

THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OF FLEMISH LEGENDS, BY CHARLES DE COSTER

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By CHARLES DE COSTER
WITH EIGHT WOODCUTS BY
ALBERT DELSTANCHE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY HAROLD TAYLOR

LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS
M C M X X



The church of Haeckendover (page 40)

Flemish Legends

By **Charles de Coster**

With eight woodcuts by

Albert Delstanche

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London: Chatto & Windus

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

There never was a book which needed less of an introduction than this one, unless it is that it should have an apology from the translator for his handling of so beautiful an original. But since so little is generally known of these Legends and their author a word of information may be demanded.

Charles de Coster flourished in the middle part of the last century. He was brought up in the court of a great dignitary of the Roman Church, and intended for the aristocratic University of Louvain, but showed early his independent and democratic turn of mind by preferring the more popular University of Brussels, to which he made his own way. Here he fell in with a group of fellow-students and artistic enthusiasts which included Félicien Rops, with whom he was associated in a society called *Les Joyeux*, and afterwards in a short-lived Review, to which they gave the name of that traditional Belgian figure of joyousness and high spirits,

Uylenspiegel. It was in this that these Legends first appeared, written in the years 1856 and 1857, and soon afterwards published in book form.

Belgian literature was not at that time in a very flourishing condition, and little general appreciation was shown of de Coster's work, but it was hailed with enthusiasm by a few of the more discerning critics, and won him a place on a Royal Commission which was investigating mediæval state papers. After publishing another book, *Contes brabançons*, likewise based on the folk-lore of his country, he seems to have withdrawn into himself and led the life of a dreamer, wandering about among the peasants and burying himself in the wide countryside of Flanders, until he had completed his epic of the Spanish tyranny, *Uylenspiegel*, which has already been translated into English. None of these publications brought him any material recompense for his work, and he remained a poor man to the end of his life, in constant revolt against what he called the horrible power of money.¹

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The primitive stuff of these Legends is to be found scattered up and down, a piece here and a piece there, in the folk-lore of Brabant and Flanders. De Coster, who had an intense love of this folk-lore and at the same time, as he said, "that particular kind of madness which is needed for such writing," set himself to give it a literary form. He has chosen to make that form so elaborate, and has worked his material to so fine a composition, that he must be considered to have produced an entirely original book. But he has not been unfaithful to his masters the people. *Sir Halewyn*, for instance, follows an old song. And the Faust-story of *Smetse Smeë*, the jovial and ingenious smith, who gets the better of his bargain with the devil in so wholly satisfactory a fashion, crops up in one form or another again and again.

The Legends were written in the idiom of the sixteenth century, the period to which the latest and longest of them roughly belongs. I believe that no more perfect example of *pastiche* exists in the language. But that is not of much interest to English readers, and I have made no attempt to reproduce the achievement. De Coster found modern French, with its rigidity of form, unsuitable to his subject and inapt to his genius. He seems to have had a mind so perfectly in tune with the Middle Ages that one may well believe that he found it actually more natural to write in the still fluid language of Rabelais than in that of his own day. The prose of the original is of arresting beauty, especially in *Sir Halewyn*; which, with its peculiarly Flemish tale of faery and enchantment, still beauty and glowing hearths, and the sombreness of northern forests brooding over them, I feel to be the high-water mark of his achievement. At times it becomes so rhythmic that one can hardly decide whether it is prose or poetry. It is not difficult to believe Potvin's report that de Coster spent an immense amount of pains on his work, sometimes doing a page twenty times over before he was content to let it go.

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De Coster has been spoken of as a mouthpiece of Protestantism. Protestant, of course, is the last word in the world to describe him. No one can have regretted much more than he the passing of that warm-hearted time before the Reformation. One has but to read the story of the building of the church at Haeckendover in *The Three Sisters*, or the prayer of the girl Wantje to the Virgin in the tale of the hilarious *Brotherhood* to see how far this is true. It is only in *Smetse Smeë*, when he comes to the time of the Inquisition, that he bursts out with that stream of invective and monstrous mockery which made the Polish refugee Karski say of him, "Well roared, Fleming!" And even then it is Spain rather than Catholicism which is the centre of his attack, and Philip II who is his aiming-point.

Above all and before all de Coster loved the simple peasant-people of his own land, with their frank interest in good things to eat and good beer to drink, their aptitude for quarrelling and their great hearts. All his chief portraits are painted from them. The old homely nobility of Flanders, such as were the people of Heurne in the tale of *Halewyn*, he liked well enough, but he could not bear a rich man or a distant-mannered master of the Spanish type. A tale is told of him and his painter friend Dillens which may well stand as the key to his work. One day at Carnival-time they were in Ghent, and when the evening came Dillens asked what they should do. "*Voir le peuple!*" cried de Coster, "*le peuple surtout! La bourgeoisie est la même partout! Va voir le peuple!*"

H. T.

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¹ His biography has been written by Charles Potvin. *Charles de Coster; Sa Biographie*. Weissenbruch; Brussels.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE CHEERFUL COUNTENANCE

I. Of the sorrowful voice which Pieter Gans heard in his garden, and of the flame running over the grass.

In the days when the Good Duke ruled over Brabant, there was to be found at Uccle, with its headquarters in the tavern of *The Horn*, a certain *Brotherhood of the Cheerful Countenance*, aptly enough so named, for every one of the *Brothers* had a wonderfully jolly face, finished off, as a sign of good living, with two chins at the least. That was the young ones; but the older ones had more.

You shall hear, first of all, how this Brotherhood was founded:

Pieter Gans, host of this same *Horn*, putting off his clothes one night to get into bed, heard in his garden a sorrowful voice, wailing: "My tongue is scorching me. Drink! Drink! I shall die of thirst."

Thinking at first that it was some drunkard below, he continued to get into bed quietly, notwithstanding the voice, which kept crying out in the garden: "Drink! Drink! I shall die of thirst." But this persisted so long and in so melancholy a manner that at last Pieter Gans must needs get up and go to the window to see who it might be making so much noise. Thence he saw a long flame, of great brightness and strange upstanding shape, running over the grass; and, thinking that it must be some poor soul from purgatory in need of prayers, he set about repeating litanies, and went through above a hundred, but all in vain, for the voice never ceased crying out as before: "Drink! Drink! I shall die of thirst."

After cock-crow he heard no more, and looking out again he saw with great satisfaction that the flame had disappeared.

When morning came he went straightway to the church. There he told the story of these strange happenings to the priest, and caused a fair mass to be said for the repose of the poor soul; gave a golden *peter* to the clerk so that others might be said later, and returned home reassured.

But on the following night the voice began its wailing anew, as lamentably as if it were that of a dying man hindered from dying. And so it went on night after night.

Whence it came about that Pieter Gans grew moody and morose.

Those who had known him in former days, rubicund, carrying a good paunch and a joyous face, wont to tell his matins with bottles and his vespers with flagons, would certainly never have recognized him.

For he grew so wizened, dried up, thin, and of such piteous appearance that dogs used to start barking at the sight of him, as they do at beggars with their bundles.

II. How Jan Blaeskaek gave good counsel to Pieter Gans, and wherein covetousness is sadly punished.

It so happened that while he was moping after this fashion, passing his days in misery and without any joy of them, alone in a corner like a leper, there came to the inn a certain Master Jan Blaeskaek, brewer of good beer, a hearty fellow, and of a jovial turn of mind.

This visitor, seeing Pieter Gans looking at him nervously and shamefacedly, wagging his head like an old man, went up to him and shook him: "Come," said he, "wake up, my friend, it gives me no pleasure to see thee sitting there like a corpse!"

"Alas," answered Pieter Gans, "I am not worth much more now, my master."

"And whence," said Blaeskaek, "hast thou gotten all this black melancholy?"

To which Pieter Gans made answer: "Come away to some place where none will hear us. There I will tell thee the whole tale."

This he did. When Blaeskaek had heard to the end he said: "'Tis no Christian soul that cries in this manner, but the voice of a devil. It must be appeased. Therefore go thou and fetch from thy cellar a good cask of ale, and roll it out into the garden, to the place where thou didst see the flame shining."

