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POEMS AND BALLADS
FOR PENNY READINGS

Original and Translated from the German

By AGRA



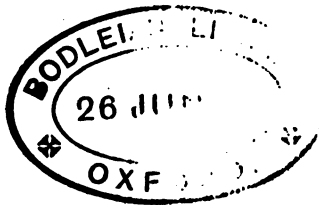
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THE EMPEROR AND THE ABBOT.

(From the German of Bürger.)

I WILL tell you a tale, it is witty enough !
There was once a Kaiser, he was crusty and rough ;
There was, too, a Lord Abbot of high degree,
'Twas a pity his shepherd was wiser than he !

Now the Kaiser must bear both the heat and the cold,
Sleeping oft in his mail in his mantle enroll'd ;
Black bread and water full often he cursed,
And, oftener still, suffer'd hunger and thirst.

But the Abbot enjoy'd ever jolly good cheer,
And he loved both his bed and his board, never fear !
Like the full moon shone his oily fat face,
Nor could any three men his body embrace.

So a grudge to the Abbot the Emperor bore—
And it happen'd one day as he rode to the war,
His train at his back, in the sweltering heat,
The Abbot he spied, lounging cool on his seat.

Ho ! chuckled the Kaiser, the luckiest chance !
Here with my fat Abbot I'll now break a lance :
“ Holy Father, how are you ? It certainly seems
What with fasting and praying your countenance
beams.

“ But still must I think that your time passes slow,
And that you would thank me some work to bestow ;
You *are* the cleverest man out, or I'm sold,
The grass you can hear as it grows, I am told.

“ So three innocent nuts I now put in your cheek,
And the answer in three months' time will I seek ;
To crack them a pastime—to give you more law
Would be quite thrown away, for you've got a strong
jaw.

“ First—When by my robes as the Emperor known,
With princes in council surrounding the throne,
How much I am worth to the uttermost mite,
Like a treasurer true you will answer aright.

“ Reckon up, for the second, until you have found
How long it will take me to ride the world round,
To the minute exact, not too long nor too short ;
The answer, in truth, to *you* is mere sport.

“ The third : You shall guess, for of prelates you’re
prize,
To a hair what I think, my Lord Abbot most wise ;
If you’re right I’ll confess it, but still, do you see,
Not an atom of truth in my thought must there be.

“ But should it so happen my nuts you can’t crack,
To be Abbot much longer the time you shall lack ;
On an ass I’ll command you be led through the land
Face backwards, the tail ’stead the reins in your
hand.”

The Emperor turn'd, full of laughter, and rode.
Out fuller than ever his cheeks the Monk blow'd,
Scratch'd his pate, plagued his brains, heaved sigh
 upon sigh,
Felt as though just condemn'd on the gallows to die.

He, one, two, three, four learned Faculties tasks,
Of one, two, three, four Universities asks,
And promises dues and fees not a few ;
But there is'nt a Doctor can answer him true.

And the time, how it runs ! while the answer he seeks,
The hours grow to days, and the days grow to weeks,
And the weeks grow to months, and still the time
 flies,
The Abbot grows yellow and green round the eyes.

And now see him, a pale, a lean, wasted old man,
Seek in woods and in fields to find peace if he can ;
He walks in a rocky, unfrequented way,
Where meets him Hans Bendix, his shepherd, one day.

“Lord Abbot,” says Bendix, “what gnaws at your heart ?

You waste right away, from yourself you will part :
By'r Lady and Joseph ! your course will be run,
Unless, by my faith, you can get something done.”

“ Ah ! good my Hans Bendix, 't must even so be,
For the Kaiser, he bears me a grudge, don't you see !
He has put 'tween my teeth three such nuts for to
crack,
Can't be done were Beelzebub's self at my back.

“ First : When by his robes as the Emperor known,
With princes in council surrounding the throne,
How much he is worth, to the uttermost mite,
Like a treasurer true I must answer aright.

“ I must reckon the second until I have found
How long it will take him to ride the world round,
To the minute exact, not too long nor too short,
The answer to me *in truth* is mere sport !

