

The Reformation of Wolfshausen Teil Ein-und-Zwanzig, Dietrich's Dilemma, 1521

The usual tradesmen and residents in the small cobblestone square were joined by the flamboyant caravan of brightly clad merchants and a prim assortment of farmwife spies. Gretchen had come into town and on the path had seen her gawping friend, Dietrich, with whom she had yet to share a word, surge from behind a tree like a lucky squirrel, scamper into the square, turn around, run to the edge of the square, turn around and then walk stiffly behind a camel laden with nails from St. Peter's cross and assorted icons.

The day was bright and sunny and Sunday as well, so Vater Karl began his service according to his custom.

“Gather round, gather round, friends. If any here don't know me I am a priest, ordained and probably in good standing in the universal church. I am assigned to Marburg not to here, so those who wish to hear about Jesus, excepting the sacraments, gather around and listen.

“Once upon a time, there was an old priest named Augustine of Hippo. He lived a thousand years ago, before I was an old priest and he is remembered for his understanding, which has been confirmed by many of our church councils. This saint, for he was made a saint after death as none are before, taught that through Holy scripture, God's spirit endeavored to teach us about salvation, not about the world He gave us to dwell in.”

At this point, the scattered farmwives ceased their tally of sin and witchery and began counting Luther's malign suggestions. Vater Karl continued, “In the Holy church we teach that the scriptures may only be read in Latin. You see, friends, the Word needs a language and that language is a silent and a foreign one.

But did God mean to exclude the German? Or the German, in his language to forbid God? Do the laws that ordain me in Latin set you aside in our common language? Of course not, Paul taught the Galatians that there is no law against the fruit of the spirit which is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

At each item on the list, several farmwives clucked their tongues, “tsk!” As Vater Karl recalled the passage, it was as if a light drumming accompanied him and the sound seemed to excite the merchants who were learning the sermon in hope of better seducing the ecclesiastical authorities in Hessen.

“These Galatians were gallic. I tell you, Paul wrote to men as foreign as the French! Jesus saved the daughter of a Greek and the servant of a Roman, though he was himself a Jew! Our language may set us apart from the scriptures but not the Word. Amat, gaudium, pax, longanimitas, benignitas, bonitas, fideles, mansuetude, continentia,” More clucking, more counting, more swaying among the merchants. “These words may not move you as the Church gave them to me but as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control,” again clucking, counting and swaying, “you do know them. These are what God has given you. These are what God asks of us all.”

“Augustine of Hippo, I mentioned him earlier, was not a Roman but a Berber, from Africa. But he spoke to God in Latin. ‘Da mihi castitatem et continentiam, sed noli modo.’ Give me chastity and self-control, but not yet!”

So crowded was the square that Gretchen could not take her usual place, halfway along the radius from the center of the square to the start of her pathway. Instead she stood at the edge of the forest. But from there she laughed and so Jeremiah, clear across the square begging alms from the merchants, laughed. The merchants themselves laughed and slapped one another on the shoulder or back with flashy, brightly draped arms. Their wives blushed and the farmers’ wives clucked and tsked and counted.

Dietrich, from his place among the merchants looked at Vater Karl with a new admiration and mouthed the Latin he had just heard. “Hamat, gachtium, pachs...Da michi kashtitatem ert kontinentüm, zed nulich moto.” As Vater Karl continued his sermon, Dietrich tried to repeat the words over and over, although they changed somewhat with each repetition, losing their Latin meaning and gaining teutonic blather.

Jeremiah was having a grand morning of it. Although the prim women scattered throughout the square offered him little, he found could stand somberly next to the misbehaving children of the merchants and politely widen his eyes and soon a merchant

would drop a penny or two into the bucket, which that merchants wife would poignantly double. He knew how much money Vater Johann would expect to split and the surplus, Jeremiah hid in his clothes.

“And so my friends,” Vater Karl concluded, making the sign of the cross, “May God bless and keep you, make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.”

“Give me sobriety,” he added, “but not yet.” He turned toward the door of the alehouse where he was met by Gretchen and Jeremiah. Much of the crowd followed the three

“The Archbishop may have a larger and holier audience,” Gretchen joked, “but not in so many colors or with so many camels.”

“Entirely true, but I’d rather clean up after his congregation,” Vater Karl answered before turning to Jeremiah. “Well, Herr Freulich, how’d we do?” Jeremiah produced the bucket and began dividing the offerings it contained in two.

“Come on, boy!” the old priest scolded. “Give a man of faith credit for some skepticism.” Vater Karl playfully lifted the boy up in the air and gave him a shake. Jeremiah rattled and clanked like a sack full of horseshoes tied to the withers of a wild donkey. With the boy still in the air, the priest lowered his brows and raised his eyes until Jeremiah offered a fistful of coins from one of his hiding places.

“Well, this was a fine and generous crowd today!” the priest pronounced. “The sale of indulgences left them with a surplus. Quick! Before they sin! Buy the house a beer!”

The alemaster took Jeremiah’s reluctant offering and began passing out tankards, until he reached the Witwe Greulich standing awkwardly by the door.

“Certainly not!” she scolded and stepped back. A silence fell over the shocked revelers and soon all eyes were on the widow.

Vater Karl, who ministered throughout the area had noticed strange behavior among the farm wives and had spotted several of them standing apart from the crowd in the marketplace watching. This last sign was all he needed to understand something of what was underway. He whispered to Gretchen and Jeremiah, who leaned to hear.

“Abraham offered his son as a sacrifice to the greatness of God and was made the father of nations. These women have offered their gossip. How great must be their reward?”