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"That I will," said Pieter Gans. But at vespers, thinking to himself that ale was precious stuff to set before devils, he put instead in that place a great bowl of clear water.

Towards midnight he heard a voice more sorrowful than ever, calling out: "Drink! Drink! I shall die of thirst."

And he saw the bright flame dancing furiously over the bowl, which was suddenly broken with a loud report, and this in so violent a manner that the pieces flew up against the windows of the house.

Then he began to sweat with terror and weep aloud, saying: "Now 'tis all over, dear God, all over with me. Oh, that I had followed the advice of the wise Blaeskaek, for he is a man of good counsel, of excellent counsel! Master Devil, who are so thirsty, do not kill me to-night; to-morrow you shall drink good ale, Master Devil. Ah, 'tis ale of fair repute throughout the land, this ale, fit for kings or for good devils like yourself!"

Nevertheless the voice continued to wail: "Drink! Drink!"

"There, there! Have a little patience, Master Devil; to-morrow you shall drink my best ale. It cost me many a golden *peter*, my master, and I will give you a whole barrelful. Do you not see that you must not strangle me to-night, but rather to-morrow if I do not keep my word."

And after this fashion he wept and cried out until cock-crow. Then, finding that he was not dead, he said his matins with a better heart.

At sun-up he went down himself to fetch the cask of ale from his cellar, and placed it in the middle of the grass, saying: "Here is the freshest and the best drink I have; I am no niggard. So have pity on me, Master Devil."

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III. Of the songs, voices, mewlings, and sounds of kisses which Pieter Gans and Blaeskaek heard in the garden, and of the brave mien wherewith Master Merry-face sat on the cask of stone.

At the third hour Blaeskaek came down and asked for news. Pieter Gans told his tale, and as he was about to go away again drew him aside and said: "I have kept this secret from my servants, lest they should go and blab about it to the priests, and so I am as good as alone in the house. Do not therefore leave me, for it may happen that some evil will come of the business, and 'twould be well to have a good stomach in case of such event. Alone I should certainly have none, but together we shall have enough for both. It would be as well, then, to fortify ourselves against this assault on our courage. Instead of sleeping we will eat and drink heartily."

"For that," said Blaeskaek, "I am as ready as thou."



The Little Stone Boy

Towards midnight the two comrades, tippling in a low room, fortified with good eating, but not without some apprehension nevertheless, heard the same voice outside, no longer sorrowful, but joyous, singing songs in a strange tongue; and there followed divers sweet chants, such as angels might sing (speaking with proper respect to them all), who in Paradise had drunken too much ambrosia, voices of women celestially soft, mewlings of tigers, sighs, noise of embraces and lovers' kisses.

"Ho, ho!" cried Pieter Gans, "what is this, dear Jesus? They are devils for a certainty. They will empty my cask altogether. And when they find my ale so good they will want more of it, and come crying every night and shouting louder than ever: 'Drink! Drink!' And I shall be ruined, alas, alas! Come, friend Blaeskaek"—and so saying he pulled out his *kuyf*, which is, as you may know, a strong knife well sharpened—"Come, we must drive them off by force! But alone I have not the courage."

"I will come with you," said Blaeskaek, "but not until a little later, at cock-crow. They say that after that hour devils cannot bite."

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Before the sun rose the cock crew.

And he had, that morning, so martial a tone that you would have thought it a trumpet sounding.

And hearing this trumpet all the devils suddenly put a stop to their drinking and singing.

Pieter Gans and Blaeskaek were overjoyed at that, and ran out into the garden in haste.

Pieter Gans, hurrying to look for his cask of ale, found it changed into stone, and on top of it, sitting horseback fashion, what seemed to be a young boy, quite naked, a fair, sweet little boy, gaily crowned with vine-leaves, with a bunch of grapes hanging over one ear, and in his right hand a staff with a fir-cone at the tip, and grapes and vine-branches twined round it.

And although this little boy was made of stone, he had all the appearance of being alive, so merry a countenance had he.

Greatly alarmed were Gans and Blaeskaek at the sight of this personage.

And fearing both the wrath of the devil and the punishment of the Church, and swearing together to say no word about it to any one, they put the figure (which was but a few thumbs high) in a dark cellar where there was no drink kept.

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IV. Wherein the two worthy men set out for Brussels, capital city of Brabant, and of the manners and condition of Josse Cartuyvels the Apothecary.

Having done so much they set out together for Brussels, there to consult an old man, apothecary by trade, something of a glutton, but liked well enough by the common folk on account of a certain hotch-potch he made, well seasoned with rare herbs, for which he asked a not unreasonable price. He was reputed by the devout to have commerce with the devil, on account of the miraculous cures which he effected in both man and beast by means of his herbs. Furthermore, he sold beer, which he bought from Blaeskaek. And he was hideous to look at, gouty, wizened, yellow as a guinea, wrinkled as an old apple, and with carbuncles on his neck.

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He lived in a house of mean appearance, in that part where you may now see the brewery of Claes van Volxem. Gans and Blaeskaek, coming thither, found him in his kitchen, making up his stews.

The apothecary, seeing Gans in such a piteous melancholy state, asked him if he had some ill whereof he wished to be cured.

“He has nothing to be cured of,” said Blaeskaek, “save an evil fear which has been tormenting him for a week past.”

Thereupon they told him the whole story of the chubby-faced image.

“Dear God!” said Josse Cartuyvels, for such was the name of this doctor of stews, “I know this devil well enough, and will show you his likeness.” And taking them up to the top of his house, into a small room which he had there, he showed them a gallant image of that same devil, making merry with pretty maids and gay goat-foot companions.

“And what is the name,” said Blaeskaek, “of this merry boy?”

“I have no doubt it is Bacchus,” said Josse Cartuyvels. “In olden times he was a god, but at the gracious coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ”—here all three crossed themselves—“he lost at once his power and his divinity. He was, in his time, good company, and more particularly notable as the inventor of wine, beer, and ale. It may be, on that account, that instead of hell he is only in purgatory, where no doubt he has become thirsty, and by God’s permission was allowed to return to earth, once only, no more, and there sing this lamentable song which you heard in your garden. But I suppose that he was not allowed to cry his thirst in countries where wine is chiefly drunk, and that he came accordingly to Master Gans, knowing well enough that with him he would find the best ale in all Brabant.”

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“True,” said Gans, “true, friend Cartuyvels, the best in the duchy; and he drank up, if you please, a whole barrellful, without paying me so much as the smallest gold piece, nor silver, nor even copper. That is not the conduct of an honest devil.”

“Ah!” said Cartuyvels, “there you are in error, and do not perceive what is for your good and what for evil. But if you will take the advice I am about to give you, you may find a way whereby you can make clear profit from this Bacchus, for he is, you must know, the god of jolly drinkers and good innkeepers, and I am disposed to think that he will do you a good turn.”

“Well, then,” asked Blaeskaek, “what must we do now?”

“I have heard that this devil loves warmth and sunlight. So take him out, first of all, from this dark cellar. Then put him in some place whither the sun reaches, such as on top of the tall press which stands in the room where your customers sit and drink.”

“Sweet Jesus!” exclaimed Pieter Gans, “this is idolatry.”

"In no wise," said the apothecary. "I mean only this; that, put up where I tell you, sniffing the good smell of stoups and flagons, and hearing jolly talk, he will grow altogether frolicsome and happy. So may you bring Christian comfort to poor dead souls."

"But if," said Pieter Gans, "the priests should get wind of this statue, so shamelessly set up for all to see?"

"They cannot find you guilty of sin, for innocence keeps nothing secret. You will show this Bacchus openly to all your friends and relatives, and say that you found him buried under the earth in a corner of your garden. Thus you will make him seem an ancient relic, as indeed he is. Only take care to forget his name when you speak of him to any one, and, entitling him, as in jest, Master Merry-face, use this name for him always, and institute in his honour a jolly brotherhood."

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"So we will," answered Pieter Gans and Blaeskaek together, and they then departed, not without having given the apothecary two large coins for his trouble.

He did his best, however, to keep them back, so that they might partake of some of his heavenly hotch-potch, but Pieter Gans turned him a deaf ear, saying to himself that it was devil's cooking, unwholesome for a good Christian stomach. So they left him and set out again for Uccle.

