

German Short Stories of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries
Heinrich Hansjakob (1837-1916)

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Valentine the Nailmaker

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With its technical inventions, our modern age has removed a great deal of poetry from the world. The steam-engine with its railways has swept thousands of students with their “holiday-satchels” off the country roads and pursued the poetic stage-coaches with their postilions and post-horns into exile in the highest mountains.

But machines have also nailed up the quiet poetry of the nailsmith. What a poetic quiet life that was, being a nailsmith in the narrow street of a small country-town thirty and more years ago! The dark workshop, the hearth kept burning by the Pomeranian in the wheel, the red-hot iron bar in the hand of the “merry nailsmith” who hammered together all sorts of nails, from tacks for the shoemaker to the coffin nails for his fellow men. The nailsmith had a much easier trade than the blacksmith. The latter must think, measure, and test while working. The nailmaker made his wares from the template in his anvil block and was free to think of all sorts of things at the same time, not only of springtime and love, but also of politics and the tavern.

The nailmakers and their journeymen were therefore at all times more frivolous and thirstier, but also cleverer and merrier, than their colleagues of the heavy anvil.

In my boyhood years, four nailmakers made nails for town and country. Each one of the four Masters was an original in his own way.

The one living closest to me, opposite my grandmother's house, was Buss the Master Nailer, a full brother of the famous Court Counsellor Dr. Buss. Of all my neighbours, he was the one I was most at loggerheads with, because he captured my pigeons from me whenever he could. When he was busy in his workshop, "treading" his bellows himself, he would stick his gaunt head with its deep-set eyes and sharply arched nose out of the window every now and then to look at his pigeons and their guests. If he noticed some of the latter, he would abandon his iron and fire, creep to his pigeon loft and begin to whistle and lure until the stranger pigeons were in his enclosure. Mine were the nearest and therefore the most endangered.

When he had caught a couple of my birds, enmity broke out between us. I never let him pass our house without crying to him: "Buss, you just make your nails and leave off catchin' pidgins!" He just smiled every time, his long teeth flashing, and walked away without saying a word. I cursed for some time, and then I was taken in by him again, i.e. I concluded peace whenever he called to me and told me the latest stories from the local pigeon lofts: That "Boschesepp" had bought "noble culvers" or "Nägilespiz" had "bin tanned"¹ by Maier the Tailor because he had taken

¹ Been thrashed.

two of his “Redroofs”,² or that the beams in the pigeon loft had been smeared with anise-oil and the pigeons which were newly bought had to be thrown into the loft in the “three highest names”³ if they were to stay there.

This was music to my ears. I paid attention, more intently than a battle-commander to the reports of his adjutants, and being a “gormless dupe” at all times, I forgave Master Valentine, who at that very moment had the firm intention of stealing my pigeons from me again, all his sins against my property.

In this, I fared as he himself had fared back in his boyhood years. The father of the Court Counsellor and the nailmaker was a Master Tailor in the neighbouring Free Imperial City of Zell, but he had come to be the “Chief Burgomaster” of that place. Now when the Chief Burgomaster was at a wedding or a ball with his better half, he would bring some “goodies” home for his boys in the evening, as was the custom all over Kinzig Valley.

How I longed, in my childhood days, for mother to return home – she who, as a rule, visited peasants’ weddings for the sake of customers! – Every time, she would bring back some roasted calves’ feet in her apron, and that was the greatest carnal delight for me. On those evenings, I would not have swapped my portion of calf’s foot for a kingdom, and if I ever had honeyed words for my sisters, it was in those calf’s-foot hours when I scrounged at least a part of their portion off them.

² Rare pigeons with red wings.

³ The Holy Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Ghost – had to be invoked.

Things were similar in the sartorial Chief Burgomaster's house in Zell forty years earlier. Valentine and Joseph, the later Court Counsellor and Professor, were impatiently waiting in bed for their parents to return. At last they came, and the portions were shared out. But then the future professor of German jurisprudence began: "Valentine, let's keep the goodies an' lay them unner the pellow, then we'll still hae something the morn." Brother Valentine, who, as a nailmaker *in spe*, had a head filled with sawdust, believed him, laid, like Joseph, his "goodies" under the "pellow," and fell asleep, while the other stayed awake. No sooner was Valentine in the Realm of Dreams than Joseph began to eat, and, once he had finished his portion, he took Valentine's share out from under the "pellow" and ate it up also. In the morning – general astonishment, and Jacob and Esau were at daggers drawn because each accused the other of having done him out of his "goodies." The future lawyer eventually found reasons enough to trick Valentine into believing that third parties – cats, mice, the maid – were guilty, until he was satisfied; only to lose his cakes again in the same way the next time. As Joseph did to Valentine with the "goodies," so did Valentine later do to me, credulous and good-natured "Baker-Phil"⁴ with the pigeons.

But Joseph, who often told me all these things himself as an old man, had inherited this slyness from his grandfather, old "Joe the Tailor" of Zell. Here is just one example of how sly this tailor-ancestor was.

It's a cold winter morning. The hoarfrost hangs like sugar on the fir-

⁴ Hansjakob's father, Philipp, was a baker.

trees in Harmersbach Valley which Sepp the Tailor is walking up. On the Sunday before, the servant of “Farmer Hermes,” to whose house he is going, to visit his customer, had taken his “tailor’s utensils” with him. The master carried only his yard-wand as a standard of his trade under his blue cape. But the “air and scent” are icily cold; he freezes deep inside his tailor’s soul. Only one consolation remains to him on the cold walk up the valley: Farmer Hermes has good cherry brandy and Farmer Hermes, of all the Master Tailor’s customers in the little town and in the valley, makes the best “Dummis,”⁵ our tailor’s absolute favourite food. “Guid mornin’, tailor,” Hermesbauer says as the master walks into the large parlour, “A seen ye comin’ up the valley and brocht ye a Cherry Brandy till the wife has makkit the soup.” His first hope had been realised. And soon there came the stately bowl full of steaming milk soup, made especially for Sepp the Tailor. Master Yarn knew from long experience that the “Dummis” would not fail to appear at lunchtime, but one thought occupied him all morning after he had begun his work – how he could, on this occasion, when a particularly strong desire stirred inside him, attain to the largest possible portion of “Dummis.”

He would share the merry meal with Farmer Hermes. For that was the custom, into my childhood years, that a shoemaker or tailor who entered their customer’s house in the country was served especially well. After “the folks,” as the farmer in Kinzig Valley still calls his servants today, had eaten, the table was covered anew for the farmer and the master.

⁵ Pastry made of flour and eggs, cut up into small pieces in the pan.

Depending on the kind of farmer's wife and the quality of the farm, there was a more or less lavish "banquet." Farmer Hermes's wife was of the best kind and Hermes Farm one of the finest in all Harmersbach.

More than one "pinch" from the snuff-tin, which no tailor will ever be without, found its way up Sepp the Tailor's nose that winter's morning as he pensively sewed in the parlour, while the farmer threshed out his summer crop in the barn with his farmhands, the sound ringing down into the valley. The farmer's wife span with her maids, sitting on the stove bench, and was surprised at the master being so quiet today. Usually he would tell the latest news from the town and keep the "womenfolk"⁶ right royally entertained.

The good woman did not suspect that the tailor had been brooding all morning over a life-or-death on Farmer Hermes. And when the farmer's wife left her distaff after ten o'clock and went into the kitchen with the words, "Weel, Maister, a'll awa' noo and see tae⁷ the Dummis," the tailor's plan was made. At eleven o'clock "the folks" turned up to eat, servants and maids, and when these went away half-an-hour later, the table was set for the master and the farmer. Soup, bacon and sauerkraut formed the "Entrées," but my tailor paid very little attention to this. Now the farmer's wife served a dish full of "Dummis," garnished with dried pears, and now the grandfather of a Court Counsellor and my nailmaker-neighbour launched into his plan: "Hermesbauer," he broke his silence, "Ah kent yer

⁶ "Weiber": in the Kinzig Valley, refers to all the women in the house.

