

Chapter Sixteen

How Erasmus reacted, and how he was relieved of his attacks of anxiety

I imagined that I had now so won the heart of Erasmus and inspired in it confidence toward me, both through friendly companionship and daily conversation and through my generosity, which I indeed showed towards him, that I should have wagered a great deal that he would confide and reveal to me all matters of concern to him, which in fact in many respects he did; but after the good man had been informed by some of his old acquaintances from the synagogue about what certain tidings and sure consolation the chosen people of Israel had received from heaven concerning the imminent arrival of their Messiah (namely through the slips of paper which I had scattered without his knowledge), he indeed suffered a violent attack of great sadness at the thought that so shortly before the time when the Jews' misery was to end and their highest bliss was to begin, he had deserted them. However he did not in this case tell me of his great concern, but rather took great pains to conceal it from me as best he could. Now, despite the fact that from his so abrupt change of mind and the many sighs he so frequently heaved, contrary to his former habit and merry humor, I easily saw where the shoe might be pinching him, I nevertheless left him in his suffering till he too received tidings about what miracles Elias had performed and that Eliezar's daughter Esther was already assuredly carrying the Messiah, wherefore he also became quite dismayed and very wavering in his recently assumed Christianity. Then it seemed to me the time and an utmost necessity to give support to this new Christian's soul, which, because of the knavery I had perpetrated, was being undermined and in

danger of falling and perishing, especially since I suspected that he surely had in mind to change horses again because he did not accept a fine opportunity to embark for the East Indies, as he had desired to, and accept a profitable position which had been offered to him.

Besides, he had also become reticent about telling me, as he had before, much about the Jews' erring and errors in their religion, which seemed to me not an insignificant sign that he must needs no longer be of the same persuasion as heretofore. Now so that I might with good grace come at him to put him in a different frame of mind, I began one day to speak with him about their false messiah Sabbatzi Sevi and his prophet Nathan who emerged in *anno* 1666, and finally said that were I assured of his discretion, I should be willing to tell him a fine little tale about the way in which I had only recently made monkeys of the Jews. Now when he swore not to breathe a word of it, I told him the entire story of the slips of parchment which I had made and blown into the Jewish synagogue; but since he found it difficult to believe, I showed him the left-over scrap of parchment and even some of the slips, which I had kept because the writing on them had not turned out delicate enough, and also the blowpipe which I had used. He was astonished at this, and answered that this affair with the slips was indeed something of import, but was very slight compared to the new information which he had about the same matter (which had been making him have strange thoughts for a while now), and which he could communicate to me if I likewise were willing to keep silent. I assured him, no less than he had me, of my complete discretion, and he thereupon told me what I already knew before better than he did himself; namely that Esther, the daughter of Eliezar, a wealthy Jew, was with child and was to bear the Messiah, whom she, following divine command, had conceived by a heavenly spirit; moreover, he told me another whole pack of lies about great miracles which Elias was said to have performed in a short time,

not all of which, in fact, I had done, but rather which the Jews had invented to add to mine; and finally he added, as a final remark, that solely this pregnant Esther had recently kept him from his East Indian journey because he wished to see whether the Messiah's birth would also be as wondrous as his conception had been.

Then I was well able to imagine with what temptations good Erasmus was beset; nevertheless, I did not venture to reveal to him everything about the means by which I got atop Esther in order to thereby rid him of his concern, but I nevertheless did not at all desist from listening to and talking in the matter with contemptuous laughter, with the assurance that once more, as had happened so often before, there was behind this messiahdom trickery and vain hope, which he, as a solidly based Christian and a well-read intelligent man might himself easily judge. Indeed, in earnest and in jest I explained enough to him so that he, a sly cunning fellow, thought further on the matter and finally said: "Were it possible that shrewd Eliezar and his so well guarded daughter, whose virginity was watched over by her mother with lynx eyes, might be deceived, then he could impute his deception to no man other than precisely him who had tricked all the Jews with the blown-out slips of parchment."

