as well as the Virgin Mary and the Lord Jesus." The men readily climbed back into the coffin. It closed over them and the lid was whole and intact as before. This great miracle once more made countless numbers into believers in their hearts, but they concealed this for fear of the Emperor.

Now when the knight Saint George entered the palace and walked into the hall where the Emperor, the princes and the grandees were assembled, the Emperor said to him: "Well now, brave knight, yesterday you promised to sacrifice to our god. Look at how delightfully the sun is shining. Now do as you have promised." Saint George replied: "The sun is

worthy of every honour, and worthy of even greater honours is He who created it. But where is the idol for whom you exact a sacrifice of me?" The Emperor replied: "He stands outside in his temple." The knight said: "He may make his way here, if I am to sacrifice to him." The Emperor said: "Come, we shall go to him." Saint George replied: "I am not in the humour to go to him. If we are to pay him honour, he might make his way to us." Now among the crowd of spectators there was the widow talong with her little son, whom he had healed. Saint George walked towards her and said to the boy, while giving him a rod: "Make haste to the Temple of Apollo and tell the idol: The knight Saint George commands him to follow you forthwith; if he refuses this, then strike him with the rod, and drive him before you until you have brought him to us." The boy said: "It shall be done as you have ordered," and took the rod and left. He was wearing a pretty white tunic, and a wreath bedecked his forehead. Having arrived at the temple without mishap, he stepped before the idol and said: "The knight Saint George commands you, in the name of Almighty God, to come to him in the Emperor's Hall directly." He repeated these words three times, and as the idol still refused to stir, he struck it with the rod, and in this way drove it before him, through the heart of the city, into the Imperial Palace. When Saing George saw the idol coming, he said in a loud voice to the Emperor and those around him: "Because you believe neither my words nor the wonders I work with the power of the only God, you shall hear evidence from the very mouth of him you worship as your god, the all-seeing one. And he turned to the idol: "I conjure you," he said, "to declare who you are." The idol began to bellow horribly, then he said: "Christ is the true God and

the Son of the Living God. I and my brothers were expelled from Heaven into the abyss. Therefore we seek to make people apostate from God, and tempt them to worship us, and cause them to suffer everlasting fire.” Then the knight said: “Begone to the abyss, Accursed One.” Immediately the devil disappeared, and the statue burst into numberless small pieces.

When the Emperor saw that his idol had been disgraced and even destroyed, he flew into a towering rage and ordered the knight to be seized. He had a wheel prepared which was fitted with many two-edged swords on both the inside and the outside, and had the knight’s limbs plaited around its spokes. But when the wheel began to turn, it flew apart with great violence, bringing harm to many heathens, while the knight lay on the ground uninjured. The tyrant then had a cauldron filled with molten lead and the martyr thrown into it; but the red-hot lead flowed over his limbs like a refreshing spring water. The Emperor had recourse to the sorcerers, who prepared one of the deadliest drinks from viper’s venom and hemlock-juice; but Saint George, after taking the goblet, made the sign of the cross over it and drank it empty; and now that the poison had done him no harm, the sorcerers acknowledged themselves vanquished, and they embraced the Christian faith. The Emperor at once ordered them to be executed. To his wife he said: “I shall die of vexation unless I succeed in overcoming the blasphemer.” The Empress replied: “Stop your raging, tyrant. Don’t you see that the knight is too powerful for you, and that the power of Jesus Christ works through him?” When the Emperor heard that his wife also had become a Christian, he frothed at the mouth with fury and ordered her to be scourged until such time as she gave up the ghost. As for Saint George, he

had him dragged through every street in the city; after which he had the martyr's head cut off in his presence. But while he was returning to his palace from the place of execution, fire fell from Heaven and consumed him and his servants.

On Giving Advice

Take heed that you do not fare as the sparrow, who advised other birds but could not advise himself or protect himself from danger. It so happened that some woodpigeons had a nest with their chicks up a tall tree when the fox came along and threatened to climb up and take the chicks with the nest if they did not throw one chick down to him. The pigeons were shocked and dreadfully afraid. In the end, they threw a chick down to him; the fox took it and moved away. But once he was gone, the sparrow taught and instructed the woodpigeons: When he came again, they should give him nothing, but say they were in their nest, and if he were bold enough, he should climb up. So when the fox came back, they would not give him anything more. The fox realised at once that the sparrow, who was sitting on a nearby thorny hedge, had warned them. The fox turned to him and looked to see how he might circumvent him with cunning. He said: "What a free creature a bird is, he can fly away wherever he will, and is everywhere safe from the hunter. But it is hard that you cannot protect yourself from cold and wind in winter." Then the sparrow said very boastfully: "Oh, the wind does not harm us, for when it blows from the right side, we put our head under our left wing; but if it blows from the left side, we put our head under our right wing; and in this way we can save ourselves from all winds

and frosts. Now as he was chattering at some length, the fox said: "You're sitting too high up; I can't understand you, for I don't hear very well"; and he thus persuaded the sparrow to sit lower down. Then the fox asked him: So what did he do when the wind blew from the front? Then the sparrow thrust its head between its legs, into its feathers, wishing to show him. The fox, not letting the grass grow under his feet, snatched the sparrow and ate him up. And so the sparrow perished, he who had advised others but could not advise himself.