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V. Of the long conversation and great perplexity of Pieter Gans and Blaeskaek in the matter of the deviling; and how they returned to Uccle with a resolution taken.

While they were on their way: "Well, comrade," said Gans to Blaeskaek, "what is thy opinion of this apothecary?"

"A dog of a heretic!" said Blaeskaek, "a heathen, a despiser of all good and all virtue. For 'twas treasonable and wicked counsel he gave us."

"True, my good friend, true. And is it not besides a great heresy to dare tell us that this deviling on his cask is he who invented beer, wine, and ale, when we have heard it preached every Sunday in our church that St. Noah, under the instruction of Our Lord Jesus Christ"—here both crossed themselves—"invented these things."

"For my part," said Blaeskaek, "I know I have heard that preached above a hundred times."

Here, seating themselves on the grass, they began to refresh themselves with a fine Ghent sausage, brought by Pieter Gans against such time as they should feel hungry.

"There, there," said he, "let us not forget the *Benedicite*, my friend. So, perhaps, we may escape burning. For 'tis to God we owe this meat: may he deign to keep us always in his holy faith."

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"*Amen*," said Blaeskaek; "but, my master, between us we must certainly break up this wicked statue."

"He who has no sheep fears no wolves. 'Tis easy enough for thee to talk comfortably of breaking up this deviling."

"'Twould be a deed much to our credit."

"But if he come back again to wail each night so piteously: 'Drink! Drink!' And if he turn angry with me and cast spells on my beer and my wine, and make me as poor as Job! Nay, better follow the advice of the apothecary."

"Aye, and if the priests learn of the statue, and call us both before the tribunal, and have us burnt as heretics and idolaters, what then?"

"Ah," said Gans, "here are the good God on the one hand and the wicked devil on the other, fighting over our poor bodies, and we shall be pounded to nothing between them, alas, alas!"

"Well," said Blaeskaek, "let us go to the good fathers openly, and tell them the whole affair."

"Alas, alas! We shall be burnt, my good master, burnt without mercy."

"I believe there must be some way whereby to escape this danger."

"There is none, my friend, there is none, and we shall be burnt. I feel myself already half roast."

"I have thought of a way," said Blaeskaek.

"There is none, my friend, there is no way whatever, unless it be the clemency of the worthy fathers. Canst see no pilgrim or wandering friar on the road?"

"None."

"If we see such a one we must give him all our sausage—have we said our grace for it?—and all the bread in our wallet, and humbly invite him into our house, to eat a quarter of roast lamb, well washed down with old wine. I have not much of that kind, but I will gladly give him all there is of it. Canst not see such a one coming?"

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"No one," said Blaeskaek. "But open those rabbit's ears of thine and hark to me: I will give thee good counsel, for I wish thee well, blubberer. We must follow the apothecary's advice in half-and-half fashion, so much only, you understand. 'Twould be idolatry of the most shameless kind to put up this statue in the public hall."

"Alas, alas, by all the devils! yes, you are right."

"Very well, then we will put him in a cupboard, which shall be well fastened, but with an opening on the top to let in the air. Therein we will also put a small keg of good beer, and ask him not to use it up too fast. In this way he will be, in fact, within the hall of the inn, and he will keep himself well hid for certain, for in his cupboard he will be able to take what pleasure he may from the songs of the drinkers, rattling of mugs, and clinking of bottles."

"No," said Gans to that, "no, we must follow wholly the apothecary's advice, for he knows more about devils than we. As for this deviling, we will do our best to satisfy him, according to our means. But in spite of it all, I fear we shall one day be burnt, alas, alas!"

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VI. Wherein it is seen that the devil is not a good one; and of the evil trick which he played on the good wives of the drinkers.

As soon as they reached *The Horn*, the two worthies took out from the cellar the statue of the deviling and put it with great respect on top of a press which stood in the hall.

On the morrow there came to this inn nearly all the men of Uccle, brought together in this wise because on that day had been sold publicly in their stables two horses well bred by the late sheriff, Jacob Naeltjens. His son was in no mind to keep them, saying that a man's best steeds were his slipper-shoes.

The men of Uccle were surprised and delighted when they saw the statue of the youngster on the press, especially when Blaeskaek told them that his name was Master Merry-face, and that it was proposed, by way of jest, to establish forthwith in his honour a jolly brotherhood.

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They were all willing to do this, and thereupon decided between them that no one should be of their brotherhood until he had drunk, as his baptism, four-and-twenty monstrous great cups of wine, while another brother beat twelve strokes on the plumpest belly of the company there present.

Each night thereafter they gathered together at *The Horn*, and drank deep enough, as you may well guess.

The most wonderful thing about the business was that in spite of this they worked all day like stout fellows, some at their crafts, some at their trades, others in the fields, contented one and all. But their good wives were not by any means contented, for as soon as vespers sounded all their husbands and sweethearts went off to *The Horn*, without giving them so much as a single thought, and there stayed until curfew.

And when these worthies went home they did not beat their wives, as some drinkers do, but lay down quietly beside them in bed, and immediately, without saying a word, fell fast asleep and began to sound such fanfares with their noses

as Master Porker makes with his snout.

Then the poor women might thump them, cuff them, call their names as they would, to get them to sing their bedfellows a different sort of song, but all quite in vain: as well beat water to get fire out of it.

They awoke only with cock-crow, but their temper in the morning was so rough and stormy that none of their womenfolk (that is to say, of such as were not asleep from weariness) dared say a word, either then or at the dinner-hour. All this was brought about by the evil power and influence of the deviling.

On that account there was much sadness among the women, who said, all of them, that if such a state of things went on for long the race of the people of Uccle must needs become extinct, which would be a great pity.

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VII. Of the Great Parliament of the Women of Uccle.

So it came about that the women decided between themselves to save the village from this fate, and to this end, while their menfolk were at drink with Pieter Gans, they met together at the house of a certain dame Syske, who was big, fat, loud-speaking, had hair upon her chin, and had buried five husbands, or else seven, I dare not particularize the number for fear of untruth.

There, as a rebuke to their drunken husbands, they quenched their thirst with clear water.

When all were present, the younger ones assembled on this side and the older on that, the ugly ones among the older, dame Syske opened the talk by saying that they must all go forthwith to *The Horn*, and there give these drinkers such a drubbing that they would be stiff and sore for a week because of it.

The old and ugly ones applauded this proposal with their hands, their feet, their mouths, and their noses. There was a fine noise, you may well believe.

But the young and pretty ones kept silent as fishes, all save one, very pretty, very fresh and very neat, bearing the name of Wantje, who said very modestly, and blushing somewhat, that it was of no use to belabour their worthy men in this fashion, but rather they must bring them back to good ways by gentleness and laughter.

To this the dame Syske replied: "Little one, thou canst understand nothing of men, for thou art but a maid, or so I believe. For my part I know well enough how I managed my several husbands, and that was neither by gentleness nor by laughter, I promise thee. They are all dead, the worthy men (may God rest their souls!), but I remember them clearly, and know very well that at the least wrongdoing I made them dance the stick-dance on the field of obedience. None dared eat or drink, sneeze or yawn, unless I had first given him leave. Little Job Syske, my last, did my cooking for me in my own house. He made a good cook, poor little man. But I had to give him many good beatings to bring him to that, and so it was with the others as well. Therefore, little one, give up all these laughters and gentlenesses of thine, they are not worth much, I can tell thee. Let us rather go forthwith and cut ourselves good staves of greenwood, easy enough to find now that it is spring-time, and going off to *The Horn* let us make fall a good shower of blows on these unfaithful husbands."

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At this the old and ugly ones broke out afresh into monstrous howls and tumult, crying, "Out upon them! out on the drunkards! They want a good drubbing, they want a good hanging!"

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VIII. Of the great wit which every woman has, and of the modest conversation which the maid Wantje held with the worthies at the inn.

On the morrow all these good women met together once again, and drank as before a great quantity of clear water; and afterwards went off, armed with sticks, to the place where they knew their men were to be found.

Before the door of *The Horn* they stopped, and there a great council took place.

The old ones wanted to go in with their sticks.

