

Chapter One

The effect of money, both when one has much of it and when one loses it

For a person with the itch, 'tis almost impossible to leave off scratching, even though he can imagine the future pains which he is causing by doing so, and which he has also perchance felt heretofore, even though he sees people who laugh at the foolish gestures—the fletching teeth, the contorted mouth and wrinkled nose—which he makes during such energetic itching, together with his impatience with his own skin, which itching he makes twice as bad as his scratching. But what is the reason that they laugh at him? The reason is that these mockers do not themselves have the itch; else they would indeed leave off their scoffing. How should one who has not tried a thing know what it tastes like? He may indeed make a guess, but he is far from knowing for sure, like that peasant boy who praised the goodness of snipe shit over all other delicious dishes, not, to be sure, because he himself had eaten any of it, but because his grandfather had once said that his own great-great-grandfather had ages ago seen it spread on white rolls and baked in butter, eaten with pleasure by his squire, and had heard it praised.

But this is a different matter. I shall go along with the old proverb: the proof of the pudding is in the eating. No one can believe how bleeding taken on the shin bone hurts and prickles like a bee sting or a hackle, unless he has felt it himself.

I have heard spiritual shepherds of all manner of religions rumble (I came within a hair of saying “thunder”) against it, both in public sermons and private conversations, on the basis of Holy Scripture as well as other weighty reasons, when they learned that common folk

who had either sick children, sick servants, or sick animals, or from whom something had been stolen, or which they themselves had carelessly mislaid or even lost, and run to the old women, so called “wise men,” or, to be more accurate, to the necromantic scoundrels, the sieve-shakers, the soothsayers, and such like rabble as were merely suspected of being privy to arts which, if not downright devilish, were at least forbidden. O the blessed zeal of such pious and loving pastors! O the certain aid and counsel of which the errant little lambs might then with consolation have availed themselves when lured by Satan into repugnant adventures, incited by his apostles with the promise of certain aid, compelled as it were by their own painful temptations, and thus from all sides both emboldened and teased, as well as spurred on sharply, to stray from the proper path! O holy providential care of such faithful fathers, who with such honest zeal endeavor in this way to protect us wretch idiots, us poor, blind, ignorant laymen on this our perilous journey, from the magic arts, from idolatry, and thus from the loss of our souls and from eternal ruin, but rather, in keeping with their honorable profession, endeavor to deliver us into the bosom of Abraham; but since according to right reason, it is to be concluded that one who seeks aid and refuge with the enemy of God and with that enemy’s emissaries, even though he not find it, is afterwards no longer worthy of the aid of God and his saints, but that our loving God now and again nevertheless, through his paternal goodness, helps up again the one or the other who has fallen, and takes him into his grace—for this only His boundless mercy is to be thanked.

But, dear reader, just consider what the thousand-fold crafty arch-enemy of both the heavenly host and the human race undertakes when he sees that we are following so obediently our faithful fathers, scorning him together with his prophets, and relying on God alone. Just look at his slyness!!

Through the practitioners of his damnable art he has it spread abroad that some of those very clergymen who have resisted this art most violently of all, almost as if they wished to extirpate it with fire and the sword, have run to them and without hesitation availed themselves of their aid, in order to persuade us poor ignoramuses so that we shall think and in our blind simple-mindedness say: "Oho! If our devout fathers, devoted only to God, have done that, then who is to think evil of us if we follow their example? If it is all right for them, then it is all right for us; for where the abbot throws the dice, the convent is permitted to gamble."

And indeed, what is more common, better known, and from experience more certain than that those folk who are at sea and in danger of drowning seize the nearest thing they can reach (and even if it were a sharp hedge of thorns or only a weak and fragile blade of grass), and grasp it so tight and hold on to it tenaciously in life and death that even after their death (unless they defy and overcome this strangler in the water) one has great trouble getting it out of their hands again.