The Presents

Once upon a time there was a King who had an only daughter. Now many suitors came from every land and asked for the Princess's hand in marriage; for she was rich and beautiful. But she had set the condition that she would have to husband only that man who had defeated her in a race; while he who was defeated by her would be punished with the loss of his life. So most of them abandoned their suit; for the Princess ran so swiftly that she could catch up with a deer in open country. Others, who made the attempt and took up the wager, had to pay for it with their lives. Now there lived, not far from the Court, a poor man, and he was taken with the urge to woo the beautiful and rich Princess and to race against her. But he had often heard that a proper suitor had to bring presents along for the future bride; and as he was without means, but was skilled in every handiwork, so he first wove a lovely wreath of flowers; then he wove an elaborate girdle of damask; finally, he knitted a silk purse, and put in it the few coins he possessed, which he had polished very nicely so that they shone and

glittered quite beautifully. With these presents he now went to Court and announced himself as one who wished to woo the Princess. When the Princess saw the poor man, she was downright angry at his presumption; but true to her given word, she agreed forthwith to a race with him. The poor man really exerted himself, but he was left behind right from the beginning. Then he threw the wreath onto the road before the Princess, and she – maidens taking pleasure in flowers – immediately picked it up, placed it on her head, and complacently looked at herself in the stream that flowed past. Meanwhile the man overtook the Princess; but the moment she perceived this, she ran after him with fleet foot, and when she had caught up with him she gave him a slap in the face and said: “Take that first of all, for your impudence in presuming to woo a Princess.” Then she ran away and left the man far behind again. But he presently threw the beautifully woven damask girdle in front of her, and when the Princess caught sight of this, she could not resist the desire to pick it up; after keenly inspecting the masterly weaving, she tied the girdle around her waist to see how it suited her. In the meantime, the man had gained the lead and was a good distance ahead; but when the Princess realised this, she doubled her pace and soon caught up with the runner. She gave him another slap in the face, and ran on, laughing derisively. She was now near to the finishing-line, while the man followed, panting with effort – when he threw the open purse onto the road in front of her, so that the glittering coins fell and scattered all around. He knew that maidens take particular delight in all that glitters; and indeed, it so happened that the Princess picked up the purse at once, and gathered the lovely coins, and regarded every one with satisfaction. While

she was occupied with this, the man had, unperceived by her, taken the lead and reached the finishing-line. So the Princess had to admit defeat, and she became the poor man's wife.

Dearest! The Princess is every maiden; the poor man is every man. The race signifies the courtship; the swiftness indicates the aloofness of maidens; the slap in the face is their sulky humour; finally, the punishment with death the uttered rejection, on account of which many a young man has fallen into despair. A wise man will therefore take refuge in presents; for maidens love presents, such as earrings, necklaces, and shawls. Such things prove to be real magical charms, and there is no example of a man not having carried off the victory with them.

Saint Peter with the Fiddle

Once when Our Lord was travelling through the land with Saint Peter, their way brought them before an inn where a wedding was being celebrated. Now St. Peter, hearing the great merriment inside, felt a craving to stop in, and he told this to the Lord. But He said: "It does not become you; he that makes himself a sheep shall be eaten by wolves."¹⁷ However, Petrus would not give up his desire, but entered the house against the Lord's warning. Now when he walked into the parlour and the guests looked him all over, one of them said: "Hooray! Now we have a fiddler too." And turning to Petrus, he said: "Fiddler, strike up!" You see, this guest had spotted a fiddle on his back, which was, however, only a painted one – the Lord having secretly arranged this. Petrus, on hearing the companion's

¹⁷ Literally: 'Who mixes himself with the bran will be eaten by pigs.' 'Daub yourself with honey, and you'll never want flies' is one of several synonymous proverbs.

words, objected: That he was no fiddler and also had no desire to play; he wanted to have a sip and a bite as a friendly guest. The companion, infuriated at this, said: "Then why are you carrying a fiddle on your back if you're not a fiddler and don't want to play? Are we not respectable enough people for you?" Petrus also now lost his patience, and he brashly said: If he had a fiddle, he would hit him over the head with the bow. After these words were uttered, the half-drunken companion seized him and showed him the door. Petrus having thus paid for his desire, he walked down the road and very soon met the Lord, who, resting under palm trees, was awaiting him. Petrus now related how he had fared; whereupon the Lord replied: "He that will not hear must feel."¹⁸

Our Lord's Ape

When God the Lord had created mankind in His image, that He be known and worshipped on Earth: then, as an old legend tells, Satan, the Adversary of God, also resolved to create a being in his image that would worship him and serve him. And he took a lump of clay and kneaded it into a thing that was as follows. Its head quite resembled a human head, and it seemed that the creature would be able to equal mankind in bearing and behaviour. But its skull was so small and pointed that there was room inside for only a very little brain, and its mouth protruded, like a snout, with voracious teeth; and the being had very many, and long, fingers, more for taking than for giving; and it could walk on its four hands like the beasts; and, instead of fine, smooth skin, its body was covered with a mangy fur,

¹⁸ i.e. will have to learn the hard way.

and only the ugliest part, the rump, remained naked. Last of all, after the form was complete, Satan breathed his breath into the creature and said: “Fiat!”¹⁹ and – the Ape was created. Satan now expected that the creature would worship him forthwith, as Man did his creator. But the ape bared its teeth at him, and turned its back on him, and climbed up the nearest tree to apply itself to the food there.