"No," said Wantje, with the young and pretty ones, "we would rather be beaten ourselves."

"Hark to these sillies!" cried the old ones, "these poor silly things. They have not an ounce of pride in their bodies, between the lot of them. Be guided by us, gentle ewekins: we will avenge the dignity of women for you upon these wretched drunkards."

"That you shall not," said the young ones, "as long as we are there."

"That we shall," howled the old ones.

But here a certain young and merry wife burst out laughing.

"See ye not," said she, "whence comes to these grannies so great a rage and such a thirst for vengeance? 'Tis simple bragging, to make us believe that their old croakers of husbands still care to sing them songs." [16]

At these words the old hags were thrown into such a state of fury that one or two died of rage there and then. Others, having quite lost their heads, wanted to kill the maids and young wives who were laughing at them (and 'twas pretty music, all those fresh and merry voices), but the dame Syske stopped them from that, saying that for the present they must take counsel together and not kill one another.

Continuing their discussion, they quarrelled, argued, chattered, jabbered in this and like fashion until curfew-time, when they separated without having made up their minds to anything, by reason of not having had time enough to talk it over.

And there were spoken in this assembly of women more than 877,849,002 words, each one as full of good sense as a cellarful of old wine.

Pieter Gans, who, as they said, had rabbit's ears, hearing in the street a certain hum of chattering voices, cried out: "Alas, alas! what is this now? Devils for a certainty, dear Jesus!"

"I will go and see, little coward," answered Blaeskaek. But on opening the door he burst out laughing all at once, saying: "Brothers, 'tis our wives."

Thereupon all the drinkers rose and went to the door; some with bottles in their hands, others brandishing flagons, others again clinking their mugs together like church bells. Blaeskaek went out of the room, crossed the threshold of the outer door, and stepped into the street.

"Well, wives," said he, "what brings you here with all this greenwood?"

At these words the young ones let fall their sticks to the ground, for they were ashamed to be caught with such weapons.

But one old woman, brandishing hers in the air, answered for the others: "We come, drunkards, to tell you the tale of the stick, and give you a good thrashing." [17]

"Woe, woe!" wept Pieter Gans, "that, I know, is my grandmother's voice."

"So it is, scoundrel," said the old woman.

Meanwhile the Brothers of the Cheerful Countenance, hearing all this, shook their sides merrily with laughing, and Blaeskaek said: "Then come in, come in, good wives, and let us see how you do your drubbing. Are those good greenwood staves you have brought?"

"Yes," said they.

"I am glad of that. For our part we have ready for you some good rods, well pickled in vinegar, which we use for whipping disobedient boys. 'Twill doubtless give you all sweet pleasure to feel their caresses, and so recall the days of your youth. Will you be pleased to try them? We will give you plenty."

But at these scoffing words the old women took fright and ran off as fast as their legs would carry them, more particularly mother Syske, making such terrible threats and noises as they went that they sounded to those jolly Brothers like a flight of screeching crows passing down the deserted streets.

The young ones stayed before the door of the inn, and 'twas affecting to see them so humbly standing, gentle and submissive, waiting for some kindly word from their husbands or sweethearts.

"Well," said Blaeskaek, "do you please to come in?"

"Yes," said they all.

"Keep them out," said Pieter Gans into Blaeskaek's ear, "keep them out, or they will go chattering to the priests about the deviling, and we shall be burnt, my good friend."

"I am deaf," said Blaeskaek; "come in, my dears."

Thereupon entered all these good women, and took up their places, some by their husbands, others by their sweethearts, and the maids in a line on a bench modestly.

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"Women," said the drinkers, "you wish to join us?"

"Yes," said they.

"And to drink also?"

"Yes," said they.

"And have not come here to tell us temperance stories?"

"Nay," said they, "we have come without any other wish than to join our good husbands and sweethearts, and laugh with them, if that may be, with God's good will."

"Those are certainly fair words," said one old man, "but I suspect beneath them some woman's artifice or other."

But no one paid him any heed, for by this time the women were seated all about the table, and you might hear this: "Drink this, pretty sweet, 'tis a draught from heaven." "Pour, neighbour, pour, pour out some more of this sweet drink." "Who is a better man than I? I am the Duke; I have good wine and good wife!" "Ho, there! broach a fresh cask of wine; we must have the best there is to-day to pleasure these good dames." "Courage! I have drunk too much; I am going to conquer the moon. But wait a little first. For the present I stay by this good wife of mine. Kiss me, sweet."

"This is not the place, before all these people," the women would answer. And with many caresses and pretty ways each said to her man: "Come away home."

They would indeed have been glad enough to go, all those good drinkers, but did not dare do it, being shamefaced in this matter in one another's presence.

Guessing as much, the women talked of going back.

"There, there!" said the old man, "is not that what I said. They want to have us outside."

"Nay, my masters," said Wantje very sweetly, "but I pray you remember that we are not accustomed to such strong drinks, nor even to their smell. Therefore, master, if we feel the need to go out into the fresh air 'tis assuredly without wanting to anger or sadden you in any way whatsoever. May God keep you merry, brothers."

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And thereupon the good women went off, though the men tried to keep them back by force.

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IX. Wherein it is seen that the learned Thomas a Klapperibus knew what makes a drinker fidget on his stool.

Left thus to their pots and tankards they turned to one another in wonder, saying: "Ah, look ye at these dames! Does it not always fall out in this wise; that they would have us do whatever they bid, and that with humility! Submissive they seem, tyrants they are. But look ye, is it to male or female that belongs properly the right of command in all matters? To the male. We are the males. Very well, then, let us drink! And we will at all times carry out our own wishes, which will presently be to sleep here in this inn, if we please."

After this fashion they talked together for some time, feigning great anger, but being, in fact, eager enough to go and join their wives. By and by they fell silent,

and so remained for a while, some yawning, others drumming tunes on the floor with their boots, others again, and these many, fidgeting on their seats, as if they were on sharp thorns.

Suddenly a young townsman, but lately married, got up and left the hall, saying that by the advice of a leech he was forbidden to drink more than six-and-twenty mugs of ale, which number he had already taken.

After he had gone they all began to excuse themselves, one with a pain in his stomach, another with a headache, others with a melancholy feeling or with the phlegm, and made off to their homes, excepting only one or two among the older men.

And when they were once outside they hurried with all speed to join their wives. Thus was borne out what was written by the learned *Thomas a Klapperibus* in his great work *De Amore*, c. vi, wherein it is said, that woman has more power than the devil.

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X. Of the brigand called Irontooth.

But this thing never happened but once; for on the morrow when the drinkers were carousing at *The Horn* the good women who came thither to entice them away a second time were driven off in a shameful manner.

And as for the men, they continued to drink and to shout hilarious carols.

Several times the night-watchman of the town came in to warn them against making so much noise after the sun was set. Ha, they listened to him with all respect, and seemed quite abashed and repentant at their fault; each one said his *mea culpa*; and in the meantime they gave the poor watchman so abundantly to drink that when he got outside he went off straight away to do his round leaning against some wall, and there snoring like a bass-viol. The others continued their drinking bouts and heavy slumbering, whereof the unhappy wives never ceased to complain. And so on, in this fashion, for a month and four days.

Now by great misfortune the good Duke had lately been at war with my Lord of Flanders, and although peace had been made between them there remained afoot a band of lewd and ribald scoundrels, who went about ravishing all the countryside and robbing the townsfolk.

This same band was commanded by a savage captain, to whom was given the name of Irontooth, because on the top of his casque he wore a single spike, sharp and cruel, like the tooth of some devil or of one of the unicorns of hell, cut out into fantastic shape. In battle he would sometimes put down his head and use this tooth as a wild boar uses his tusks. In this manner were slain many brave soldiers of the duchy of Brabant. On this same casque he carried also an evil bird whose wings beat against the steel, whereof it was said that it screeched in battle in a terrible fashion.

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It was Irontooth's custom to come at night to the villages on which he was minded to carry out his forays, butchering without mercy the poor townsfolk in their sleep, and carrying off jewels, plate, women, and maids, but of these last only the young ones. As for the old women, he left them their lives, saying that it was not worth the while of killing them, for they would certainly die of fright by themselves.