⁷ "Well, Master, I'll go now and see to."

faither weel, Ah makkit mony⁸ a smock and pair o' Sunday troosers o' calf's leather. A guid man, he wes, it's a shame he had tae lie in his carebed mony a year. Ye wur still young in those days, Farmer Hermes, but ye wur a richt help for yer ma. Ah weel remember ye gaeing through the toon tae this and that doctor. What was the illness yer faither had, and which doctors did ye gae tae?" Farmer Hermes, who, like most people, was only too happy to talk about his late father, laid his fork down to one side and began to speak. The cunning tailor had counted on this. He knew that a farmer, when he is going to talk about something near to his heart, cannot eat at the same time. The farmer spoke, and the tailor ate. The more the former span out his tale, describing the various doctors, cures and salves and their success, the deeper the tailor's fork sank into the "Dummis" and the emptier the dish became. This finally made Farmer Hermes aware of the tailor's prank; he concluded his tale and decided he would now, for his part, catch the Dummis-eater in his own snare. "But noo, Tailor," the farmer finished his narrative, "noo ye tell me what illness yer faither deed o'!" But the tailor, not stopping eating for a second, said straight out: "Weel, Farmer Hermes, there's hee-haw tae tell, ma faither deed upon a suddenty frae a shock, and in just ten meenits he wis hale, then he wis deid."⁹ So saying, he calmly ate the remaining "Dummis" with the farmer. The latter, however, was vexed that the tailor had taken him in, and when his wife cleared the dish away, he remarked: "Wife, mak twa

⁸ "I knew your father well, I made many a smock"

⁹ "Well, Farmer Hermes, there's nothing at all to tell, my father died all of a sudden from a stroke, and in just ten minutes he was healthy, then he was dead."

dishes fu' o' Dummis the morn, ane for me and ane for the tailor, then ilka o' us cin eat and speak as muckle as he likes!"¹⁰

Thus did Sepp the Tailor do Farmer Hermes out of his "Dummis," his grandson Joseph do his brother Valentine out of his "goodies," and the brother Valentine, *vulgo* Nailmaker Buss, do "Baker-Phil" out of his pigeons.

Incidentally, old Farmer Hermes, the story of whose illness cost his son a meal of Dummis, died like a hero. Hermes Farm lies on a small hill and looks down into the quiet valley as far as the pilgrimage church at Zell. The farmer had walked thither on many a Saturday in days of health "for the sake of the Mother of God," and when he became ill and iller, he sent his children down to the chapel so they would pray for a happy hour of death. The Chaplain of Zell often brought him the holy viaticum. And so Farmer Hermes did not fear dying.

It was a hot summer's day when the Scythe-bearer knocked at Hermes Farm to fetch the farmer away to his wife, who had lain in the churchyard at Zell many years since. The children, all grown up, were standing around their father's deathbed. Down in the valley, servants and maids were working to bring in the wheat harvest. From over the Kinzig River a storm was moving into the valley. Already thunder was rumbling in the distance.

"The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes,"

¹⁰ "Wife, make two dishes full of Dummis tomorrow, one for me and one for the tailor, then each of us can eat and speak as much as he wants!"

says Shakepeare,¹¹ and a German farm-owner is a prince also. At least he still was so in old Farmer Hermes's day. While he was dying, he heard the voice of the approaching storm and knew that the harvest was lying down at the foot of the hill. "Ah cin dee alane," the old man told his children, "ye help the fowk doon ablow bin stooks an' see tae yer breid for winter-time. Ah dinnae need ony more,¹² Ah'll wait for winter doon in the God's-acre." Behind the ancient chest in the dying man's chamber there stood an old, long flintlock, which had always simply been called "The Grumbler" in the house. The dying man's great-grandfather had fired the Grumbler down into the valley for New Year and the Church Fair. Dying Farmer Hermes wanted to use it to announce his death. "Lay the Grumbler," he continued, "on the windae-sole, tie a tow tae the lock an' gie me the tow in ma haun. An' noo gae doon and bin stooks an' yer faither will wait for Deeth, an' when he comes, Ah'll pu at the Grumbler."¹³ When ye hear the Grumbler doon in the valley, then kneel doon an' pray an Oor Father and a 'Lord gie him eternal rest' – for then yer faither will be deid. And noo God preserve ye! Bide guid, as yer faither and mither were. But hie thee, the thunner's rummling agen!"¹⁴

Old Farmer Hermes always had his way, his will being hard as iron. But today, his last will was like diamond. His children, always accustomed

¹¹ *Julius Caesar*, Act 2 Scene 2.

¹² "A cin dee alane ... ye help the people down below bind sheaves and see to your bread for winter-time. I don't need any more."

¹³ "on the window-sill, tie a string to the lock and give me the string in my hand. And now go down and bind sheaves and your father will wait for Death, and when he comes, I'll pull at the Grumbler."

¹⁴ Stay good, as your father and mother were. But go quickly, the thunder's rumbling again!"

to obey him, obeyed here also. Weeping, they walked down the hill, and in tears they bound their sheaves. From time to time, they looked up from their work with tearful eyes to Hermes Farm, to check they had not overheard the Grumbler because of the thunder. The last sheaf had just been bound and loaded when lightning and a peal of thunder passed over the valley. A sudden silence followed the flashing and rumbling in the heavens – then a shot was fired down from the farm, the Grumbler was signalling their father's death. The children kneeled down beside the harvest cart and prayed an Our Father and 'Lord give him eternal rest' and 'Let the light eternal light his way.' Then they brought their sheaves up into the parental home. Their father was dead when they entered his room. The harvest was brought home, and so was their father. –

That is how great people die, and great people are not found only on the thrones of Princes, on battlefields, at lecterns – they are also to be found in quiet valleys, on lonely farmsteads. Among the people, this sea of mankind, they live, the children of Adam, of every description. –

The grandson of the Dummis-Tailor of Zell, Valentine the Nailmaker, did have one way of placating me after he had lured my pigeons away from me. He kept canaries, and a canary was the supreme flower of the feathered world in my eyes, but unobtainable for me in those days; for it cost one a Crown Dollar. But at that time a Crown Dollar was a concept of money no smaller to me than a billion would be today. Even my father never attained to a canary; he allowed himself at most a siskin, which a Swabian bird-dealer who passed through every year had supplied him with for six kreutzer. I still remember very clearly that sunny September day

when the news came through to us boys that there was an escaped canary in Mill Street. All morning we drove the bird from tree to tree, from roof to roof, as if it were a matter of life and death, until I succeeded in getting hold of it near the brick kiln by the mill-chapel. The first victor in the Olympic Games could not possibly have been happier than I was. But in the afternoon came Joseph Hinterskirch, who functioned as an actuary and so, although a man of Haslach, was held in whopping great respect by us boys, and he requisitioned the bird as his property. I would rather have seen a wolf than this Joseph, who incidentally soothed my grief by giving me an old hen for our young cock. But what did that avail me, for the yellow bird was everything to me, its song did not matter in the least. Why, I heard the birds singing in the fields and in the forest every day.

So when Nailmaker Buss called to me that he had young canaries or eggs, and he wanted to show them to me, then I joyfully ran into his low parlour and forgot all loss of pigeons. Valentine had another balsam to heal me from my youthful fury. Once in a while, a small child of his would die, and he regularly made me the crucifer,¹⁵ a dignity which brought in six kreutzer and was therefore much desired by us boys. But it also made us feel proud because you wore an “amice” over your upper body and so were dressed up fit for a parade. The nailmaker paid me down to the last farthing, but I was so naïve that I never thought about him recouping his money twofold and threefold with the first pair of pigeons he whistled away from me.

¹⁵ The person carrying a cross at the head of a procession.