This story is droll, but also edifying. For in it we can observe that and how, alas! man himself often takes on the nature of our Lord’s ape – namely, when he disfigures the image of God in himself into an image of Satan, one full of malice, hatred and envy, and every sensual desire.

Marriages are Made in Heaven

When the Lord still walked the Earth, He went one day with His disciples over a long and broad heath; and they lost their way. Now it was a sultry summer’s day; and there was nobody going that road for them to ask. Finally, St. Peter saw a man lying under a tree, asleep. He went up to him and asked for the right way. But the other appeared reluctant to answer, and he was so lazy that he did not even open his mouth, but merely stretched out his right foot, like a milestone its arm, and St. Peter had to guess what he meant thereby. So the Lord and His disciples continued down the road. A while later, St. Peter saw a maid, at the side of the road, hard at work mowing what little grass grew on the heath. St. Peter called to the maid; she immediately left her work and came over; and when she was asked the right way, she not only readily pointed it out, but even went along

¹⁹ (Latin) “Let it be done!” / “Let it be made!”

with them for a good stretch until they could no longer go astray; then she took her leave and returned to her work. St. Peter was highly surprised at this readiness to help and he said to the Lord: He should grant the honest maid a favour and bring a worthy husband to her. The Lord said: He intended to do that; and that lazy man was the very husband the maid would receive. This incensed St. Peter, and he presumed to censure the Lord. But the Lord said, in His mildness: "Peter, you do not understand what lies in the acts of divine providence. These two belong together always; for the industrious wife will stop the lazy husband from going to utter ruin, and the lazy one will encourage the industrious one to work and to patience and piety. And so each will be helped by the other, at all times."

The Miracles

Two men of the parish had private conversations about the confusions and delusions of their time. One of them, a man in robust years, prudent and industrious in every regard, but who saw himself hampered in every activity, and disappointed in his best expectations, looked at the present with sorrow and into the near and distant future without hope. He complained of this to his neighbour, an aged, much-tried man, who had attained to a hard-fought peace, security, and clarity in heart and mind after the manifold experiences of a long life, as we perceive them in the mirror of our inner self, in the sky, when after days of thunderstorms it regains its brightness and looks down, clear and mild, on the Earth. "The terrible thought," said the first man, "presses on me more with every day that the world had been wrenched out of its fundament and, as a ball for play,

exposed to the mercy of the evil powers, whom a wrathful and punishing God has let loose to chastise a depraved generation. Wherever we turn our eyes, we see only the derangement and perversion of human relations. Old thrones have collapsed, which had seemed to be built on fastnesses of granite; new ones rise up on hills of sand, which the wind of the morrow will blow away. Peoples are, and – are no more; for the tenets and rights of the fathers were discarded, and new ones have crept and crowded in, which bear their own dissolution even as they arise. Through those principles which are being contended for, the character, the constitution, and the substance of the life of the people are laid bare; and while one avers to be always seeking only the Best, he completely loses the Good. And all their deeds, doings and dealings have only the earthly, the temporal in view, and self-interest rules the world. What was previously regarded as the beginning of wisdom, and as the end of all life and all endeavour, and as the centre to which the weal and woe of whole peoples as well as of individuals attached and held themselves – the Eternal Divine – it has disappeared from public life, from the profane marketplace, and truth, right, and justice with it. And those few who yet had their hearts opened and devoted to holiness fled with their secret to take refuge from the hurly-burly of the marketplace, and remain lonely and silent; for their voices, like the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, would only die away in vain in the ears and hearts of a foolish generation. O friend!” concluded the man, deeply moved, “who shall bring order and light and peace into these confusions and delusions? Unless a miracle happens here, the dissolution of the world in blood and fire is nigh.”

His neighbour looked at him with a soft smile, and grasping his hand, he said in a tone of assurance and belief: "In truth! Miracles still happen, and even if we cannot see them with our eyes, yet they happen all the same – as the light penetrates the night of clouds and the air the sealed abyss, though we do not perceive the source from which they stream. Miracles still happen! Only recently have I seen two of them which gave me a trust as great as the astonishment they caused me. It was in a night when I could not sleep for care, so I walked out into the open, and then I caught sight of a high, wide, immeasurable vault over my head, and innumerable stars twinkled on its roof, and the slumbering Earth reposed in safety, like a human being, under the protecting cover. Now, nowhere could I see pillars on which the Master had set the vault, and nevertheless the sky did not cave in, and it stood firm, without those pillars. Then I said to myself: Should we poor people quiver and quake, fearing the collapse and fall of the heavens because we neither grasp nor see the supports that hold it up? And should it not suffice us to know that God's marvellous hand formed the structure, and that this same hand holds and maintains it securely suspended? And I went back into my hut, my mind at rest, and, in this reassurance, gave myself up to restful slumber, as I knew that a Watchman is watching over the worlds, and over the huts of men.