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XI. In which it is seen how bravely the good wives of Uccle did the duty of men.

It came about that one night when only a few stars were showing, and the moon shining a little, there came to Uccle a certain Master André Bredael, running as hard as he could and quite out of breath.

He brought this news: that being by chance behind a bush on the road to Paris, he had seen a troop of men go past, whom he thought to be the Irontooth's, for he had seen among them a spiked casque like that which the great brigand was wont to wear.

While these men were halted by the roadside, and munching some food, he

overheard them say that they were bound that night for Uccle, where they hoped to get good sport and fair plunder, but they said also that they must leave the high road and travel by small lanes, so that their passage should not be discovered. Master Bredael thought it most likely that they would debouch behind the church.

Having learned so much he had hurried to Uccle by the Paris road, outdistancing the brigands by a good half-league, so that he might warn the townsmen to arms, and prepare a strong reception for these unwelcome travellers.

And arriving there he hastened to the door of the prefecture and knocked loudly, so that the warning bell might be set ringing at once; but none came to open to him, for the good reason that the custodian, being one of the Brothers of the Cheerful Countenance, was fast asleep, like all the other drinkers. André Bredael then sought other means of alarm, and shouted out so loudly: "Fire! fire! *Brand! brand!*" that all the women and old men, and children who were too young to drink, leapt out of bed and ran to their windows to see what was going forward.

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André Bredael made himself known to them and begged them to come down into the square, which they did with all dispatch. When they were all gathered round him he told them of the coming of Irontooth, and bade them go and wake their husbands.

At these words the older women began to shout as if mad: "Welcome to Irontooth, God's tooth in good deed, come to rip them all open! Ha, drinkers! now we shall see you, as a punishment from heaven, either hanged short or burnt alive or drowned without respite; and 'tis no more than your sins deserve!" Then, as if they had wings to their feet, they flew into their houses, and there Master Bredael, who stayed with the younger women in the square, heard the enraged old hags shouting, whining, weeping, vociferating, thumping on chests and frying-pans, in an attempt to awaken their good men. At the same time they cried in their ears: "Scoundrels, wake up! Sweet friends, come and protect us! Drunkards, do your duty for once in your accursed lives! Dear fellows, do you wish to find us dead by morning? Bear us no malice for our talk of thrashing you. We were foolish just then, and too hasty; ye were wise. But save us in this pass!" And so on, mixing together smooth and bitter words, like milk and vinegar.

But none of the men stirred.

"What is this?" said Master Bredael.

"Alas, master," said the young women, "'tis as you see; they are as good as dead the night through, and so has it been a while past. If the angel of God himself were to come he would scarce be able to rouse them. Ah, must it be that after having left us lonely so long these wicked husbands will now leave us to die!"

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"Do not weep," said André Bredael, "this is no time for that. Do you love these husbands of yours?"

"Yes," said they.

"And your sons?"

"Yes," said they.

"And your little daughters, so sweet and winsome?"

"Yes," said they.

"And you are ready to defend them as best you can?"

"Yes," said they.

"Well, then," said Bredael, "go and fetch your men's bows and come back here with them as quickly as you can. We will think of some way to defend ourselves."

Soon enough the women were back again, armed with bows which they had taken from their husbands, brothers, or sweethearts. These bows of Uccle were of great renown throughout the land, for they were as strong as steel, and winged their arrows with very great speed.

With them came certain boys of twelve years old, or not much more, and one or two brave old men, but the women sent them back again indoors, saying that they must stay behind and look to the village.

The good womenfolk then collected in a bunch in the square, talking with great ardour and courage, but not too much bragging withal. Every one was clad in a white gown, jacket, or shift, as is the customary night apparel of women. But on this occasion it was by the special favour of God that they were so clad, as you

shall see by and by.

Wantje, who was one of their number, standing very bold and calm, said suddenly that they must pray. Thereupon they all knelt devoutly, and the maid spoke thus:

“Madam Mary the Virgin, who art queen of heaven as Madam the Duchess is queen of this country, give an ear to these poor wives and maids, humbly kneeling before you, who by reason of the drunkenness of their husbands and brothers must needs take on themselves men’s duty and arm themselves to fight. If you will but make a small prayer to My Lord Jesus to give us his aid we shall be sure enough of victory. And we will give you as thanksgiving a fair crown of gold, with rubies, turquoises and diamonds in its rim, a fair golden chain, a fair robe of brocade spangled over with silver, and the same to My Lord your son. Therefore pray for us, Madam Mary.”

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And all the other good maids and wives said after Wantje: “Pray for us, Madam Mary.”

Suddenly, as they were rising from their knees, they saw a beautiful bright star shoot from heaven to earth, not far from where they were. This was, no doubt, an angel from the good God, who came down from Paradise in this guise, to stand beside them and help them the more surely.

Seeing the sign the good women took heart of grace, and Wantje spoke further, saying:

“Madam the Virgin hearkens to us, ’tis certain. Let us now proceed to the gate of the village, beside the church of Our Lord, who dwells therein”—here all crossed themselves—“to await with confidence the coming of the Irontooth and his men. And when we see them near at hand let every woman draw her bow, without speaking, nor moving in any way. Madam the Virgin will guide the arrows.”

“Well spoken, brave maid,” said Master Bredael. “Come, I see in those eyes of thine, so bright in the darkness, the breath of God, which is a flame, alight in thy maid’s heart. We must do as she says, good wives.”

“Yes, yes,” said they.

This woman’s army took up its place in line in the alley behind the church.

After a while of waiting, wherein was much perplexity and anxiety, they heard the sound of footfalls and voices, growing louder as they listened, as of men on the march.

And Wantje said: “Madam Mary, they are coming; have pity on us!”

Then a large body of men appeared before them, carrying lanterns. And they heard a monstrous, husky, devil’s voice crying: “Out, friends, out upon them! Loot for the Irontooth!”

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But here suddenly all these good women let fly their arrows with great precision, for though they themselves remained in darkness they could see the brigands, all lit up by their lanterns, as clearly as in daylight. Two hundred of the men fell at the first volley, some with arrows in their skulls, others in their necks, and several with them in their bellies.

The Irontooth himself was among the first that the good women heard fall with a great thud, from an arrow let fly by Wantje, which pierced him through the eyeball neatly.

Some were not wounded at all, but, having troubled conscience, thought when they saw all these white figures that ’twas the souls of those whom they had made pass from life into death, come back by God’s grace to avenge themselves upon them. So they fell on their faces in the dust, as if dead from fear, crying out in a most piteous manner: “Mercy, Lord God! send back to hell all these ghosts, we pray you.”

But when they saw the good wives bearing down on them fear put strength into their legs, and they made off as fast as they would carry them.

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XII. Wherein Pieter Gans is nearer the stake than the wine-barrel.

When the enemy had been so far discomfited the women came back into the

square and stood before the prefecture, not feeling any glory, but rather sadness at having had to shed Christian blood in this manner. Ah, they returned thanks with a full heart to Our Lady the Virgin and Our Lord Jesus, who had given them the victory.

Nor did they forget in their thanksgiving the good angel who had come to their assistance in the form of a bright star. And they sang fair hymns and litanies very sweetly.

Meanwhile all the cocks in the countryside awoke one by one and heralded with their clarions the new day about to dawn.

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And at that call, all the drinkers were roused from sleep, and ran to their doors to find out whence came this sweet music.

And my lord the Sun laughed in the sky.

And the worthy men came out into the square, and some of them, when they saw their wives in the assembly, were all for beating them because they had left their beds; but André Bredael interposed and told them the whole story. Thereupon they were all amazed, ashamed, and repentant, seeing how well these brave petticoats had striven on their behalf. Pieter Gans, Blaeskaek, and Father Claessens, Dean of Uccle, a most saintly man, also came out into the square.

Thereupon, seeing all this crowd assembled, Master Bredael spoke thus:

"Friends," said he, "you hear how that 'tis through the valour of your wives and daughters alone that you are not by this time sniffing the air of heaven. Therefore 'tis seemly that here and now you should promise, and take oath to it, not to drink any more except by their wish."