One time, he took from me a pair of red-rumped swallows, rare birds at that time. Our apprentice, Sepp, had brought them for me from his hometown, Shappach, on the Sunday evening. I had gone high up the valley to meet Sepp because I knew what he was going to bring. Up at the edge of the forest, where the Kinzig drifts away past primitive woodland, I met Sepp. "Got pigeons?" was my cry from afar. "Aye, ah hae,' an' cakes an' a' from ma mither." And from the stick he carried over his shoulder, he took down two small ticken bags, and the pigeons were in one of them, the cakes in the other. I walked on cloud nine, carrying the bag of pigeons, towards the little town with Sepp, and I would have spent all that night in the pigeon-loft if father had allowed it. When the pigeons paraded around on our roof for the first time, Valentine the Nailmaker saw them, and two days later, when I was at school, he took them. A neighbour, Furst the cartwright, who lived opposite him, had observed him catching them and immediately told me what had happened. He was in love with our maid, plump Luitgard, and I gave her his regards, told him what she was doing and where she was. This made him my friend; but I had not the faintest idea of the deep psychological basis of friendship. At the time, I believed only in *one* love, in love of pigeons, of field and wood.

The friend in love knew what to do. "When the damned nailmaker," he said in the purest High German, "goes into his field, we'll fetch the pigeons back!"

Valentine had his field, where he spent the greatest part of the day, far away in a forest vale at the back of the Stricker district. His wife and children, insofar as the latter were able to walk and work, accompanied

him. But in a room on the upper floor, an old, old woman sat constantly at the window; I was afraid of her, as I was of all old women I did not know. She was the mother of the Court Counsellor and the nailmaker. Until the Revolution of '48, she had been with her Court Counsellor son in Freiburg. When he was forced to flee with his family from the revolutionaries, our Valentine took their mother in and kept her until she died.

And before the house of my pigeon-marten, there was a second female as guard, the nailmaker's sister-in-law, Nanne Buhrer, minding the little children. There are not as many original types in the female sex as in the male one. Women are by nature more disposed not to show themselves as they are. There is too much coyness and hypocrisy in play. But Nanne Buhrer was an original, even though her past life had faded her considerably. Once an original beauty, she had gone to Paris via Strasbourg, which is situated not far from our little town. In that Babel on the Seine, she lost everything, even a part of her mind. The world-city then spat her out again, and she came back to the Kinzig poor and deranged. The spital for the poor and the sick took her in, and during the day she took care of her brother-in-law Valentine's children. She was a tall, stately person, who always very elegantly held her drill-skirt somewhat raised with her right hand, as if she were wearing a dress with a train. Her favourite saying was, "My favourite colour is pink and my ball-gown is purple." The young girls mockingly cried these words to her in the street.

It was music to Nanne's ears, who then stopped and told the girls about the lovely balls and clothes in Paris. Her concluding words were invariably, "Children, be good, good, and never go to Paris, to Paris!" She

spoke German just as hastily as properly. She often had her bad hours, and then she gave no echo to "pink and purple." But if someone then called "Miss Nanette" to her, she would give a bright smile, nod, and walk on.

She had been a friend of my mother's schooldays and youth. She visited her very often and asked for a tonic. "Cecile, give me a little glass again!" was her frequent salutation. And then she went on to complain about the rough people in the spital, and what she had to suffer from the malice of youth. She lived in a perpetual feud with Sepp Gottleut, a fellow-sufferer in the spital, where they both represented intelligence and education. Sepp Gottleut wanted to be the top dog among the "Spitalers" because he had read a great deal and, in particular, knew the Hussite Wars by heart. But he had never gone beyond the precincts of our little town. Miss Nanette, on the other hand, had received her education in the big world, and though she possessed little definite knowledge, she had elegant manners. And as the latter count for more with most people, not only with spital patients, than scholarliness, then Nanne Buhrer had more followers than Sepp Gottleut the Hussite. He now sought to disparage his rival through all kinds of more or less crude Parisian allusions. Then a row broke out all over the spital. The battlecry was, "For Nanne," "For Sepp Gottleut."

I well remember when I was in grandmother's garden, near the spital, the noise and the storming, which grandmother explained to me every time with the words, "That'll be Sepp Gottleut and Nanne Buhrer going at each other again."

Nanne most commonly called Sepp Gottleit the “Eternal Patient” because he had been in the old almshouse¹⁶ down near the churchyard and then brought over into the new spital. Hence his name. But Sepp claimed this was his inborn right, because his forefathers had held the rectorship in the almshouse since time immemorial. When the Hussites under Black Prokop rode to the Council of Basle,¹⁷ they took the road, Sepp Gottleit declared with rock-hard certainty, through Kinzig Valley and over the Elzacher Eck. They had stopped at the first house in Haslach; it was the almshouse. Nobody else being there, the master of the house’s “Katie” had acted as the riders’ guide as far as the Haidburg. But that evening a rider had come back and stayed with Katie for the rest of his life. He was descended from that man. Hence his love for the Hussites and his researches into their history.

Sepp Gottleit and Nanne Buhner were both the laughing-stocks of young and old. I could never, however vivacious and malicious I was as a boy, join in the mockery of them. They both seemed to be to be remarkable persons, whom I enjoyed listening to, especially Sepp Gottleit. In front of the spital was the large rhizome of an apple-tree, and Sepp Gottleit sat on it while we boys sat around him. I listened with all my soul when he spoke about Zizka and his Taborites¹⁸ and about the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren¹⁹ and their victories.

¹⁶ “Gottleuthaus” – a place where people were cared for “um Gottes willen” (for the love of God), hence an almshouse.

¹⁷ Prokop the Great (or the Bald) (c.1380-1434). The Council of Basle lasted from 1431 to 1449.

¹⁸ Jan Zizka (c. 1360-1424), leader of the Taborites, the radical Hussites.

¹⁹ A Protestant denomination founded in 1457.

And I always took his side and assured him that I believed him when, at the end of his tale, the other boys cried: "Sepp Gottleut, it's all a lie," which deeply hurt him every time.

I regret now that I was not able to take a closer look into the souls of a Sepp Gottleut and a Nanne Buhner. Sepp died when I was still a stupid boy-student who cared about anything rather than psychological studies of spital patients. I saw Nanne for the last time when my mother died. On that gloomy December day in 1867, one of the saddest in my life, I stood crying in the hallway of my parental home when they brought mother down the stairs in her coffin. Suddenly I heard a stranger sob to one side of me: "Oh, she was so good with me!" It was Nanne Buhner. But I could have applied her words a thousand times more truly to myself and I now cried out loud.

I would probably have completely forgotten the poor spitaler if her brother-in-law Valentine had not called her image to my mind.

To carry out the attack on the nailmaker's pigeon-loft, it was necessary to get Nanne out of the house. Furst, who knew how to handle women, found a way. "Miss Nanette," he said in a sweet tone, "could you perhaps be so kind as to fetch me two cigars from Gotterbarm?" If you spoke in a friendly way to Nanne, you had her heart immediately. She readily complied and pushed off up the "back alley" with the children. Now the cartwright and I rushed into the house. Furst positioned himself on the second floor before the door of the old Chief Burgomaster of Zell's wife, and I rushed a flight of stairs higher up to the pigeon-loft. I did indeed find my red-rumped swallows there in a separate cage. I pounced on my property like a young marten and went down the stairs with it, where Furst

had been faithfully guarding the old woman I feared. She had sat unsuspecting in her room all this time.

A king who has regained his lost realm could not be happier than I was then. The matter was less attractive to my brave accomplice and the admirer of our Luitgarde. In every village and in every little town, there are people who like nothing so much as to set others at loggerheads. Goethe rightly says:

Whether you're living in village or city,
Don't ever think to be shown any pity.²⁰

Valentine's neighbour up from him, "Raving Schlosser," belonged to these people. He may have been zealous for the "Religion of Christ," but whenever he had the chance to egg two people on against each other, or to lie in ambush for a peasant, he was there. And so that evening, he told Valentine about our trespass as a silent observer. Valentine's guilty conscience left *me* in peace, but he attacked Furst with vehement words that same evening. After a short introduction, each of them tried to prove that the other was a "scoundrel." Raving Schlosser stood in his hallway, like a faun, listening with glee. I seconded my friend and helper down from the skylight in the roof of my parents' house, beside the pigeon-loft, and barked death-defyingly at tall Valentine. He beat a retreat and disappeared, showing the cartwright his fist all the while, into his dwelling.