"And another time, on a day when I was oppressed with heavy misery, I looked out of the window, and there I saw great, thick clouds floating overhead, and they swept along like ocean waves driven before a storm, and the waters threatened to cascade down and all but drown the globe. But the rain flowed down very softly, and refreshed the fields, the

forests, and the meadows; and the vault of the Heavens moved on, to spread its blessing over more of the lands of mankind. Then I said to myself: Where then is the ground on which the clouds rested or had their base? Or where the tubs in which the waters were contained? And whose hand directs these mighty masses through the skies, and whose arm props up the tall, heavy columns of water, so their full weight does not crash down over us all at once? And behold! While I was asking thus, a shining rainbow took shape in the distance, in the midst of the night of clouds, and I immediately recognised it as that sign which God set for our fathers to be a covenant between Him and us, that he never would extirpate the human race from Earth.

“Since those days, when I had those visions, no doubt can creep into my mind any longer, and every sorrow disappears before the ray of hope that has lighted my inmost being.”

The friend understood and esteemed these words of his friend. And he complained no more about the confusions and delusions of the time; but he did, following the other’s wise counsel, bestow all the more care on the narrower circle of his family and the parish, that they might be as well protected as possible against the turbulence of destiny, which seemed to be imperilling populations and lands.

The Tale of the Everlasting Jew²⁰

Chapter the First

When the Lord Jesus – praised be His name! – was bearing his heavy cross through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha, he grew weary and faint from the weight of the burden; and to rest awhile, he wished to sit down on a bench before the house of Ahasverus, a Jew from the tribe of Naphtali. But this man prevented him, saying that an unbeliever and Sabbath-breaker and corrupter of the people would keep no company with him, or with anything of his. Then the Lord looked at him with the wrathful look of the Judge and said, “Ahasverus, because you will grant no rest to the Son of Man, so no rest will be granted you henceforth, and you shall wander and wander until the time that I come again.” With these words, the Lord passed on, and the sergeants-at-law who led him forced one Simeon of Cyrene to help him carry the cross. Ahasverus followed the procession at a distance, and it seemed to him that he heard a voice saying, “And even if this man had been an unbeliever and a sabbath-breaker and a corrupter of the people, he is now suffering punishment for his misdeed, and you should not have refused him that act of kindness.” But he thought to himself: “How did he deserve my taking pity on him? Why, did he not place a curse on me?” And he continued to follow the procession, and stood not far from the hill of Golgotha where the Lord was nailed to the Cross, and raised on the Cross. And he saw the mother of the crucified one, and other devout women and many good men, mourning and weeping round the dying man, and a voice said, plain for him to hear: “Truly, this man is righteous.” But he

²⁰ This appeared at the beginning of Volume I, before the ‘Amusing and Edifying Stories.’ A version of the Dr. Faustus legend occupied the same position in Volume II.

thought to himself: "If this man were righteous before God, and a benefactor of the people, why did he not leave revenge to God instead of laying a curse and punishment on me?" And at the ninth hour the Lord Jesus bowed his head and expired. And the Sun and the Moon were covered in darkness, the Earth shook, the dead rose up out of their graves, and the veil of the Temple was rent in the midst. Then Ahasverus blanched, and terror flashed through his limbs and made him tremble, and a terrible thought arose from the depths of his soul, and now he believed; and he cried, "Truly, God's curse has fallen upon me." And despairing of mercy, he ran from that place and was seen no more near the City of God.

Chapter the Second

When the fiftieth year after our salvation came round, a strange, savage man crept out of a cave in Lebanon. A disciple of the Lord, who was passing by that road, saw him. Long hair covered his face and breast; tattered clothes hung on his body; his head and feet were bare; and, as he stepped out of the cave, he clenched his fists and pounded them violently against his breast, making a sound like metal being beaten; and the man moaned and groaned and cried, "Oh! Not be able to die! Not be able to die!" Then he looked with agitated eyes at the region around, which was beautifully bedecked, like a bride, in vernal attire, and everywhere there was merriment and loud jubilation, as at a wedding feast. The poor man, however, did not rejoice, but moaned and groaned once more and cried, "Not be able to die! Oh! And not want to live!" Then he tottered a few steps further forward and now stood before the Lord's disciple, who addressed

him with the Christian's greeting, "Praise be to Jesus Christ!" The stranger looked at him with staring eyes and, menacingly raising his fist, he cried, "Damned!" so that the mountain echoed with the appalling word. The disciple turned away from him, aghast, and the stranger broke out into an abominable sneering laugh, as if Hell were laughing from him!