"That is all very well, Master Bredael," said one of the townsmen, "but 'tis not plain drinking that puts us all into so deep a sleep. I speak of these things with knowledge, I who have drunk wine freely all my life, and hope still so to do with relish to the end of my days. There is something else to it, devilry and evil spells, or so I think. Come hither, Pieter Gans, come hither and talk to us somewhat, and if thou know anything, bring light to this dark matter."

"Alas, alas!" said Pieter Gans, his head wagging and his teeth chattering (for he was afraid, poor fellow), "alas, alas! I know nothing, my good friends."

"Nay," said the man, "but thou dost know something of it, for I see thy head shaking and thy teeth chattering."

But at this point the Dean confronted Gans:

"Wicked Christian," said he, "I can see well enough thou hast had commerce with the devil, to the great despite of all these good men. Confess thy sin with all humility, and we will accord thee such grace as may be, but if thou deny it, thou shalt be punished with hot oil."

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"Ah," said Pieter Gans in tears, "'tis as I said; I shall be burnt, dear God! Blaeskaek, where art thou, my good friend? Give me thy help. Alas, alas!"

But Blaeskaek had gone off in a hurry from fear of the holy Fathers.

"Ah," said Pieter Gans, "see how the traitor deserts me when danger threatens!"

"Speak," said the very reverend Father.

"Yes, Master Dean," said Pieter Gans, weeping and wailing, "I will tell you the whole story, without keeping back anything.... Master!" he cried when he had come to the end of his recital, "if you will not punish me too heavily, Master, I will give all my poor savings as a perpetual gift to the Church. I am a true Christian, that I vow, and no heretic. Moreover, I wish not to die until I have had sufficient time to do long and full penance. But have me not boiled in oil before I have had that time, I beg of you."

"As to that," answered the Dean, "we shall see. Now take us to the place where this devil is to be seen."

By that time they were close to the church, and the priest went in to get therefrom some holy water before they started. Then all the men, women, and children of the village took their way to *The Horn*.

There the Dean demanded to see what had been the cause of those wicked spells which had been cast over so many worthy men, and Pieter Gans, with all humility, showed him the deviling, still smiling and holding his staff of vine-branches in his

hand. And all the women, after looking at him for some time, said that he was very comely for a devil.

The priest first crossed himself, then, dipping his fingers in the holy water, anointed therewith the brow, breast, and belly of the statue, which thereupon, by the grace of God, crumbled into dust, and a sorrowful voice was heard saying: "Oï moi, ô phôs, tethnêka!"

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And these words of the devil were explained by the priest to signify, in the Greek tongue: "Woe is me! Light! I die!"

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XIII. Of the great wonder and astonishment of My Lord the Duke when he heard of the valour of the women of Uccle.

In the meantime the village sent to the Duke two trusty men, with a message to that high prince informing him in due order all that had occurred. These men met him already on his way to Uccle, for he had learnt by his runners the Irontooth's design, and knowing full well where he would find him was coming against him at all speed with a strong force of horsemen.

As soon as the messengers saw who it was coming along the road they went down on their knees, but the good Duke would have none of this, and made them rise and walk at his stirrup.

Before they had gone far they reached the scene of the brigands' discomfiture. At the sight of all those heaped-up bodies the Duke halted, greatly astonished and no less pleased. "And who," quoth he, "has slain all these scoundrels in this wise?"

"Our womenfolk," said one of the messengers.

"What is this thou'rt telling me?" said the Duke with a frown.

"Before God, My Lord," said the man, "I will tell you the whole story."

And so he did.

"Well," said the Duke when he had done, "who would have thought it of these good wives? I will reward them well for it."

So saying he caused the casque of the Irontooth to be taken up and carried away. This casque was to be seen for many years in the armoury of My Lord Charles, who had it guarded with the utmost care.

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XIV. In what manner was instituted the Order of the Women-Archers of Uccle and of the fine reward which My Lord gave to the brave maid Wantje.

On entering Uccle the good Duke saw coming towards him a large body of people, and in their midst a man crying out in a most piteous voice: "Master! Master Priest! let me not be boiled!" To which the answer was: "We shall see."

"Whence comes all this noise?" said the Duke.

But as soon as Pieter Gans saw who it was he ran towards him and threw his arms round his horse's legs. "My Lord," he cried, "My Lord Duke, let me not be boiled!"

"And why," said the Duke, "should they boil one of my good men of Uccle?"

But the very reverend Father Claessens, stepping forward, told him the whole story with great indignation, while Pieter Gans continued to blubber alongside in a most melancholy fashion. And thereon followed such confusion, with the one weeping and groaning, the other denouncing and syllogizing, and each so vehemently, that the good Duke could not tell which to listen to.

Suddenly Wantje came forward out of the press, and, like Pieter Gans, cried: "Mercy and pity!"

"My Lord," said the maid, "this man has sinned greatly against God, but only from

simpleness of mind and a natural cowardice. The devil frightened him; he submitted to the devil. Pardon him, My Lord, for our sakes."

"Maid," said the Duke, "that was well spoken, and 'tis to thee I will hearken."

But the very reverend Father: "My Lord," said he, "forgets to think of God."

"Father," said the Duke, "I am not forgetful of that duty. Nevertheless I think he takes little pleasure in watching Christian fat smoke or a good man's flesh boil, but likes rather to see men gentle and kind, and not giving their fellows penance to do. And on this day when Our Lady the Virgin has deigned to perform a miracle for our sakes I will not sadden her mother's heart by the death of a Christian. Therefore none of the accused, neither this Pieter Gans nor any other there may be, shall this time go to the stake."

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On hearing this Pieter Gans burst out laughing like a madman, and began to dance and sing, crying out the while: "Praise to My Lord! I am not to be boiled. Brabant to the Good Duke!" And all the townsfolk called out after him: "Praise to My Lord!"

Then the Duke bade them be silent, and smiling:

"Well, dames," said he, "who have this night done man's work so valiantly, come hither that I may give you a man's reward. First of all, to the bravest one among you I give this great chain of gold. Which is she?"

The good women pushed Wantje forward before the Duke.

"Ah," said he, "'tis thee, sweet pleader. Wilt kiss me, though I be old?"

"Yes, My Lord," said the maid. And so she did, notwithstanding that she was a little shamefaced over it.

And the good Duke, having hung the chain round her neck, spoke further in this wise:

"As for you all, good dames, who have this night so gallantly carried arms, I institute among you a most honourable Order, under the protection of Madam Mary the Virgin, and I direct that there shall be set up in this place a staff of a good length, and that each Sunday you shall come together here and draw the bow in archery, in memory of the time when with those bows you saved the lives of your husbands and children. And there shall be a fair crown of laurel and a fair purseful of golden *peters*, bright and new, to be awarded annually to the best archer of the year, and brought to her on a cushion by all the others together. And this purse will dower her if she be a maid, or, if she be a wife, will stand her in good stead against a time of famine."

In this manner was instituted the Order of Women-Archers of Uccle, who still draw the bow like men every Sunday, under the protection of Our Lady the Virgin.

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THE THREE SISTERS

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I. Of the three noble ladies and their great beauty.

In the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ 690, lived three maidens, descended, by male issue, from the noble line of the great emperor Octavian.

Their names were Blanche, Claire, and Candide.

Though they had dedicated the flower of their maidenhead to God, it is not to be supposed that this was for lack of lovers.

For, on every day that passed, a crowd of people used to collect for nothing else than to see them go by on their way to church, and onlookers would say of them: "See what gentle eyes, see what white hands!"

More than one, besides, with his mouth watering to look at them, would say sorrowfully: "Must it be that such sweet maids as these should dedicate

themselves to God, who has eleven thousand or more in his Paradise already.”

“But none so fair,” answered an old wheezing merchant behind them, who was drinking in the fragrance of their dresses.

And going off on his way, if the old man saw any young fellow loafing by the roadside, or lying on his belly in the grass to warm his back in the sun, he would give him a kick in the ribs, saying: “Well now, dost thou care nothing to see the finest flowers of beauty that were ever blowing?”

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II. How a prince of Araby was taken with love for the youngest sister, and what came of it.

Not a few young men tried to win them in marriage, but failing in this endeavour, turned moody and pined visibly away.