“ The third—was e'er prelate before so distress'd?—
To a hair what he thinks, he says, must be guess'd ;
If I'm right he'll confess it, but still, do you see,
Not an atom of truth in his thought must there be.

“ And should it so happen his nuts I can't crack,
To be Abbot much longer the time I shall lack ;
On an ass he'll command I be led through the land,
Face backwards, the tail, 'stead the reins, in my hand.”

“ Is that all ? ” says Hans Bendix, with laughter full
sore,

“ The riddles to guess, good my lord, do not pore ;
I can make it all right if you but lend to me
Your mitre and crozier and frock, do you see ?

“ For though I don't understand Latin a bit,
I am none the less proud of my own mother wit,
What you, all your learning, your gold, cannot gain,
I, leave it to me, will engage to obtain.”

The Abbot he jump'd with delight, and he ran
And fetch'd mitre, and crozier, and frock, and began
Hans Bendix as Abbot to dress for the Court,
Where he sent him, and Bendix the Emperor sought.

The Kaiser he sat on the Emperor's throne,
And he lorded it high with his sceptre and crown ;—
“ Now tell me, Lord Abbot, like treasurer true,
How much am I worth? mind you give me my due.”

“ For thirty broad pieces Our Lord was betray'd !
Howe'er high you lord it, I'm therefore afraid
Twenty-nine's all you're worth, do not think it too
few,
Surely *He* must have been worth *one* more than you.”

“ There is something in that,” said the Kaiser aside,
“ And it goes a long way to humble our pride ;
But still I must own I am struck of a heap,
I had never believed I had gone so dirt cheap !”

“ Now tell me the second : I suppose you have found
How long it will take me to ride the world round,
To the minute exact, not too long nor too short :
Methinks you can hardly turn this, too, to sport ! ”

“ My Liege, with the sun if you saddle and ride,
And as fast as he goes but keep pace at his side,
I'll wager my mitre and crozier thereon
That in twenty-four hours the task will be done. ”

“ Ha, ha ! ” laugh'd the Kaiser, “ most splendidly put,
Your horses you feed with your ‘ if ’ and your ‘ but, ’
With your ‘ but ’ and your ‘ if ’ he who maketh his pun,
Hath well fed his steed, *he* can race with the sun !

“ Well ! we'll pass to the third, and you'll need all
your wit
If I'm not to condemn you face backwards to sit :
Of my thoughts that are false just one you shall find—
Your ‘ but ’ and your ‘ if ’ you will please leave
behind. ”

“Your Majesty thinks me the Abbot!” “I do—
But the thought is not false.” “My Liege, it’s not true.
The hood makes not the monk, yourself you deceive,
I’m his shepherd, Hans Bendix, my Liege, by your
leave.”

“The Devil!” cried the Kaiser, “you’re not, as I see,
The Abbot, but henceforth the Abbot you’ll be”;—
Had he dropp’d from the skies ’twere no greater
surprise,
Yet a merry, bright twinkle broke out in his eyes—

“For I will reward you with crozier and ring,
Your predecessor backward in saddle I’ll fling,
And there he will learn, as is proper and right,
To labour to live—it will be a rare sight!”

“My Liege, you’re too fast, my day has gone by,
Neither read, nor yet write, nor figure can I,
Nor my life to save, could I speak aught of Latin,—
What the boy neglects the man ne’er can be pat in.”

“ Ah, honest Hans Bendix, that same’s sure a pity,
Any favour I’ll grant you, your jests are so witty ;
I’ve been much entertain’d by these lusty, mad
 pranks,
They have earn’d you my praise, they deserve now
 my thanks.”

“ So please you, my Liege, I have no need of pelf,
But if I may ask any favour myself,
Then let me just beg, as my wish’d-for reward,
You will graciously deign to pardon my lord.”

“ Bravo, now, you knave ! Your heart I can see
Is placed like your head e’en where it should be ;
And, since you request it, we’ll pardon your lord,
And grant you free quarters for life for reward.—

“ Upon the Lord Abbot this ord’nance we lay,—
No more shall Hans Bendix keep sheep from to-day,
But the Abbot shall keep him in board and in bowl,
And when he shall die sing a mass for his soul.”