It was Ahasverus, the Wandering Jew. Since that time when, like Cain from the countenance of God, he had stolen away from the holy Place of Skulls,²¹ he had stayed in the ravines and caves of Lebanon; he did not eat or drink, and yet continued to live; he tormented and agonised himself, and banged his head against the rocks, and flung himself into the abyss, and yet he could not die; wishing to at least extinguish the memory of his earlier life, he fled the world and men, but his misdeed ever hovered in his remembrance, and he felt that he must live; he must live to be tormented and punished. And the many years and the long days had flowed away from him in anxiety and despair; and he saw no end before him, no release. The unfortunate man stood alone in God's wide world, and he saw the pious flee from him as from one stricken with plague, as from Cain, marked by God. Then he laughed, all scorn and derision, and cried, "Not be able to die? Very well! Then I shall *live* – to defy the Nazarene!" And he ran from that place like a startled deer struck by the hunter's arrow.

Chapter the Third

In Rome, the city which ruled the entire world at that time, an innumerable crowd of people had assembled to watch the bloody games

²¹ Golgotha, or Mt. Calvary, a hill that resembles a skull.

which the Emperor was giving to celebration his accession to the throne. Among the hundred, the thousand fighters who entered the field of battle, and fought with each other to the death, there was one who drew the eyes of very spectator to him. Although he was only of middling growth, and no experienced swordsman, as could clearly be seen, yet he overcame all of his opponents, and all their blows and dagger-thrusts bounced off his body as though he were made of pure bronze. Thus was he at last led in triumph into the Emperor's palace, where he was supplied with every conceivable kind of sumptuous apparel and aliment. But Ahasverus – for such was the invincible swordsman – could derive no pleasure from these splendours. For, like a man who has a blemish in his eye and so sees the black spot always, even on the most beautiful object, wherever he may turn his gaze: so did he ever see his misdeed before him, and he could take no joy of his life. And when three days had passed, this drove him out of Rome, whether he wished it or no. Now he wandered through Italy from place to place for a good many years; he saw cities and people, but their bustle and hurly-burly did not please him; he sought pleasure everywhere, but it seemed to him that its countenance, when he observed it more nearly, changed into a hideous form; he drank in delights like water, but the remembrance of his trespass and of his punishment mixed with every pleasure like gall, and he was unhappy in the midst of happiness.

Then one day, there came to his ears the rumour that Jerusalem was going to be besieged by the Romans; and thinking of the Holy City and of the graves of his fathers, he resolved to go thither and fight and die for the law. “And die?” a voice inside him cried. But he cherished the hope that

Judaea would be victorious over heathens and Christians, and with the annihilation of Him whom he did not dare to name, that magic in which he was ensnared would also disappear.

Fourth Chapter

In Jerusalem, the Holy City, there was misery, distress, and wretchedness, such as never before had been heard, and never again will be heard. For she had been rejected by the Lord ever since she shed the blood of the Righteous One. The heathens had already been beleaguering the city for two years, and were pressing it ever more hardly; and they threw down its walls, and killed its people, the Chosen Ones, whom the Lord had rejected. And there were cries of woe and loud wails in the houses and in the alleys; and hunger raged so fiercely in their entrails that the mother slaughtered her own child and devoured it. Ahasverus saw this misery, but it did not move his heart. He saw thousands dropping down dead to his left, and thousands to his right, but he strode past the slain, and between the enemy's swords, like a spirit that belongs neither to life nor to death. He sought death and found it not; he sought to liberate himself from life, and he could not fling it from him; for it would itself round him like a snake, and he felt it only from the pain of its venomous bite. Now when the time of revenge was completed, and the heathens had penetrated into the heart of the city, and set fire to the Holy of Holies, the Temple, so that it was consumed; and now, when Ahasverus stood on the ruins of the incinerated city, between hills of the corpses of his slain brothers: he tore out his hair, and he wailed and swore, that he alone must be left over, in the generation devastation,

and that he could not die! ... And when the heathen soldiers seized and bound him, he let himself be led away without offering resistance; and thus was he, besides some thousands who had survived the bloodbath, dragged a prisoner to Rome.

Chapter the Fifth

Ahasverus now lived as a slave in Rome for several years, and he was put to the hardest jobs and the meanest duties. But he did and endured everything as though it did not concern him; as joy had before, so now sorrow made no impression on him; for he knew no other unhappiness than life, and he desired no other happiness than death. He defied the fate that pursued him, and nothing on Earth touched him any more save the thought of his trespass and punishment. He was like a man who lies ill with catalepsy: he looks as if he does not see or hear, and feels no pain other than the pain of existence and this terrible condition of ostensible life and apparent death.

At that time, a cruel persecution of Christians broke out in Rome, and judges and executioners concocted every conceivable kind of torture to turn the faithful from Christ and force them to offer sacrifices to idols. Ahasverus saw, with malicious joy, the followers of Him who had cursed him being persecuted and tormented by the heathens, and to vent his revenge on them, he offered his services as an executioner. And many an innocent victim was put to death by his hands with double the agony. But he could take no joy in his revenge; for the axe he swung cut through his own soul, and the poison he gave raged in his own heart, and the fire he stirred

burnt in his own entrails; and he saw them *die*, the martyrs, die in joy, and *he* had to live, live in anguish!

