

Chapter Fifteen

The Messiah is fathered by Elias, carried by Esther and at last of the great mountains only a ridiculous little mouse is born

Now, when I, as told above, had made Eliezar and his daughter believe (and was myself looking forward to it anxiously and joyously) that on the third day of the month of Elul Elias should appear (or rather that my desire and carnal lusts should be satiated), I nevertheless was unwilling to thank my good fortune, but rather was apprehensive that the Jews might trick me, and that they might not rightly trust and believe, but rather might perchance sacrifice me, just as when I was about to begin the work I had in mind; therefore I sneaked around in Eliezar's house the day before to see what they were about, whether they were readying for the coming Elias a bridal bed or a grave, and found that this wretched folk wished to be deceived, so that the prophecy was fulfilled which was made by the Mouth of Truth, in John 5: "I am come in my Father's name and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (John 5:43). And woe be unto him who in his obduracy, like these blinded Jews, is left untouched by the illumination of God's grace, so that he persist without conversion in his refusal to repent! Who should ever have thought that learned rabbis would permit themselves to be persuaded to believe the holy prophet Elias capable of practicing unchastity and through sin and vices displeasing to God, capable of fathering the promised Messiah, to whom they impute, next to God, the greatest sanctity? But those people who think only of their temporal welfare and of what is pleasing to the flesh; also cannot imagine any other but a saint of flesh and

blood; they have already had nigh on to 19 messiahs and corruptors, and in the future, in their blindness and blundering will not cease to believe more of that ilk, till they either little by little diminish or are converted here and there one by one, so that on that future great day of the Lord few of their great number, which was formerly incalculable, will be left, since for example under emperor Aelius Hadrianus alone, from the year of our Lord 131 to *anno* 137 many hundreds of thousands of Jews, men, women and children, perished for the sake of their corruptor Barchochetae (who was called “the son of the star”). Rabbi Bereschits (Rabbi fol. 74) said: “Henceforth they ought to call this man not Barkochba, a “child of the star,” but Barkostba, that is, a “child of lies,” which anecdote Christian Gerson von Recklinghausen, born a Jew but a baptized reborn Christian, tells in his refutation of the Jewish Talmud (*lib.* 2, *cap.* 9), where he makes mention of many more such false messiahs of the Jews.

But I shall for the time being leave it to others to speak further of this matter and merely tell my story, the gist of which is that Eliezar not only furnished his daughter Esther’s bedchamber with bedding, easy chairs, pillows, and other adornments, just as if a royal prince were to be lodged there, but also he provided his kitchen with the very most delicate foods; and all manner of confits were there in superabundance, so that Elias might be well entertained and provided for and might therefore perform his work with all the greater contentment.

I had got up a garment of rough hair together with a leather belt so that my Esther, when she felt me, might have all the less cause to doubt that I was Elias, and often I had seen the ready willingness of Eliezar, his wife, and his daughter, and had seen no less how zealously they had been adorning, beautifying and embellishing their daughter ever since they received the tidings from the angel Uriel, I put on this Elias habit, took my musk-box with me, made myself

invisible, and arrived at the appointed time in Esther's room, where I straightway made my presence known by the usual aroma (which both daughter, father, and mother had already smelled heretofore in Eliezar's bedchamber) and by a soft rustling sound, whereupon father and mother, together with Esther's maidservant, withdrew and left us alone. She was clad in naught but a sheer nightgown and a velvet bathrobe completely lined with marten fur, her arms and neck adorned with strings of pearls, and her hair in braids and wound atop her head, as is the custom of Jewish brides. The table was covered with all manner of sweet meats, confits, and large gold-plated goblets filled with canary; and Spanish wines were not wanting either; the bed was so preciously furnished and decorated with silk hangings, with a silken coverlet embroidered with gold and pearls, with the very softest feather mattress, and, as far as linen was concerned, with sheets and pillowcases of the very finest Dutch linen cloth, that it would have been good and majestic enough, were it the Turkish emperor or the Persian shah himself should have had on it his resting place and wrestling-ground.