We made our peace long ago, and since I began doing research for

²⁰ "Lebst im Volke, sei gewohnt, / Keiner je des andern schont" (If you live among people, be accustomed to the fact / That nobody ever spares the other). From Goethe's *Zahme Xenien* ('Tame Xenions'), 1827.

“Wild Cherries,” he has told me how he became a nailmaker and came to Haslach.

His father the tailor, though he was Chief Burgomaster, had not become a rich man. Nevertheless, he decided that his two talented sons, the older Joseph and the younger Nepomuk, should study. But it was determined that Valentine, being the feebler thinker and, by age, in the middle of these two, was to become a tradesman. Joseph was already at Göttingen University when the time came for Valentine to decide what he wanted to become. The choice was in his hands. Next to the parental house, a nailmaker hammered his nails, and the boys had been in his workshop looking on very many times. So Valentine took a fancy to become a nailmaker. His mother clapped her hands over her head. “Even a tailor rather than a nailmaker,” she said, “why, that’s the most wretched trade of all!” But Valentine simply wanted to hammer rather than tailor, and the Master Nailer promising him six kreutzer a week for his wages, and his father having to send all the money he had left over to Göttingen, Valentine’s wish came true. “And so,” he told me, “I became a nailmaker and martyr, while my brother Joseph became a Court Counsellor and an apostle!”

The younger brother, Nepomuk, studied medicine, but was too frivolous to make it to the exam, and he enlisted in Strasbourg as a second regimental physician going to Algiers. He was involved in all the battles and sieges there, as well as journeys to Palestine, and he stood – this was what impressed Valentine the most – on Mt. Sinai. He died as a physician in a French regiment while still quite young.

When Valentine had finished his apprenticeship, at the age of seventeen, he went on his journeyman's travels. He came to Baden-Baden, where he found work. Here he saved up a hundred florins, a tremendous achievement for a nailmaker's journeyman with a weekly wage of one florin. He was also the "most handsome nailmaker's journeyman" in Baden, freely came in and went out of the house of every master of his guild, and was "known in every place where beautiful master's daughters lived." When he came home to "live it up," the people of Zell stared, for Valentine was not only a handsome journeyman but a proud one as well. He wore stirrup trousers, a top-hat and a cane-stick with a silver knob; in those days, this last was the greatest adornment of a journeyman when he came home from foreign lands.

Our Valentine wanted to spend the time from "living it up" to "enlisting" not far from his hometown, and so he came as a journeyman to old Franz the Nailmaker in Haslach.

When a journeyman from other parts comes to Haslach, he must be first-class, not in trade, but in "fidelity," when the sons of burghers of the same guild make friendship with him. In Kinzig at that time, the nailmakers belonged to the so-called Allied Guild, which contained the hatmakers, the nailmakers, potters, coppersmiths, and tinsmiths. Our Valentine must have fitted in with the perpetually merry people of Haslach, for the two sons of the potter "behind the church", Sepp and Fidel, very soon admitted him to their friendship. We know Sepp from my "Memories of Youth"²¹ as the

²¹ *Aus meiner Jugendzeit* (1879).

trumpet-blower in the church-choir and as the priest's safeguard during the revolution in the town. When Valentine entered the guild, Fidel had just returned from abroad – and with a cow, no less.

He had worked for a poor devil of a potter in Gernsbach for several years, who could rarely pay his journeyman's wages. The master went bankrupt, and Fidel, to obtain his due, came to an agreement with him to quickly take the cow in the byre as payment and then depart. He buckled his knapsack on his back, took his walking-stick in one hand and the cow-ropes in the other and set out up the country, arriving in the town one fine evening. It was surely very rare for a travelling journeyman to come from abroad with a cow, hence the great jubilation among the people of Haslach, who then played the part of Fidel in the Shrovetide Carnival. At the time when I became aware of Fidel, he was already an elderly man who struck me because of his small figure and the circumstance of his always having both hands in his trouser pockets in the street. In those days he generally walked around the Haslach area with the name "The Morning Star." He owed this poetic nickname to his strong predilection for walks in fields and meadows before sunrise. He declared that there was nothing healthier than morning dew; he took it from the leaves before "the sun got up" and washed his eyes with it. Wicked tongues remarked that the Morning Star had his eye not only on the dew from the sky on his rambles, but also on the fruits of the field, and he brought many a sack filled with apples and pears home with him.

Now Sepp the Potter, Fidel, Valentine and Sepp the Hatmaker, which last-named never had a care in the world save on Monday evening,

when the money was all gone – then he sighed: “Life is beautiful, but costly” – formed a camaraderie that was as merry as it was strong, and which meant more to Valentine than anything else. On Sunday, they went bowling and drank beer at “Sweet” Lang’s, who had just come from Lyons and opened his business. He lived down by the Klosterbach River and had established a summer-cellar in the Stricker Forest, in among the spruce trees. The sound rang out through mountain and forest and vale when the journeymen of Haslach sang or played ninepins. And when the sun over the forest had gone down, they moved up to “Sour” Lang’s in Mill Street to continue drinking and caterwauling.

These two beer-brewers had their nicknames not from beer but from their physiognomies. Matthias Lang in Mill Street always had a fierce and deeply serious expression, so he was called “Sour” Lang. Joseph, his cousin by the Klosterbach, was the opposite; he always had a friendly and cheerful smile, which led the people of Haslach to christen him “Sweet” Lang.

Remarkably enough, the John Barleycorn they produced was the inverse of the nicknames of the two brewers. Sweet Lang had in the main sour beer, and Sour Lang had as a rule sweet beer. For Matthias, as a rule, did not make his tipple until a few days before Sunday, and if he forgot to do this, often not until Saturday afternoon. As a result, it was unfermented, boiled malt, and therefore sweet.

The Sour Master made no attempt at all to conceal this from his guests, indeed, he was proud of it and said with self-satisfaction as he served the glasses: “Yesterday, still malt; today, already beer.” He had a

fondness for speaking the Bavarian dialect, to remind people that he had studied in the Number One land for beer.

It is one of my earliest boyhood memories, my father taking me out into the countryside one summer's morning, to the Spitfields or into the clay-pits where the day-labourers were working, and then stopping in at "Sour" Lang's with me on the way home. Matthias's wife was a cousin of father and always looked sharp to put something to fill a little hole before me. Add to that a few sips from the sweet brew, and that meant much more to me at that time than the most splendid dinner today.

My father had a penchant for sarcastic remarks, and when the sombre alehouse-keeper with his little eyes and the strong black eyebrows above set down his thick, dull liquid with the words, "Philip, yesterday, still malt; today, already beer" – then my father might say, "Matthias, you're one for the ages – your beer can be eaten or drunk!"

Yet people at that time were just as merry and content with this would-be beer as they are today with the chemical malt preparations. And I find it to be the strongest proof of the irrepressibility of Haslach humour that the people of Haslach are merry at all times, whether their beer be good or bad.

The days at Sweet and at Sour Lang's and his friendship with Morning Star and his companions, made the stay in Haslach exceedingly pleasant for our Valentine. Now, old Franz the Nailmaker had a rosy-cheeked granddaughter who ran his household, but Valentine had his eyes on her far less than "Liz" and Franz the Nailmaker had theirs on the handsome and diligent journeyman. They were unhappy to see him leave

when the time came for his military service, and he too departed with a heavy heart, but only from Morning Star and his satellites.