One day, when, following the execution of a holy old man, who had yielded up his spirit praising and thanking God, several Christians had pushed their way forward, out from the crowd of spectators, and then came numbers more, and more, crying: They too were Christians and wished to die for Christ; and when the broad square rang out with this one testimony to the Crucified Lord, and the witnesses lay all around, body on body, a great and holy seed: then was Ahasverus taken with the Spirit, and he threw the executioner's axe from his and placed himself among the Christians who were yet awaiting death, and cried, trembling, "I took believe in Christ." Then the sergeants seized him and, enraged at the bad example he had given before all the people, they saved him for the final and cruellest torments. But he, in the joyful expectation that he would now suffer death, which he wished for above all, felt no pain; and the red-hot metal they poured into his mouth flowed down him like a cooling drink, and the wounds they beat on his body seemed to him as roses, for out of them his death would bloom. And so the executioners left him lying on the spot. But he was not dead; he only slumbered, peacefully, without evil dreams, for the first time since that terrible day, in blessed forgetfulness of himself.

Chapter the Sixth

On the night that followed, the faithful came to secretly carry away and bury the bodies of the saintly ones. And one pious man also took

Ahasverus on his shoulders and bore him from that place to one of the underground crypts in Rome, where the faithful buried their dead and held their divine services by the graves of the martyrs. And the assembled people began to sing sacred songs, and they praised God and the One He had sent to save the world, Jesus Christ, and they counted as blessed all who had died for his name and received the Crown of Testimony. With their prayers and songs of praise, Ahasverus awoke; he sat up among the dead, who lay all around, and he cried in heart-rending misery, "Yes, blessed indeed are those who have died in the Lord! But, oh, life pursues me, unhappy man that I am, for it is His curse!" The faithful shuddered at his voice, and that pious man who had borne him thither – it was the priest of the congregation, and his countenance shone like the countenance of an angel – walked up to him, and comforted him, and asked, as if he knew him, "Ahasvere, do you believe in Christ?" Ahasverus hid his visage and replied in a hollow voice, "I believe and – tremble." The pious priest did not cease comforting him, saying, "Ahasvere, though you have committed a grievous sin against the Lord, do not despair of His mercy. He forgave the sinner Mary Magdalene and the disciple who denied Him. And when He hung dying on the Cross at Golgotha, He prayed for His tormentors, saying, 'Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And to the murderer who hung on the cross next to him, and who had belief and faith in him, he said, 'Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.'" But Ahasverus said, "Then he has forgiven everyone but for me; on me alone his curse, his punishment, still rests; and so my guilt must be greater than the guilt of all others, and there is no mercy, no death, for me, until the day that He comes." With

these words, he left the congregation of the faithful and disappeared from Rome, and he fled from all those regions where Christianity was preached.

Chapter the Seventh

If I were to tell you, Christian reader, everything that subsequently happened to the Everlasting Jew over the following years and centuries, and even but name all the lands he passed through without finding rest anywhere: I would have to write a book for which an entire human life would not suffice. I shall therefore say only so much of this as: there was no land in the world to which he did not come – for he was averse to taking the same, familiar road again – and there is no known adversity to which he was not exposed or to which he did not expose himself from hatred of himself and his life. At one time, he passed through the inhospitable forests and swamps of old Germany, and pressed forward into the lands where perpetual snow covers the Earth, and a long, long night encompasses the people all the year round; and the blanket of ice was to him as a cooling pond for his burning heart; and the night accorded with the darkness that enveloped his mind. Another time, he wandered over the long steppes of Asia, and down towards Arabia, and through the African deserts; and his brain was well-nigh singed by the hot rays of the Sun, and his tongue cleaved to his palate from parching thirst, and there was no shade, no spring, no food to refresh the wanderer. And yet he could not die. Half delirious, he entered into the bloody wars of savage hordes, and hurled himself into the thick of the enemy hosts, and spread death and ruination in the hope that the provoked enemy would kill him. The enemy's weapons

did not wound him. He sought out the ill-starred places where the plague raged, and sat with the sick, and licked their buboes, sucking in death. But death did him no harm. He plunged himself into the sea, into the booming surf, into the deepest eddies; the water cast him back out. He could not die.

However, it was only on occasional moments when he ventured such deranged acts, and namely those moments when his old pride and defiance rose up again in his heart, as if the Lord had dealt with him mercilessly and cruelly through the punishment He had imposed on him. But at the other times, since that day when he had suffered torture on account of his confession, and awoken in the community of Christians before the pious man whose countenance shone like that of an angel: since that time, he had mostly been at peace among his restlessness, and calm among his suffering. For he thought of the terrible guilt he had drawn down upon himself from the Lord, when he refused to let Him take a rest on His heavy walk to His death, and he well felt that it was but justice done to him if he, for that reason, was nowhere to find rest the length of his life. Thus did humility gradually come into his heart, and with humility that submission which gives up the vain and inglorious fight against a higher and just power.