But do not for that reason imagine, much less believe (as I foolishly did in times past), that clergymen seek in their need the aid of necromancers, for they are much too holy and too reasonable to do that. One of them would rather let his horse, which cost him a hundred sovereigns even though it had been ridden by a thousand witches, perish a hundred thousand times than ask a soothsayer for help with even the slightest nod of the head, indeed, even if it were a matter of life and death; for they know that just as they have lived in the Lord, they shall also therefore die in the Lord.

Therefore they are much more conscientious and more cautious than I was, and act far differently than I did when the Hopalongian hurdy-gurdy girl fished out all my gold and silver, as much of it as I disposed over in assorted crude coins.

O ye accursed riches! Whatever did you do to me! As long as I possessed you, you burdened me with such a load of pride, which by itself would have been enough to push me down into the deepest abyss of hell, not to mention in what manner your superabundance downright paved the way to damnable lusts for my vain vile desires, so that I was able to wander along on it guided unimpeded to my corruption and was therefore unable to perceive, much less escape, the snares which were beginning to draw me to eternal damnation; for I lived like the rich man, and had I continued, I should have also quite rigidly died like him.

Alas! But what were these vain sensual pleasures, the presumed and yet so quickly dissipating joys, the follies of such false amusements, the fulfillment of my foolish desires and the like, compared to the heavy cares with which you tormented me day and night more than any hangman would have, not only to keep you but also to increase you, so that I should not, through your diminution or complete loss and ruin, be deprived at the same time of my great esteem, honor, and reputation, of my magnificent soft life, and of other things desired by and pleasing to man's senses which I imagined I was enjoying so superabundantly solely because of you, and feared I should lose, were I to lose you.

But I must say once more: ye accursed riches, with all this you were by no means satisfied! Hitherto it had been mere child's play and for me a pleasant sweet poison by means of which you led me by means of my good contentment, without my noticing it, on a seemingly merry path straight toward damnation (a path which, to be sure, now that my eyes have been opened, I cannot with good common sense call merry because of the bitterness mixed with it).

At last, however, ye treacherous riches wished to deal me a blow to the heart with violent tyranny and most extreme torture, for look you, after the hurdy-gurdy girl had successfully perpetrated her theft

and my treasure had flown away, along with my wealth, these evils with which you plague people who possess you should have ceased also. But alas! Then you really did let me feel for the first time the torment of hell itself. Yes, I am more than glad to confess that at that time it would have been touch and go, and very nearly over with me and my soul's salvation, had the mercifulness of the Almighty, through His angel, not preserved me, so very short was the step between me and total despair. For just as theretofore the care to retain and to increase what was mine had tormented me, now it pained me all the more because it was *kaput* and there was no hope of getting it back again.

I no longer had a moment's peace anywhere, no peace came to my soul and no sleep to my eyes; *in summa*, outwardly and inwardly I was thoroughly in nature like one who is in love with a maiden and despairs of her requiting all of her love. And I cannot better liken any madness of that time to any other folly than to precisely that into which foolish lovers sink; for I walked, ran, and made many a useless trip. I went with Saul to Endor, and sent with Ahaziah to Ekron. No exorcist did I fail to visit, no warlock to ask, but all in vain! No encouragement from relatives had any effect on me, no consolation from the clergy was of any help to me, nor did I take to heart at all their warnings and admonitions. I could do nothing more than sigh, and yet what pained me most of all was that here were people whom I had really never insulted, but rather had shown every kindness, who were happy at my misfortune and to see me going about so downcast and humiliated; for I became lean of body, dull and incompetent of mind, weak in strength, pale in color, melancholy in humor, and in a word, quite as wretched as the above mentioned unrequited lovers are wont to be.

Alas! Great fool that I was! What were my only thoughts? After all, I still had about as much wealth, even though it was not in cash

money or as much gold and silver, as I had lost, and in the bargain my credit was still good with everyone, not to mention my considerable number of friends who did not forsake me, so that I might, better than many others were able to, not only bring myself through this crisis with humor but also garner and win back again a stately sum. But of what help was that? My folly must needs go to its extreme, so that I might learn, painfully indeed, what other people saw anyway by looking at me; namely that I, contrary to all that is reasonable and fair, loved gold more than God.