A few weeks later, Valentine was wearing an artilleryman's uniform in Gottsau near Karlsruhe. Being a soldier at the end of the Twenties was no risky undertaking. But Master Valentine was proud of it in later life all the same. I very clearly remember his discharge as an artilleryman who had given faithful service hanging up in his living-room, and I often looked reverently up at the board on which a soldier was painted beside a cannon. What annoyed him most was anyone doubting that the handsome soldier was his image in former days. One day, he was the town's Master of the Forests by this time, when he was writing under his "discharge" in his green coat, lean and gaunt, and I, impertinent boy that I was, asked if he had been the soldier, and would not believe him when he said, "Aye," he cried, "Ask your father, ye scallywag, he wis in uniform wi' me up the valley, he as Grenadier, I as Gunnar. Since then, thair's nivver bin twa sic braw lookin' sodgers on furlough.²² An' that's ma portrait!"

After a military service without reproach and without deeds, Valentine wandered into foreign parts again, and it was to Freiburg he went, where his brother Joseph was already a celebrated university professor. The apostle provided his Martyr-Brother with a place in a nail-forge, and while Joseph lectured, Valentine hammered. On Sundays he could visit the professor and he received a coffee, a delicacy in those days.

But our Valentine longed for Haslach, where he was much merrier

²² "there has never been two so handsome soldiers on furlough."

with sweet or sour beer than he was in Freiburg with the professor and coffee. Just when he was on the point of moving back there, his father wrote to him that his old trade-master, being childless and advanced in years, wanted to make over his house and nail-forge, together with his field and two cows, to Valentine for a cheap price. The lucky man joyfully hurried to Harmersbach Valley, and the old master's estate was offered him for a song.

While the father conducts the negotiation for the son and settles the points, the latter walks to the merry little town on the Kinzig on a Sunday afternoon. It is just so delightful to be with the potters and hatmakers again, and Morning Star and the other companions exhort our Valentine to set up shop in Haslach. Franz the Nailer and Liz, visited by Valentine and informed by him that he was going to establish himself in Zell, likewise besiege him to take what they are offering. Liz and the nail forge, the common-land field in Stricker Forest as well as a goat, are laid at his feet. The only reason he looks more closely at rosy-cheeked Liz and the old house today is because they promise him the opportunity of staying among the merry folk of Haslach for ever.

Liz and Franz the Nailer do not let go of him, they accompany him to Zell, and now Hercules-Valentine stands at a crossroads. On the one side, the house of his trade-master's neighbour beckons to him with two cows in the stable, on the other, Liz, a goat and an old nail forge, but the latter in unforgettable "Hasle" and the former in boring Zell. His father is for the latter, the professor, on being consulted, likewise, but the Martyr wants at least a merry nailsmithy-life and is for Franz the Nailer's firm in "Hasle."

With a heavy heart, the Chief Burgomaster decides to go to Haslach with Valentine for an “inspection.” But it turns out badly. The good sun looks straight down through all of Franz the Nailer’s house into the cellar; everywhere are the traces of a poor nailer. The Head of the Imperial City takes his Valentine by the arm and drags the resisting son away, out of the tumble-down hut. Franz the Nailer and his Liz are in despair and make every possible protestation in front of the house. In the end, they beg and beseech the burgomaster to go with them to neighbour Kaltenbach: he could best straighten everything out.

Xavier Kaltenbach, my grandfather on the maternal side, was regarded at that time as the wisest man in the town and was well known to Valentine’s father. Yet it was not so long since the now wealthy merchant had come to Zell as a hawker and peddler with his heavy box on his back and obtained a permit from the burgomaster’s office to peddle in the mountains and valleys of the Imperial Territory. Old Buss considered the man to be an authority, and a few minutes later the two parties contending for Valentine surround him in his shop. Before Kaltenbach stands the Chief Burgomaster with his martyr, and to his right and left are Franz the Nailer and Liz. While the Mayor of Zell complains about Franz the Nailer’s poverty, Liz tugs at Kaltenbach’s long, blue coat and looks imploringly up at the judge who will decide her future, and he thoughtfully takes one pinch after another from his large snuff-box.

When the plaint was finished, he spoke as advocate for his neighbours. “Franz the Nailer,” he began, “is the most industrious neighbour I know; he toils and moils, in his old age, for all he’s worth. He

lost his wife and children young and has had much domestic ill-luck. So his household went to rack and ruin through no fault of his. Liz is a girl as good as they come, nobody would be unhappy with her. Therefore just give your son to my neighbour's house, and whenever you need anything, I'll be there to help with word and deed." These last words were the decisive factor for the Chief Burgomaster of Zell. He gave his consent, and a few weeks later Valentine was the head of a house and a Master Nailer in merry Haslach; he had Liz, the hole-riddled house, the goat, the field in Stricker Forest, but also the not inconsiderable debts of old Franz the Nailer.

Master Valentine fared as almost everyone does who establishes a household. You build yourself a merry, bright future with all your hopes and wishes, and most of the time the very opposite happens. No sooner was the wedding over than my grandfather died, he who had offered to be a helper in need, and Valentine was alone with his debts. In a short time, he became a martyr in the true sense of the word. Whereas his colleagues, Morning Star and Sepp the Hatmaker, stayed bachelors and merry, the poor nailer became ever more serious and quiet. He worked day and night. In the summer season, he dug over his field in Stricker Forest during the daytime, and at night he began to make nails with no other light than the one given by his hearth.

I still clearly remember how the sound of his hammering came over to us baker's boys, to me and to Peter, when we were at work during the night. And when we closed the shop in the bakery at midnight, we saw the head of hammering Valenitne in the glow of the nail-forge fire. I liked this

curious chiaroscuro at midnight; my soul must have sensed at that time that this was poetry, and I liked looking at the martyr, around whose head the fire of his hearth spread a halo. Peter, in whose breast no poetic sentiments stirred, would often cry impatiently to me: “Harry, c’way,²³ let’s gae ta bed. Wir better aff than Buss the Nailer!”

Valentine personally brought to market all that he had nailed together in the nights of a week. Then the peasant-cobblers and the carpenters came to the little town from mountain and vale, to supply their needs from the nailers who offered their competing goods for sale at the Town Hall, a hundred large nails for six kreutzer, smaller ones for a batzen.²⁴ These slight proceeds were to feed Valentine’s family, which grew more numerous every year, and pay the interest on his debts. It was impossible, and with every year he became a greater martyr. If the apostle in Freiburg had not sent some small change every now and then, Valentine would not even have been able to go for a pint on a Sunday in “merry Haslach.”

But he never lost his sense of humour. This much he had learnt in Haslach, where nobody, as of yet, has ever known despair. In between the toils of the day, he crept into his pigeon-loft at midday and, in the evening, whistled to other people’s pigeons, and caught them. Such a capture, and he forgot all of his martyrdom for a day. Or on Sunday afternoons, when he lacked money for the inn, he sat before the cage of his canaries and made his ornithological observations.

²³ Come away; Come.

²⁴ Four kreutzer.

But Master Valentine showed himself in his full greatness when he paraded on Sundays, in the clothes which the Court Counsellor of Freiburg sent him each time they ceased to be worthy of the salon or the college. At those times the poor nailer proudly drew attention to his Court Counsellor's garb as a part payment for the fatherly fortune which the Court Counsellor had needed for his studies and the loss of which had made a nailer of Valentine.

Though the martyr was not as talented as his brothers, he was still much cleverer and, in particular, much more dexterous with a pen than many a man of Haslach. Compared with the intellectual lights of his friend Morning Star, he was a veritable sun. Thus it came about that the Senate of Haslach conferred on him the office of Woodward over the many and lovely woodlands of the community, these amounting to half a district forest.

The office was a difficult one: in it, one of his predecessors had almost lost his life. This happened as follows. Not only Rome, but my hometown on the Kinzig had its struggles between plebeians and patricians. The ideas of the French Revolution had penetrated to the "rear vassals" of the small town, and as early as 1805 these had successfully ensured that the common-fields and -meadows were divided in equal shares among them and the full citizens. Twenty years later, it was all about the woods. Up to then, only the full citizens had possessed a right to wood from the town's woodlands; now, the suburbanites and the rear vassals also demanded the same right, to two cords and 150 faggots every year.