Chapter the Eighth

Approximately four hundred years had elapsed since the birth of Christ – in almost all of the known world, the sign of the ignominious Cross had been raised as a triumphal sign of salvation – when Ahasverus, the Everlasting Jew, returned from distant regions of the world through Jerusalem towards Rome. A hundred races of men had by this time passed

away; many cities, the pride and splendour of their time, had disappeared, and only their ruins remained visible as a sign of their former greatness; whole nations of different origins now inhabited those lands in which the old heathens had lived, and he stood alone among them, the only person from a foregone time; but time had been powerless against him, for he still had the vigour of the age of a man's life he had possessed at that time when the terrible curse fell upon him. Now, as he wandered through the land and the islands of the Mediterranean, and saw everything changed but for himself alone; and as he passed by the temples dedicated to Christ, and the graves of the Christians who now rested from the toils of life and partook of the fruits of their faith; and when he saw and heard that the name of Him whom he had pushed away from his threshold was lauded by all as the Saviour of the World: then he was seized with an infinite sadness, and he all but sank into despair because of his guilt – could it ever be forgiven him? And he cried out, "Is there then no chance of expiation for me, Lord of life and death? Am I to wander around yet more, like Cain, as a sinner struck by God's curse? He, the first murderer, yet died; and I am to live on, to my torment and to the annoyance of others? I will free the world of my hateful presence, and may God show me grace when I throw myself into the arms of His mercy." Thus did he speak, and he ascended Etna, which was then belching fire, from its broad and deep gulf, that shone through the smoking clouds like the thunderbolts of God, while thunder rumbled dreadfully up from its depths. And he stood at the edge of the gulf and looked down, and horror seized him. But he summoned his courage and cried, "If there is yet a Heaven for me, it is only in Hell!" and pitched himself down.

Chapter the Ninth

Yet the fire-belching mountain did not keep him, but cast him back out with its eddying flames. And Ahasverus lay at the foot of the mountain, unconscious, his body all over burns, with a rattling in his throat and groans like one who has death raging in his entrails. In such a state was he found by a pious hermit whose hermitage lay at the foot of Etna; he carried him to his dwelling and tended to and healed his wounds, until the unfortunate convalescent returned to his senses. “Oh,” cried Ahasverus, when he awoke from his long sleep, “why did you call me back to life, to this life that is so hateful to me? If the mountain has cast me back out of its burning innards, why did you not leave my body to putrefy and be devoured by wild beasts? Indeed, not only have all the elements conspired against me, but mankind has as well, to keep me suffering the torment of life without end! Oh, living! – having to live! – having to live to be punished! – Oh you fortunate ones who call yourselves mortals, who are mortal! You do not know what it means: Having to live in the consciousness of your guilt! What seems a blessing to you is a curse to me!”

Thus did the unhappy one lament. The pious hermit spoke words of comfort to him, and talked with him as with one whose person and life were precisely known to him. “Ahasvere,” he said, “if the punishment of the Lord was great, yet your trespass was greater still; and though your trespass be great, yet the grace of the Lord is greater still!” So have patience, and bear the burden of life with submission until the Lord comes and takes it from you.” Then he spoke to him again of the grace and favour of the Lord, and

that He, the Saviour of the World, had come down from Heaven to bring all men to bliss, taken their sins upon Himself, and died for them on the stem of the Holy Cross. Ahasverus listened attentively to the pious hermit, and when he related to him the beautiful parables of the Lost Sheep²² and the Prodigal Son,²³ and added the loving words of the Redeemer: That there is more joy in Heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety and nine righteous souls,²⁴ then Ahasverus wept his first tears of repentance, joy, and gratitude, for his eyes had been dry as dust ever since that disastrous day of his misdeed and punishment.

Once he had recovered his health, he left the pious hermit and, on his advice, made his way into the deserts of Thebes in Upper Egypt.

Chapter the Tenth

The deserts of Thebes were at that time inhabited by many thousands of pious eremites, who, utterly removed from the world and its pleasures in this place, served God through prayer and contemplation. Thither came Ahasverus, and as his heart had become purer and calmer, so did he at once find contentment in this environment. For he saw these godfearing men living on Earth without living in the world; he saw them regarding life itself as nothing but a heavy burden which God had laid upon them to bear until He came – as a never-ending preparation for death – indeed, as death itself – to make themselves worthy of the higher, the everlasting life; and he saw them, finally, persevering nonetheless with

²² Matthew 18:12-14 and Luke 15:3-7.

²³ Luke 15:11-32.