Among them was a certain prince of Araby, who had himself baptized with great ceremony. And this for the sake of the youngest sister solely.

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But, failing to attain his end, either by pleading or by force, set himself one morning before her door, and there let himself fall on his sword.

The maid, hearing this fair lord cry out, came down in haste and had him carried in and laid on her own bed; whereat (for he was not quite dead) he found great solace.

And when she bent over him to bathe and dress his wound, he roused what force he had left in him, kissed her on her red mouth, sighed like a man delivered from torment, and so gave up his soul happily.

But the maid was not at all pleased at this kiss, for she considered it a dishonour to her divine husband Jesus. Nevertheless she wept for the fair lord, a little.

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III. Wherein it is seen how Satan persecutes those ladies who seek to escape from the world.

There were oftentimes a great crowd of suitors before the dwelling of the three ladies, some of them sighing laments, others prancing up and down on fine horses, others without uttering a word, but only looking up at the windows all the day long.

And oftentimes these men would fight together and kill one another, from jealousy. At this the ladies were saddened exceedingly.

“Ah,” said the two elder to their sister, “pray for us, white Blanche, white of soul and white of body, pray for us, little one. Jesus listens readily to the prayers of such maids as thou art.”

“My sisters,” answered she, “I am less worthy than you, but I will pray, if you so wish it.”

“Yes,” said they.

Then the three sisters knelt down, and the youngest prayed in this manner:

“Kind Jesus, we have sinned against you assuredly, else you would not have let our beauty so touch these wicked men. Yes, we have indeed sinned, but, weaklings that we are, despite ourselves, Lord. Ah, grant us pardon for our great sorrow. You would have us for your own, and so indeed we have kept ourselves: our youth and beauty, mirth and sadness, vows and prayers, souls and bodies, thoughts and deeds, everything. In the morning, at noon, and at vesper-time, at all hours and all moments, do we not have you in our minds? When your bright sun rises, O beloved, and no less when your bright stars shine in your heaven, they can see us at prayer, and offering to you, not gold, frankincense, or myrrh, but our humble loves and our poor hearts. That is not enough, we know well. Dear one, teach us to do more.”

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Pausing here they sighed sorrowfully, all three.

"Kind Jesus," went on the youngest sister, "we know well enough the desire of these men. They think themselves brave and handsome, and hope on this account to capture our love, but they are neither handsome, nor brave, nor good, as you are, Jesus. And yours we are and shall be always, and theirs never. Will you please to love us also a little, for you alone are our comfort and joy in this sad world, Jesus? We will not be unfaithful to you in anything. Ah, let us rather die quickly, for we hunger and thirst for you. If you will, let these evil men continue to pursue us with their loves, 'twill be but delight to suffer it for your sake. Nevertheless, the mortal husband leaves not his wife in danger, nor the betrothed his bride. Are you not better than they, and will you not keep us also from the snares of the enemy? If it be not pleasing to you, do nothing, but then it may be that one day some one will steal from us our virginity, which is yours only. Ah, dear beloved, rather let us pass our lives old, ugly, leprous, and then descend into purgatory, among devils, flame, and brimstone, there to wait until you deem us pure enough at length to take us into your Paradise, where we shall be allowed to see you and love you for ever. Have pity upon us. Amen."

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And having spoken thus, the poor child wept, and her sisters with her, saying: "Pity, Jesus, pity."

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IV. Of the voice of the divine bridegroom, and of the horseman in silvern armour.

Suddenly they heard a low voice saying: "Take heart."

"Hark," they said, "the husband deigns to speak to his brides."

And presently the room was filled with a perfume more delicate than that of a censer burning finest frankincense.

Then the voice spake further: "To-morrow," it said, "when dawn breaks, go out from the town. Mount your palfreys, and, riding without halt, follow the road without heeding whither it leads. I will guide you."

"We will obey you," they said, "for you have made us the happiest of the daughters of men."

And rising from their knees, they kissed one another joyfully.

While the voice was speaking to them, there had come into the square a beautiful horseman in silvern armour, with a golden helm on his head, and, flying above that like a bird, a crest more brilliant than a flame. The horse whereon he rode was of pure white.

None of those there had seen him coming, and he was as if risen from the ground among the crowd of lovers, who, seized with fear, dared not look him in the face.

"Rascals," quoth he, "take these horses away out of the square. Do you not know that the noise of their hooves troubles these three ladies in their prayers?"

And therewith he rode away towards the east.

"Ah," said the lovers to one another, "saw you that silvern armour and that flaming crest? 'Twas an angel of God assuredly, come from Paradise for the sake of these three ladies." The more insistent among them muttered: "He did not forbid us to stand on foot before the door, and in that wise we may yet remain with impunity."

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V. How, by the command of God, the three ladies rode to adventure.

On the morrow, therefore, before daylight, the suitors returned once again in great numbers, but first left their horses behind them in their stables. Soon after daybreak they saw the three ladies ride out from their courtyard, in obedience to the command which God had given them, each one mounted upon her palfrey. Supposing that they were but going out into the neighbouring meadows to take the clean air, they followed behind, one and all, singing merry carols in their honour.

For so long as they were in the streets of the town the palfreys moved slowly, but once out in the open country they began galloping.

The lovers tried still to follow them, but at last were forced to drop off, and fell one by one along the wayside.

When they had covered some miles the palfreys stood still; and the three ladies, seeing that they had come free of their pursuers, resolved to give honour to God for his aid, and to this end to build him a fair church.

Where? They did not know. But the thing was already decided in Paradise, as you shall see.

For as soon as they were once again on their horses, the animals, guided by God's holy spirit, set off at a high trot.

And leapt rivers, threaded forests, passed through towns, whereof the gates opened of themselves to let them by, and closed again after, bounded over walls and like obstacles.

And startled every one they met, all amazed to see go by, quick as the wind, these three white horses and these three fair ladies.

And travelled in this way for a thousand leagues, or rather more.

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VI. Of the diamond hammers, and foundations torn up from the ground.

At Haeckendover, in the duchy of Brabant, the palfreys stood still once again, and neighed.

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And would not go one step forward, nor back.

For this was where God had chosen to have his church.

But the ladies, supposing that they had stopped there because they were tired, went on as far as Hoy-Bout on foot, and there determined to start building.

Therefore they sent for the most skilful workers in stone, and master-builders also, in so great number that at the end of one day the foundations were two hands' breadth high in the lowest part.

And seeing this good beginning the ladies rejoiced greatly, and supposed their work agreeable to God.

But on the morrow, alas, found all the stones torn up out of the ground.

Thinking that by chance some traitor heretic had been buried in that place, who at night shook down the stones of their church with the trembling of his accursed bones, they removed to Steenen-Berg with their workmen, and there started afresh in the same manner as at Hoy-Bout.

But on the morrow morning found the walls once again out of the ground.

For the Lord Jesus was minded to be worshipped more particularly at Haeckendover.

And sent, therefore, his angels by night, with hammers of diamond from the workshops of Paradise.

And bade them tear down the work of the three ladies.

Therefore the sisters, greatly perplexed and wondering, went down on their knees, praying God that he would tell them where he wished to have his church.

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VII. Of the youngest sister and the beautiful angel.

And suddenly they saw a young man, of a beauty more than earthly, clad in a robe of the colour of the setting sun.

Kindly he looked at them.

Knowing him for God's angel, the three ladies fell on their faces before him.

But the youngest, bolder than the others, as is the way with children, dared to steal a look at the fair ambassador, and, seeing him so comely, took heart and smiled.

The angel took her by the hand, saying to her and to her sisters: "Come and follow me."

This they did.

And thence they came to the spot where the church now stands, and the angel said to them: "This is the place."

"Thank you, My Lord," said the youngest joyously.

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VIII. How the three ladies saw a green island, with sweet flowers and birds thereon.

At that time it was thirteen days past the feast of the Kings; snow had fallen heavily and set hard in frost after, by reason of a north wind which was blowing.

And the three ladies saw before them, among the snow, as it were a green island.

And this island was girt about with a cord of purple silk.

And upon the island the air was fresh as in spring, and roses were blowing, with violets and jessamine, whose smell is like balm.