This caused an uproar. The patricians saw their last privilege under threat. The leader of the opposition was Kaiser the Weaver, whom I knew well, a sincere, stately man, with large blue eyes and a hawk's nose. He smoked a short Cologne-Pipe in the street all the time. More eloquent and intelligent than all of his fellow plebeians, he gathered them around him to form a private confederacy, to which he gave the handsome name: "The general weal."

A patrician, in whose house he had a lodging and his loom, gave him notice to leave the dwelling when the fight began. What does the people's tribune and the spokesman of "The general weal" do? He takes his wife and child to the Town Hall and pitches his tent and holds popular assemblies in its airy stone halls, until the authorities offer him a home in the almshouse. But even here he incites a rebellion against the patricians; he makes all of the poor people into social democrats. A patrician of the second rank, "Baker-Fidel," takes his stand under Kaiser's flag and supports his rant against the town government: "They at the Town Hall are sheer scoundrels, who need an upright man placed in the Council to tell them his opinion straight from the hip. This man, Baker-Fidel, is the person best suited for this." The plebeians elect him, and no sooner is Baker-Fidel in the Council than his opposition to them falls silent. And when the people interpellate him: why has he not kept his promise? – he says, "Guid fowk, Ah'd nivver hae thocht as lang as ah lived that a'thing went on wi' sic honesty at the Toon Ha'." The number of "Baker-Fidels" in similar circumstances is legion to this day.

However, "The general weal" did not drop his cause. Kaiser now

transfers the agitation to the women, who are easy to win over. They also want to burn wood which costs nothing in the kitchen and the stove, like the wives of full citizens do. In spring 1826, the Town Council promises to allow the plebeians to participate in this right and appoints Baker-Fidel as temporary Woodward. The plebeians suspect a kind of coup d'état behind this appointment and are doubly on their guard. Spring arrives in the land; much wood has been felled during the winter, the blows of axes having resounded down from the primitive forest to the town on many a winter's day. The day for the lots to be drawn for all "those entitled to wood" was proclaimed.

Now, up to the present day, wood is distributed at the Town Hall every year, the same for every citizen in terms of quantity, but differing in quality. It is mostly women and boys who go to the draw. It was no small honourable office for me when father ordered me, as a boy, to draw the lot and then pick up the wood in the forest straight afterwards.

On that first draw-day of the year 1826, the plebeians sent mostly their wives; the men had fought and won the victory, the women were to fetch the trophies. Before Baker-Fidel began the lot-drawing, he announced the decision of the Town Council that, for the first year, the rear vassals would not have a lot for wood but would only receive 150 faggots of brushwood. Now the poor Woodward was done for. The women flew at the treacherous patrician like hyenas and gave him a battering, beating him down to the ground. Had it not been for the intervention of men of his patrician rank, he would not have escaped alive from the hands of the wood-furies. Then the Senate stepped in. The ringleaders, Sawyer's wife

and the wife of “Wild Neumaier,” a carter, were to be arrested and taken into the “Idiot House” by the policeman. For the Chief of the Executive Power at that time, old Miehle the tailor, that was no small matter. Sawyer’s wife, a giantess, whom I often saw at my grandmother’s as a boy, threw the poor policeman-tailor out the door. He succeeded in arresting the wife of “Wild Neumaier” and putting her behind lock and bar. Her husband was away, but when he returned home with his horse and cart from Offenburg that afternoon, he was told that his wife had been locked up by Miehle the tailor because of the battle at the Town Hall.

If a knight in the Middle Ages had been informed on his return home that somebody had abducted the Lady of his castle, he could not have started out to avenge the disgrace in greater haste than Wild Neumaier did. In those days, Haslach had a militia squadron. Neumaier was one of them. Buckling on his cavalry sabre, saddling a horse, and galloping into town with drawn sword, were the work of only a few minutes.

Arrived at the Idiot House, he bursts open the wretched wooden door with his sword, lifts his dearest onto his horse, like a knight of old in the age of courtly love, and proudly trots down the main street, his naked sword still in his right hand, towards his ruined castle in the suburbs, where he sets down his wife.

But the knight has not yet avenged himself on the man who assailed the honour of his house,²⁵ on Miehle the tailor. He rides at full pelt into town once more and searches for the servant of the Holy Brotherhood.

²⁵ “Hausehre,” meaning his wife.

Enraged Roland gallops up to Miehle's home, to the Town Hall, to all the taverns. He does not find him. He is about to ride back home – there, on the border between town and suburb, not far from the Angel Inn, he sees the tailor in the distance, already informed and frightened, hurrying towards his dwelling. The tailor hears the hoofbeats, sees Wild Neumaier swinging his sabre and riding for him, and he sprints behind the Angel Inn in search of a shelter. Another second, and the dragoon will have him. Quick thinking is of the essence. Only one single opening offers itself to the man in mortal fear – the goose-coop of the Angel Inn. Into this he slips with his uniform and sabre. Hardly has he drawn his feet in after him than a blow lands on the goose-palace. Yet the poor tailor's fear, and the energy with which he squeezed himself into the goose-coop, disarm the horseman's fury. But so long as his wife had to stay in the "Idiot House," just so long must the policeman stay in the goose-coop. High on horse, Wild Neumaier keeps faithful watch, and to leave the tailor in no doubt as to his presence, he cuts a chip out of his wooden hiding-place every now and then. Eventually, old and young gather around this peculiar tableau. When the evening bell has ceased to sound, the plebeian rides away; merciful folk pull the half-dead officer of the public safety out of his chest and compassionately escort him home.

That was the worthy conclusion of the long struggle between the patricians and the plebeians. The latter were victorious in all their demands. From that time on, there was peace until the year of '48.

But these achievements could not help the tribune of the people, the ingenious weaver, Kaiser, the great speaker for the field- and forest-hungry

people, out of his weaver's misery. What good does cheap wood do when you have nothing to boil? Pope once said:

“Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
And thin partitions do their bounds divide.”²⁶

That was also true of the leader of the plebeians in Kinzig. The dark night of the soul surrounded him. One morning, he sought his death in the mill-canal, at the same spot where, several years before, old Breithaupt, his sister, who first gave me Till Eulenspiegel to read once upon a time, entered the deathly water. It was at the same spot, up from the town mill, that the bodies were found. I saw both of them lying dead in the green grass by the bank.

Dark points in the history of the human soul. –

At the time when our Valentine was the Woodward, things were more peaceful than in the days of “Baker-Fidel.” The forest wardens did, indeed, still have fights on many a night on the heights of the ancient forest with the peasants of the upper Barental Valley, who readily crept into the town woodlands by night to fetch a roebuck or a log. But Valentine, as a soldier who had served in peacetime, kept his distance from these fights. He walked in the beautiful mountain forests only in daytime, and I can still picture him today, leaving his house, in his coat which had turned from green to yellow, and holding a staff, for his forest inspection.

His “Martyrdom” was not alleviated by the new office. Such small “corvées” ruin their man as a rule. My father often said, when a citizen had

²⁶ The quote is actually from Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681).

to put on a coat on a working-day, then all was lost. Valentine did maintain himself at his previous level, and once he had played Head Forester during the day, he hammered his nails until midnight. And even during the day, he still had time enough to lure my pigeons from me.

Another preferment which he held in those days contributed just as little to pave a path to prosperity for him. He was “Master of the Chest” of the allied guilds. The “Chest” of the old guilds could well be named their Ark of the Covenant, in a way. In it were kept the passports of the travelling journeymen, the papers of the guild, and the coffers. Whenever an apprentice was admitted, or qualified, or a master was made, a contribution of one florin, or several, had to be offered to the chest. An apprentice, that is to say, his father, paid four florins as an admission-tax; the honourable masters drank three of them away at once, and the fourth went into the chest. When an apprentice qualified, the agents involved, the Master of the Guild, the Master of the Chest, the Junior Master²⁷ and their two advisers from the guild had to address a banquet.