²⁴ Luke 15:7.

patience in this misery, and living full of hope for the Coming of the Lord. The example of these pious men, their quiet way of life and their simple way of thinking, had a salutary effect on him, and year by year he became more resigned to his fate. He served the Brothers, who lived in isolated huts scattered far and wide, in particular the Patriarchs who supervised the younger Brothers, and he made every effort to execute all his duties with the utmost diligence. Yet he never entered into conversation with anyone; he also avoided their assemblies and took no part in their divine services. He did not conceal from the Superior, who called him to account for this, that he was a Jew and so could hold no communion with Christians. For, Ahasverus had gradually been cured of his obstinate pride by the grace of God, which had taken and driven him throughout the manifold wondrous events of his life, and had been led to self-knowledge and humility, it was true, but he still was wanting in faith – in living faith in Jesus Christ, in whom alone true salvation and true peace is to be found.

Chapter the Eleventh

Another few centuries had flown by, and they seemed to Ahasverus, when he looked back on them, like a few years; for the future is the only time for man, the present flies from him without his noticing it, and the past has flowed away from him as if he never lived it... Then the rumour rang out even into the deserts of Thebes: A new prophet has arisen in distant Arabia who places himself above Christ and damns and exterminates Christians as idolaters. His credo is: "Allah is God, and there is no other prophet but Mohammed." When Ahasverus heard this, there suddenly awoke once

more in his breast the thought, which had long slept in him: Jesus was not God, but only an envoy from God, a prophet; and his Kingdom would now meet its end with the appearance of a new prophet and miracle-worker. In this delusion, and in the hope that the time of his release had come, he left the desert that same day to seek out the new prophet and take his place in the ranks of his followers. But the heathens, who were called Mohammedans after their pseudo-prophet, had already left Arabia in great hosts, and moved up towards Palestine and Syria to spread the new doctrine there with fire and sword. Ahasverus came upon the savage hordes not far from Jerusalem, and he passed into the city with them and with the cry: "Allah is God, and there is no other prophet but Mohammed." And while the heathens plundered the Christian temples and raised the crescent on them in place of the Cross, Ahasverus went out, with a wildly exulting heart, to the Holy Sepulchre, where the Redeemer's body had once rested, and where the Lord of the Dead rose back to life. And in the belief that he would gain great merit with the new prophet if he devastated the holy site with his own hands, he seized a burning torch in superstitious frenzy, and ran into the Temple to set it alight. Behold! There, before him, stood the Lord, as He was when risen in glory from the grave; and as the guards of the Holy Sepulchre were seized with sudden terror at that time, so did a holy dread take hold of the sinner now, and he fell down to the ground in adoration, crying, "My Lord and my God!"

And thus was he found, lying on the ground, by the monks who kept watch over the Holy Sepulchre; and as they realised that he believed in Christ, the living God, they baptised him that very hour in that very place.

But the next day he departed with them, into the mountains of Lebanon, whither they fled from the heathens.

Chapter the Twelfth

From that time on, when he was vouchsafed salvation, Ahasverus felt his inner self to be completely transformed. Through his faith, grace had been given him, and his sin had found forgiveness; and although the consequence of that sin – the punishment – could not be rescinded, for the Word had to be fulfilled, yet from that moment on he felt a blessed restfulness and holy peace, like a child who is suffering the effects of a severe illness and slowly ripening towards death, but who, resting in the lap of motherly mercy, bears the incurable pain readily and patiently in the care of a loving heart.

Now Ahasverus lived in blissful seclusion from the world, in the caves and on the rocky heights of Lebanon with the pious monks, until it was granted to them, through wondrous Divine Providence, to return again to the Holy Land and settle themselves by the Redeemer's grave once more. For, to avenge the ignominy the Cross had suffered, and to cleanse the consecrated earth, where Christ himself had walked, from the heathens' filth, the people of the Occident decided to launch a crusade against the infidels, and they drove out the followers of Mohammed's teaching and planted the Holy Cross again instead of the blasphemous crescent. Ahasverus was among the heroic warriors who conquered the Holy City, Jerusalem, and his feelings, under the Banner of Christ, were completely different from what they had been at that time when he defended the same

city against the old heathens with the people whom God had rejected. He also served in all the subsequent wars which were waged in these lands against the arch-enemy for several centuries; and when at last, from the unfathomable decrees of God, the heathens maintained the upper hand, yet in such a way that the Holy Sepulchre remained accessible to Christians, then he gave himself entirely to devout service of the Lord and His believers. From that time on, he was the constant escort of those who came from distant regions to visit the Holy Land and perform their devotions at the Holy Sepulchre; and he serves them as a faithful interpreter of everything that Jesus Christ did, taught, and suffered on Earth, and takes them around to all the holy places where the Saviour has left a trace of His miracle-working mercy and grace. And he does not conceal his own history, although he discloses it only to very few, and very pious, souls; and to those who, driven by a sacred love of knowledge, ask him about the events in human history which have passed over him or passed before his eyes over so many centuries, he narrates with such graceful copiousness and overflowing unction that nobody leaves him without being truly fortified in faith, in love, and in hope...

Ahasverus sees one century passing away after the other like a year, and the generations of man like the creatures of a day; and he waits, with reverent patience and steadfast devotion, full of faith and among the works of love, for the Coming of the Lord – for the holy, great, eternal Sabbath, which will break after the six days we name millennia.