

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Homeward Journey and Conclusion of this little War

Another fourteen days I spent with my pater in Utrecht after I had become completely healed and healthy again when orders came to him from his superiors to betake himself to Rome by way of Switzerland. Now that was an opportunity I had wished for, to get safely down the Cologne side of the Rhine with him as far as Strasburg, and from there over the Kniebis and all the way home. Therefore I got, through the intercession of the pater, a pass from the French general staff, and set out on the way with him, *per pedes*, in accordance with the rules of his order. Our company consisted of divers and quite different people; for, first of all, there were the pater and a frater of his order; four French soldiers of divers offices and qualities who had been ordered to Breisach; a parson of the reformed religion who had earlier been called from the Palatinate, where he was born, to Holland and had been so burnt out and ruined in the present war that he was compelled to return home again with his wife; and then a Jew, who was traveling to Frankfurt and whose presence often reminded me, with tormenting pains, of the wicked tricks I had played in Amsterdam; and then, finally, myself, a simple merchant who probably still had 200 Imperial sovereigns with him for food, from which I also loyally procured sustenance for the good honest pater and the brother, since they neither had money nor were permitted to touch it.

Now there were occasionally merry disputations between the pater and the parson, each of whom had as supporters two of the soldiers who were adherents of his confessions, also between the pater

and the parson on the one hand and the Jew on the other; and even though this Jewish rogue was extremely well educated and knowledgeable, he did not wish to speak right out candidly, but rather said that the Christians should first glue their schisms back together before they made so bold as to convert the Jews, who were united in their faith; for even if one or the other of them would have wished to become a Christian, he would not be able to know to which of the Christian religions he should turn, since each boasted that it was the best! Not only, he said, were the Lutherans daily at odds with one another, but also were constantly at war against the Calvinists Reformed, and were never seen united save when they attacked the Catholics, as, for example, the pater and the parsons were now standing as one man against him, whereas the Catholics opposed all other religions and deemed only their own to be the best. And even though the pater and the parson demonstrated to the Jew that just as ages ago there were Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes amongst them, there were still today among the Jews and their cochams differing opinions which were, to be sure, at times set aside by essays and mediations invented by the afore-mentioned cochams, but by which the matter was in no way helped nor the religion improved, but rather would be made worse by human dogma and would never bring them to obey their laws as Moses had commanded them to obey them. The Jew, for his part, stubbornly insisted that he must needs first see the Christians united before he would be able to make up his mind to go over to them; the changing of religions, he said, was a serious matter on which salvation depended and was therefore not to be undertaken so lightly and without careful consideration.

The disputations which occurred between the pater and the parson were so diverse, so varied, and so many that I have since forgotten all of them save the following ridiculous episode. As we were marching through the territory of Trier, we passed a pole with a

wooden statue of the Virgin Mary atop it, before which the pater not only doffed his cap, but also knelt before the mother of our Savior and greeted her with an Ave Maria. Scarcely a half-hour afterward we came to a gallows embellished with a thief, and when we had passed it, the parson said to the pater: "How is it, pater, that you did not kneel down here too? The gallows and the pole with the Virgin's statue are of the same kind of wood, you know." The pater answered: "First inform me about another question, and then I shall reply to yours. I see that you have a wife; you probably kiss her, as other husbands do their wives." "Why not?" answered the parson. "I do not say that that is wrong," said the pater, "but tell me, do you not generally kiss her on the lips?" The parson answered: "Of course. Where else?" "That's all well and good," the pater thereupon said, "but why do you not also kiss her on her bottom? For it is the same sort of skin as her mouth, just as the pole with the Virgin's statue and the gallows are of the same kind of wood. To be sure, 'twould not be a shame for a man either if he, following the habit of the praiseworthy Emperor Carolus Quintus, doffed his hat when he passed by a gallows and said, like the most highly revered emperor: 'Salve, o Sancta Justitia!'" All of us could not but laugh at this, save the parson, who stood there like butter in the sun and perhaps did not yet know that in such circumstances one is wont to be answered the way one has asked.

From this time on the disputing ceased, and we continued our journey together up the Rhine; the parson stopped at Bacherach with friends of his wife, and the Jew in Mainz, and we came with one another without incident to Strasburg, where we rested three or four days and enjoyed according to our need the delicate salmon from the Rhine and the noble Alsace wine; and this was the best place for me also to take leave of the rest of the company.

The pater and his frater accompanied me as far as Kehl and, as long as we were going through the Metzgerau, admonished me

without surcease to persevere on the path to salvation upon which I had embarked. However, when we came to the Rhine bridge, he drew forth the nests from the anthill, showed me it so that I might see that my seal with which I had sealed it was still unbroken, and said that he knew of no better way to extirpate from the face of the earth the harmful magic which had so shamefully seduced me than to throw the whole plunder into the Rhine. I was well content with that; and he opened the covering where the current of the river was most rapid, and when he got the innermost ball in his hand, he instantly disappeared from the sight of me and the frater. 'Twas a good thing that at that time few people were walking across the Rhine bridge, and no one was around us who saw it, so otherwise the honest pater might have been taken for a sorcerer and seized. His invisibility did not last longer than it took him to cut open the ball and empty the nest out onto a clean bridge piling; then we saw him again. Afterwards he swept the nest, down to the last piece of dust, completely into the Rhine and said: "Now I thank God from the bottom of my heart that this harmful piece of magic has been so happily disposed of in your presence; otherwise you might have thought that I had talked you out of it in order to make use of it myself; but my plan to get rid of it has long been directed at this suitable place."

At Kehl we breakfasted before we took leave of one another, which for my part happened with tears in my eyes; and because I found myself in a land at peace (although I hear that since then it has been quite ruined by the war), and particularly because I still had some money left, I bought myself a horse with which I happily arrived home in a few days. And when I found "The Wondrous Bird's Nest," a so-called little treatise, in public print when I arrived home, and read it, and also saw from the circumstances that this was precisely the same magic object and material which I had had, I thought it meet that I also communicate to the world what happened to me

with it, and wrote down this, my own history, in the hopes that perchance some would be on their guard to protect themselves from these dangerous magic arts. Whilst doing this, I also devoted myself to making myself, through penitence and godly exercises, worthy of participating in the rewards of the Savior, of receiving forgiveness for my sins and thereby, with God's grace and support, of bringing my life to a blessed

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