The merry murmuring at this feast still sounds in my ears when I recall how we boys, at that time, would look in at the windows of the Raven Inn, where almost all the guilds had their lodging, and envy the lucky ones.

Every now and then, a good drink and a proper repast sweetened the existence of Valentine, Master of the Chest, so that he now suffered it in silence, he now bore it with good humour. Far more silent even than Valentine was his good wife, Liz. Untiringly active, blessed with a bevy of

²⁷ The Master most recently admitted.

children, she stood with dignity at the side of the poor nailmaker, who never left his smithy before midnight. She has long since gone home to eternal rest from the unrest of this earthly vale of tears. But Valentine, who gave us the frame for the pictures of life above, he is still alive today, an octogenarian.

In that parlour, at the same window, where Valentine's ages-old mother sat in my childhood days, he sits now on his own on dull winter days. His hearth, which lit up his face on so many nights, went out long ago. His son, Wilhelm, a younger schoolfriend of mine, has made a white baker's room out of the black nail-smithy, and he has become, a truly tremendous achievement for a small baker in Haslach, a rich man. The blessing which the martyr and his wife earned has passed to the son. As for Valentine's other children, some are in eternity with their mother, some in America. Initially they sent many a dollar-note over the sea to their father. Years ago, they became as cold as Americans, and the dollars do not come now. But that does not dampen the old martyr's spirits.

In the hot summer last year, I met him by my parents' house, holding a rake as a support in the one hand, and a watering-can in the other to water the plants in his son's garden. I invited him to a glass of wine; he drank the juice of the vine and I related the memories he evoked of my wonderful childhood days. "Heinrich," he said at parting, armed by the "milk of the old,"²⁸ "Ah've bin a martyr a' ma life, but ah've reached auld age. Ah'm still blithe in the world, an' ah'm thinking ah'm no gaun tae

²⁸ "Vinum lac senum est" (Wine is the milk of the old) – an ancient Latin proverb.

dee!”²⁹ Smiling, he slowly wandered off, out to the gardens at Klosterbach.

Many years have passed since then. The spring of this year, 1888, brought me back home. On a Sunday afternoon, at the end of April, I walked, alone and lonely, to the Stricker Forest. Mountain and valley laughed and blossomed to meet the springtime. Children came out of the forest with primroses in their hands. The people of Haslach call these “dim angels” still today, these first, light-yellow forest-children of spring. I thought of the time when I too carried them out of the forest with the same happy, cheerful, innocent child’s face, full of the joys of life, which came towards me today in my successors in the children’s heaven that is Haslach.

Melancholy and, at the same time, joyful memories of home came back to me. I had met young representatives of my long-past childhood days here at the edge of the wood, but a yet more vivid memory lay in store for me. When I had walked further up and had come into the deep, quiet side valley at the back of Stricker Forest, Valentine the nailmaker was there in his favourite field, which he had cultivated for nearly sixty years, in Sunday dress, the main decoration of which was a coat which his brother the Court Counsellor had worn when alive. It gave him joy to meet me there so unexpectedly, but he did not suspect that a far greater joy filled my soul to find him again, whom I had seen here as a man so often in my boyhood days, on this classical ground more than forty years later, at the moment when I had just laid down my pen after writing “Valentine the

²⁹ “I’m still happy in the world, and I could imagine I’m not going to die!”

Nailsmith." I say on classical ground, for a few steps away from his favourite field lay my father's field, where I had passed so many a day in sweet work and even sweeter dreams in the forest. Because it was a long way off from the little town, the midday meal was brought over; and dining with servants and maids and day-labourers up in the forest or down by the small, still pond, that was a real treat for me such as no luncheon in the world can offer me today. How often did Valentine rest and eat beside us with his family by the small spring which feeds the pond from the forest!

So I took joy in old memories. And beside the joy, that quiet admonisher, called melancholy, moved into me again. Nature all around me was the same as formerly. The cherry-trees still stood in Valentine's field and the beech-trees of my long, long-dead friend, "Jock the Runner" were still on the mountain. The cuckoo still cried, as it had forty years before, into the spring evening, and there were still boys sitting down by the pond beating willow branches and making shawms from them – only Valentine and I had changed, he had become eighty-five and I had passed half a century.

His cherry-trees had brought him here on this Sunday; he wanted to see if they were sprouting well and promised him a harvest. I told him he had "come into a book" of mine and I had introduced his "martyrdom" to the world. At these words, he laughed from a joyful heart and said he would rather have that than a gravestone.

I walked on a few steps, when I was cut to the soul. Up on my father's field was a large fir-tree, which I had sat under as a boy. I had carved my name in its bark. Every time I came here, I had looked for the

H.H. 1850 and greeted the fir-tree as an old and dear friend. Today it lay felled at my feet. The woodcutters must have wrought their work of destruction here a few days before; corpses of firs lay all around, with a dead queen before them, the fir of my youth. A tear rose to my eye, I turned around and said to myself: "Everything changes, even fir-trees die." Over yonder, Valentine tottered towards the budding trees, the winter of life in spring.³⁰

Four years have passed again since our encounter "at the back of Stricker Forest." Again it is spring, and again the cherry-trees are blossoming. Valentine and I are sitting together in my holiday-room in "The Snowballs" in the quiet, sunny valley, to the south of Hasle, on a cool day in May of the year 1892.

The old man has come up to visit me. It occurred to him that he had forgotten to tell me the abovementioned story of Lovely Sophie before Martin's Gate at Freiburg, and she "must be in the book an' all," he says, so people will know that Valentine was popular with the "better lasses" of his youthful days and is proud still today of "that acquaintance."

Only yesterday he was in his wood on the Ried. He has been coming to this wood since 1833, every day in spring and summer for the last twenty years, a mountain-hike of four hours. Now he wants to look at his fir-trees for a few more years; then a raft will be made of them so the "wood" will be transported down the Kinzig and sold in Strasbourg. And

³⁰ This is where "Valentine the Nailmaker" ends in the 1888 version of "Wilde Kirschen." The text from this point on is translated from the 1913 Wiesbadener Volksbüch.

with the money, the martyr intends to live as an apostle for “a few years” more.

I ordered two quarts of wine for him and gave him some more money for further fortifying pints. Merry with wine, he left. When something else occurs to him, he will come again.

I look down from my window at him as he leaves the house. In a loud voice, he says to himself while walking away: “After a’, it’s a braw place tae be, this warld.”³¹

I, the pessimist, quickly shut my window and felt ashamed at this optimism of an eighty-six-year-old.

Very shortly afterwards, as I was walking towards the village graveyard and turned off into the little valley of “Ullerst,” still occupied with Valentine’s cheerful philosophy of life, an old woman came up behind me. She greeted me with the usual greeting: “Praise be tae Jesus Christ, Faithier.” From her costume, I recognised her at once to be from another valley towards the west, and I asked if she had some business to see to over here. “Aye,” she answered, “Ah’ve bin at the God’s-acre an’ veesited puir Xaveri.”

And then she told me the following about dead Xaveri:

Xaveri was a good, diligent boy, the son of a farmer up on the Breitebene.³² He served as a farm-labourer for his father’s neighbour, for Farmer Schmalzen, and beside him Rosine served as maid, the narrator’s

³¹ “After all, it’s a nice place to be, this world.”

³² A plateau near Haslach.

niece, a “bonny, eident, strang³³ lass.” Her home is over there, over the mountain, not far from the Breitebene.

Rosine and Xaveri are “sweet on each other” but “they cannae mak it tae mairriage.” Nowhere, neither on this side nor the other side of the Hessenberg is there a farm or an “opportunity”³⁴ for sale. In hopeless love, Xaveri and Rosine look down from Schmalzen Farm over hill and dale.

Then Rosine’s brother dies over on the Hessenberg and in him dies the future owner of her father’s farm. Now Rosine becomes a farmer back in her home, and she and Xaveri become man and wife.