Now because I was then able to jabber and speak Yiddish so nicely that you yourself, if you heard me talk, you would have sworn by hell and high water that I was a Portuguese Jew, but born in Amsterdam, look you. I opened my mouth and spoke to Esther (but I didn't do it so loudly that the people outside the door would have been able to hear and understand) and told her such a fine pack of lies (if you can call a lie fine) that her heart leaped for joy; namely, I first brought her greetings from Paradise, from all the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, with many congratulations and tidings from the King of the World (for this is what the Jews are wont to call God when they are most devout, even though we Christians, following the example of our Savior, call the evil spirit a prince of this world) because she was to conceive by me and bear for me the Moschiach,

about whom the entire heavenly host was joyous, from which every pious soul can determine how completely wanton, godless, and frivolous those who once begin to wade along in the dissolute filth and muck of sins are wont to jest with heaven itself and its holy inhabitants, whereby these folk who have forgotten God, without doubt because they are blinded by the wicked fiend, neither note, heed, nor observe the magnitude and loathsomeness of the sins they commit. My Esther accepted everything as much more well-known and true than in the past her parents had that which the prophets, or what the holy Gospel, Christ and his apostles had proclaimed to them. She said: "Do to me what the Lord has commanded you to," and in her mind already saw herself along with her son in Jerusalem a mighty empress over the entire world.

A Frenchman once confessed among other things these *formalia* also: "I am being merry at ze fair with ze urdy-jurdy gurl!"—"What else?" asked the father confessor.—"I am sleep wiz hur all ze night on ze hay."—"And what else?" asked the father confessor further.—"Else!" answered the Frenchman. "Ze rest you can *probablement* figure for yourself." And that is what I shall do here with my tale. Esther was willing, I was hot with lust, the bed was made, the opportunity was there, it was twilight, so any fool can figure what we did with one another. So why should I tell the long and short of it? I simply spent a sweet, pleasant night and thought not in the least about the fact that such a brief, vile gratification of lust drags eternal damnation along behind it, which, had I chosen to consider this trespass of mine, would surely have made this night bitter for me, or even odious to me.

Now when I had sufficiently rammed away the whole night long, I gave Esther to understand, when it became day, that on the same day I must needs be present at several circumcisions, but that I should come to her again that evening; thereupon I refreshed myself with

some sweet meats and a drink of Spanish wine, and when the opportunity arose, departed, leaving behind the usual sweet aroma, to go home and sleep my fill. This I did for several days and nights in a row, till I was tired, sated, and bored with this business, while good Esther, as is wont to occur in such matters, was skilled at it; and when we parted from one another on the last morning, each of us gave the other a precious ring as a token of remembrance.

After this, Esther truly did not think herself to be a slut and not only she, but also her parents, made much of the grace which had been bestowed on them; but when rumors of her curious impregnation spread among the Jews, they did indeed keep it secret from the Christians, so that nothing untoward, or perhaps even a Herodian trick, might be played on the fruit of her womb (and on the whole Jewish race), which, so they believed, would in the future destroy Christianity; but among themselves they were greatly happy, gloried in their faith, wished each other a happy journey to the Promised Land, invited each other to dine, sent each other presents, and venerated Esther as highly as a goddess. The baptized Erasmus got wind of it from an old and trusted acquaintance, which tidings almost made him waver in his conversion to Christianity, of which, however, I shall speak in the following chapter.

Now the more the Jews' jubilation increased, the closer the time came when Esther was to bear their savior for them and thus make their joy quite complete. Heretofore she had been cared for like a princess, now they had prepared as if for a royal birth, inasmuch as not only the experienced Jewish women, who had often attended at births, but also the most distinguished and richest Jews of the city and the most learned rabbis came to her confinement to kiss now at his first gasp of breath their newborn savior, whom they had already been worshiping anyway while still in his mother's body, and to bestow on him magnificent presents. I had persuaded the many that

she would in fact bear a child without pain; but look you, when the time came, she began to whimper like other women, and when she had been delivered of her burden, it turned out (alas *Adonai!* which for the Jews was the worst thing of all) to be a little daughter instead of the Messiah.

Then those present put on long faces and their jaws indeed dropped almost to the floor; and yet the most learned among them were so foolish, so blind, and so obstinate about the Messiah's arrival that they were simply not able to believe what they saw with their own eyes, but rather they spoke and talked the others into believing that it was nothing new in the world for females to be born who only later, when they became of marriageable age, turned into males; accordingly it was decided that they should bring this creature up like a lord, although not because of its strange birth, but rather because of its wondrous conception; who could know, they argued, what God had in mind by hiding the male organ at his birth? Perhaps it must needs not be circumcised till its thirteenth year of age, or who would know? Perhaps the *goyim* might learn of this birth and seek to kill the Jews' Messiah in his tender youth before he was able to perform miraculous works and bring together the House of Israel and lead it into the Promised Land, whereas in the guise of a female it would be quite safe and sufficiently hidden till it should begin its work; therefore [they thought], they would just have to let God dispose, who was perchance hereby tempting them and thereby testing the firmness of their belief and their constancy, just as he had done also with their father Abraham.