I thought to myself: quits! Fritz, you've guessed it! And because I again listened to this with hearty laughter, I put him into even greater doubt, in which I also left him till Esther brought into the world instead of a messiah only a slit-crotch. With that Erasmus's doubts, with which he had hitherto been tormented in regard to religion, reached their end, but on the other hand the longer he thought the more his suspicion increased that I must needs have doubtless had a hand in this affair; but in what manner that might have happened he, as clever as he was, was not able to figure out by himself, because he knew nothing at all about my invisibility and did not even think of anything like that.

Meanwhile I had even taken him into my service and had so taken him by overwhelming him with gifts and presents that I daily noticed his great loyalty in matter of trade in which I then used him and went so far that I should have been willing to build a castle on him, especially since he also began to confide the innermost secrets of his heart and the most secret affairs of his conscience to me better than many a man does to his father-confessor, among other things, and principally too, that he well nigh agreed with the conviction that they had about Esther's daughter, that she was of the male sex and the Messiah and that God was concealing her from the Christians in the form as if the child were a little girl till it came of age and was able to perform the deeds it had been born to do. As can easily be imagined, I was obliged to laugh heartily at the simple-mindedness of the otherwise sly Erasmus, and because he had kept secret what I confided to him about the slips of parchment, and had also otherwise given many proofs which assured one that much greater secrets might safely be confided to him, look you, I resolved to reveal the whole business to him, which I then did indeed do, and told him he should believe with certainty that I myself was the father of the slit-crotch messiah; but how I came to be that, and through what advantage and deceit I had outwitted Esther and her parents, I begged him, Erasmus, not to trouble himself about, which deceit I still at this time had misgivings about telling him, but in time it would not remain concealed from him.

"O *mirum*," Erasmus hereupon said, "I should never have believed that a Christian, a Christian I say, who through holy baptism has been reborn to eternal life and for whom the joys of heaven have been so dearly purchased through the most precious blood of Christ, would commingle himself with a Jewess, the sort of women who are all commonly deemed by Christians to be not much better than dogs and are even called dogs by them (unless they have been cleansed by

holy baptism and made part of the body of Christendom). I have oft heard tell that in some dishonest places Jews lusting for profit have delivered Jewish girls to some of the lewd whoremongers amongst the Christians (I well nigh take sin upon myself when I, a now baptized Christian, say that, but who can do anything about loose folk who hap to be our brethren), and pretend that these Jewish girls are common women of the Christian faith, and afterwards glory in the fact that they have so masterfully bested these sinners and deceived them with their, the Jews', own ilk, whom they curse and call bitches; and the Jews say that were they dogs and not just as much human beings as the Christians, then a Christian would indeed easily be able to notice when he was sleeping with a Jewess that he was having to do not with a human being but with a bitch." Accordingly, he added, he was unable to believe that I had been so conscienceless and lewd as to commit such a grave sin, which was to be considered the first cousin of sodomy.

Here, to be sure, Erasmus struck me to the quick and so stirred my conscience that I went into myself powerfully and in my mind beat my breast, particularly because I had vexed this new Christian and before committing that sin had not better weighed and considered the magnitude of it, but rather must needs first learn it from one who had formerly been a Jew; but I excused myself to him by saying that unbearable love had blinded me, as it were, and compelled me to do it. Erasmus, for his part, said to me that more than God I had loved a creature who in her present condition was as little capable of eternal bliss as a beast without reason; that I had preferred a brief vile gratification of lust to eternal heavenly joy and that in so doing I had made myself worthy of eternal damnation, which would indeed befall me, were no true penitence to follow. A true Christian ought to struggle against such vices with all his powers so as not to anger his Creator, who has promised him His support in this so that he may

achieve victory and so that hereafter the just Master of the Battle may crown him all the more magnificently after he has overcome.

This brief but sharp sermon I took, as noted above, very much to heart; but just as one does not suddenly, in one fell blow, become a scoundrel but rather gets to that point little by little, in stages as it were, so also the sinner (especially such a one, like me, as has already long since become mired in all vices) seldom reforms with his whole heart, unless a special glowing grace of God illuminates him. I simply remained what I was, and put all the blame on love, as many other madmen are wont to do, who exert no real earnestness and effort to overcome their desires, or rather themselves.