After many years, Rosine gives Xaveri triplets, but with this birth she loses “all her heart’s blood” and “goes out like a light without oil.” At the eleventh hour, the priest of Schweighusen is sent for, but he has not walked half the way up Gaisberg when Rosine dies.

She, the narrator, hurries to meet the priest so he will turn round and not make the long walk in vain.

Xaveri is “sore afflicted” but he must think of marrying again for the sake of his three children. Half a year later, he goes over the mountain to his home. Down there in the valley, by the trout-rich Salmersbach stream, a poor weaver lives at Helgenwasen, he has a daughter Caroline, a “braw auld lass” who has earned “a few hundred marks” by this time.

She becomes Xaveri’s wife and moves with him over to the Hessenberg. But after a few weeks, “when we war hoeing the tatties on the

³³ Pretty, hardworking, strong.

³⁴ In Kinzig Valley, a term used to describe an estate big enough to feed a family and so provide the “opportunity” for marriage.

mountain,” the farmer becomes “gyte,”³⁵ begins to sigh and to groan, and he sighs and groans day and night into the winter.

Two days before “Lady’s Day before Christmas,”³⁶ Xaveri asks for the priest of Schweighusen. He wants to make a childlike confession and also receive extreme unction.

The priest comes, and the fairmer “does a’ it’s richt tae dae when deeing.” But on the eve of Lady’s Day, when the “others” are sitting at their evening meal in the parlour, and Xaveri is lying in bed in the master bedroom, he quietly gets up and jumps over the wooden balcony at the back of the house and away.

Those in the parlour hear the noise of his leap and mark at once that the farmer has gone.

The moon is shining brightly, it is a clear, cold advent night. The “wummin” run in terror to the neighbours and report that Xaveri has gone; there is no doubt he intends to do himself harm. The “gadgies” of all the farms around are alarmed and the dogs let loose, and the troop rushes along the Hessenberg, over the Hallen to the Gummi and to the Kohlwald [*Charcoal Forest*]. There are calls and shouts and barks, and the moon “lights,” but nowhere is there a trace of Xaveri.

At midnight, the farmers and their hands came home from the vain expedition.

With the first light of dawn, old Kury, Rosine’s father, sets off, out into Kinzig Valley and over this into Harmesbach – to Farmer Hattich on

³⁵ Insane, demented.

³⁶ The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8th.

the Billersberg. He is a shaman of the first rank, and Kury wants to ask him where Xaveri is to be found.

Farmer Hattich, when asked, strides into his chamber, looks into his “mountain-mirror,” and conveys the words of the oracle to the Hessenberger, short and sharp: “Xaveri is over the mountain, towards his home, but no longer living.”

Now, let anyone try to tell me that the shamans in Kinzig Valley know nothing! It was as Farmer Hattich had prophesied.

At the same time as old Kury left the Hessenberg, on the other side of it, Farmer Heize on the Breitebene wanted to let his “mill-pond” flow so it would drive his wheel for grinding. That is when he finds dead Xaveri, his neighbour’s son, in the pond.

“But Xaveri,” said my narratress, “kent the watter weel, he often pleyed by the pond as a bairn, an’ for the pond’s sake he went rinnin’ that nicht and socht his deeth.”

What sombre, melancholy poetry in this seeking out the pond, to die in that place where the happy boy once played!

The dead man was not carried over the mountain into his hut but brought into his parental home and buried in his home churchyard, which I saw the old woman coming out of that morning.

Dead Xaveri’s farm is auctioned off, relatives not far from the churchyard take the children, and Caroline, the second wife, becomes a maid as before.

All this happened last winter. And now that spring has arrived, the old woman has come over the mountain, for she has long had a “yearning”

to visit Xaveri at the God's-acre and see after the children. She asks me "to include him and Rosi too in my prayer."

"Xaveri," she added, "is in a guid place onyways. He wis guid, liked tae pray wi' the buik and wi' his mooth, and his heid ganging sae apley,³⁷ he couldnae help that. Ah trow he's wi' Rosi agen noo, an' things are better for the twa o' them than they war afore."

She cried while speaking these words, wiped her old eyes dry with her red handkerchief, and said: "Faither, ah'd fain be wi' them an' aw; for it wad mak a stane greet, what we hae tae thole in this haur warld."³⁸

I could have kissed the old woman's brown, calloused hand, so greatly had she delighted and edified me with her naïve, moving tale.

We had stopped walking a long time since and were standing on the road. And when I, completely fascinated by the narratress all this while, raised my eyes, we were before the stone cross which Farmer Witte had put up in Ullerst not far from his farm.

I comforted the woman by referring to the Crucified One, and her wet eyes flashed like sunlight over dewdrops.

Before I parted from her, I wanted to know her name. And now the "Eternal Feminine" showed itself in the old creature. "Ah'd rather no say ma name, it's nae bonnie yin."³⁹ Nae wumman on a' the Hessenberg is

³⁷ His going so soft in the head.

³⁸ "Father, I'd be glad to be with them too; for it would move a stone to tears, what we have to endure in this here world."

³⁹ "I don't like to say my name, it's no pretty one."

ca'd it. Ah'm ca'd Uschi, an' fowk jist say⁴⁰ Kury-Franze-Uschi." So I had a single lady before me, and I doubly understood her little vanity. But when I said to her that Uschi was a very pretty name, her brown old face shone like sparkling malmsey.

The May sun had lit us up to then, but with a cool light. Then suddenly a snowstorm broke out over our heads. Uschi opened her enormous blue broly, and I was driven homewards.

We shook hands warmly. She walked up the valley to her Xaveri's children, and I went down the valley, lost in thought.

The old soul had delighted me. I wondered: Who is right, Valentine, who just parted from me, happy as a child, uttering the maxim, "After a', it's a braw place tae be, this warld," or Uschi from Hessenberg, who sighed with teary eyes, "it wad mak a stane greet, what we hae tae thole in this haur warld"?

I think the heavens settled the question. After cold sunlight, they strewed cold snowflakes on Nature's blossoms and fields.

And that is what they do in a man's life. –

One and a half years later, there was a festival in Freiburg. The old artillerymen of Baden came together.

Knowing that Valentine was certain to be the eldest, I had made him promise, long before the festival, to join in and be my guest.

October 1893 saw his day of greatest honour. As the oldest Baden artilleryman, he was led, crowned with a wreath in a garlanded car,

⁴⁰ "I'm called Ushi, and people just say"

accompanied by horsemen, at the head of the long procession all through the town. Everywhere people greeted him with joy. For the newspapers had announced that “Valentine, the Nailmaker” was coming to the festival as the eldest participant.

In the evening he said to me, beaming with joy and honour, “What wad the auld Freiburgers say, an’ ma Sophie, if they cud hae seen the nailmaker’s apprentice o’ yon days being honoured in Freiburg an’ led in triumph throch the toun? Wha’d hae thocht it!”

“That’s ne’er happened tae a nailmaker afore,” he concluded, “an ne’er will happen tae anither yin.” –

And when he came home from the Freiburg Festival Day, the people of Hasle received him with music and gun salutes, so great was their delight at the honour paid to Valentine in Freiburg.

When he took leave of me, he said, “This hes bin owermuch honour for a puir nailmaker, ah winnae survive this lang.”

Winter came and went. It became spring of the following year, 1894. With the first warm days, the old man began his daily ramble to the Ried, which he had suspended now and then in the previous winter.

Thirsty, he came back to the little town one hot April day. In “The Ox” he drinks two quarts of wine. But they do not fully quench his thirst, so he adds the same amount of beer in “The Cannon.” That does not go down well. He must lie down in bed and die, however loath he be to leave life.

When the news of his death came to me, I was a sick man myself, weary of life, or I would have helped to bury him, the Martyr of Hasle.

But on the day when they buried him, a breeze fluttered his fir-trees

on the Ried, like a song of lament for Valentine, the nailmaker, who loved his forest like a father loves his children.