But outside was naught but storm, north wind, and terrible cold.

Towards the middle, where now stands the grand altar, was a holm-oak, covered with blossom as if it had been a Persian jessamine.

In the branches, warblers, finches and nightingales sang to their hearts' content the sweetest songs of Paradise.

For these were angels, who had put on feathered guise, carolling in this fashion in God's honour.

One fair nightingale, the sweetest singer of them all, held in his right claw a roll of parchment, whereon was written in letters of gold:

"This is the place chosen by God and shown by him to the three maidens for the building of a church to the glory of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

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Great was the joy of the ladies at that sight, and the youngest said to the angel:

"We see certainly that God loves us somewhat; what must we do now, My Lord Angel?"

"Thou must build the church here, little one," answered the messenger, "and choose for this work twelve of the most skilled workmen, neither more nor less; God himself will be the thirteenth."

And having said so much he returned to high heaven.

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IX. Of the church of Our Lord at Haeckendover, and of the strange mason who worked there.

Then all three went off in haste to choose from among the others the twelve good workmen who should set up the foundations of the church where they had seen the cord of purple silk.

The work went on so well that it was a pleasure to see the stones mounting up, straight and quickly.

But the miracle was this, that during the hours of labour the masons were always thirteen in number, but at dinner and at paytime twelve only.

For the Lord Jesus was pleased to work with the others, but neither ate nor drank with them; he who in Paradise had such fine broth and such sweet fruits, and wine from the fountain of Saphir, which is a fountain giving forth without intermission wine of a richer yellow than liquid gold itself.

Nor did he suffer for want of money; for that is an evil reserved to us needy, piteous, and ill-faring mortals.

The building advanced so well that soon the bell was hung in the tower as a sign that the church was finished.

Then the three maids entered in together; and, falling on her knees, the youngest said:

“By whom, divine husband and beloved Jesus, shall we dedicate this church built for your service?”

To which the Lord Jesus replied: “It is I Myself who will consecrate and dedicate this church; let none come after me to consecrate it anew.”

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X. Of the two bishops, and the withered hands.

By and by two venerable bishops passed through Haeckendover, and seeing the new church were minded to give it their blessing.

They knew nothing of the words of Jesus to the three ladies, or they would not have thought of such temerity.

But they were punished terribly none the less.

For as one of them was about to bless the water for this purpose he became suddenly blind.

And the other, who was holding the holy water brush, when he lifted his arms for the blessing, found them suddenly withered and stiffened, so that he could no longer move them.

And perceiving that they had sinned in some way the two bishops were filled with repentance and prayed to the Lord Jesus to pardon them.

And they were straightway pardoned, seeing that they had sinned in ignorance.

And thereafter they came oftentimes most devoutly to Haeckendover.

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SIR HALEWYN

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I. Of the two castles.

Sir Halewyn lifted up his voice in a song.

And whatever maid heard that song must needs go to him straight away.

And now to all good Flemings will I tell the tale of this Halewyn and his song, and of the brave maid Magtelt.

There were two proud castles in the province of Flanders. In one dwelt Sir Roel de Heurne, with the lady Gonde, his good wife; Toon the Silent, his son; Magtelt, his fair daughter, and a host of pages, grooms, varlets, men-at-arms, and all the other members of the household, among whom an especial favourite was Anne-Mie, a girl of gentle blood, maid to the lady Magtelt.

Of everything that was made by his peasants, Sir Roel took naught but what was the best.

And the peasants said of him that it was a good master who took only as much as he needed, when he might have left them with nothing.

In the other castle lived Sir Halewyn the Miserable, with his father, brother, mother, and sister, and a large following of rascals and brigands.

And these were an ill-favoured crew, I can tell you, past masters of robbery, pillage, and murder, such as it is not good to meet at too close quarters.

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II. Of Dirk, called the Crow.

This family were issue by direct line of Dirk, the first of the Halewyns, to whom was given the name of the Crow, because he was as greedy of booty as a crow is of carrion.

And also because he was clad all in black, and his men with him.

This Dirk, who lived in the time of the great wars, was like a thunderbolt in battle, where, with his only weapon, a heavy club, furnished with a beak at one side, he broke javelins, splintered lances, and tore away mail as if it had been cloth; and no one could well resist his onslaught. And in this manner he so frightened his enemies that when they saw Dirk and his black soldiers bearing down upon them, shouting, yelling, without fear of any one, and in great number, they gave themselves up for dead before ever battle was joined.

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When victory was won and the more important booty divided (whereof Dirk always secured the lion's share and never came off badly), the other barons and their knights would leave the rest of the field to him and his followers, and would go off, saying: "The pieces are for the crow."

No other man-at-arms would dare to stay behind then, or he would have been quickly taken and slain without waiting. And thereafter Dirk's men would begin to play the crow in earnest; cutting off fingers to get the rings on them, even of those not yet dead, who cried out to them for succour; chopping off heads and arms so that they might pull away clothes the more easily. And they even fought amongst themselves, and sometimes killed one another, over the bodies of the dead, for the sake of neck-pieces, straps of hide, or more paltry stuff still.

And stayed sometimes on the battlefield over this business three days and three nights.

When all the dead were stark naked they piled up their gains into carts which they brought for this purpose.

And with these they returned to Dirk's castle, there to hold high revel and have good cheer. On the way they fought the peasants, taking whatever women and girls were at all comely, and did with them what they pleased. In this way they passed their lives fighting, pillaging, robbing the helpless, and caring nothing at all for either God or devil.

Dirk the Crow became exceedingly powerful and got very much worship, both by reason of his prowess in battle and from the fact that My Lord the Count gave him after his victories the demesne of Halewyn, with powers of seignury, both of the higher and the lower order.

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And he had a fine escutcheon made for himself, wherein was a crow *sable* on a field *or*, with this device: *The pieces are for the Crow.*

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III. Of Sir Halewyn and how he carried himself in his youth.

But to this strong Crow were born children of a quite other kind.

For they were all, strangely enough, men of the quill and writing-desk, caring nothing for the fine arts of war, and despising all arms.

These great clerks lost a good half of their heritage. For each year some stronger neighbour would rob them of a piece of it.

And they begot puny and miserable children, with pale faces, who passed their

time, as clerks are wont, lurking in corners, sitting huddled on stools, and whining chants and litanies in a melancholy fashion.

Thus came to an end the good men of the line.

Siewert Halewyn, who was the wretch of whom I am to tell you this tale, was as ugly, puny, woebegone, and sour-faced as the others, or even worse than they.

And like them he was always lurking and hiding in corners, and shirking company, hated the sound of laughter, sweated ill-humour, and, moreover, was never seen to lift his head skywards like an honest man, but was all the while looking down at his boots, wept without reason, grumbled without cause, and never had any satisfaction in anything. For the rest he was a coward and cruel, delighting during his childhood in teasing, frightening and hurting puppies and kittens, sparrows, thrushes, finches, nightingales, and all small beasts.

And even when he was older, he hardly dared to attack so large a thing as a wolf, though he were armed with his great sword. But as soon as the beast was brought down he would rain blows on it with high valour.

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So he went on until he was old enough to marry.

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IV. How Sir Halewyn wished to take himself a wife, and what the ladies and gentlewomen said to it.

Then, since he was the oldest of the family, he was sent off to the court of the Count, there to find himself a wife. But every one laughed at him, on account of his marvellous ugliness, more particularly the ladies and gentlewomen, who made fun of him among themselves, saying:

“Look at this fine knight! What is he doing here? He has come to marry us, I suppose.—Who would have him, for four castles, as many manors, ten thousand peasants and half the gold in the province? None.—And that is a pity, for between them they would get fine children, if they were to be like their father!—Ho, what fine hair he has, the devil must have limned it with an old nail; what a fine nose, 'tis like a withered plum, and what fair blue eyes, so marvellously ringed round with red.—See, he is going to cry! That will be pretty music.”

And Sir Halewyn, hearing the ladies talk after this fashion, could not find a word to answer them with, for between anger, shame, and sorrow his tongue was fast stuck to the roof of his mouth.

Nevertheless he would take a lance at every tournament, and every time would be shamefully overcome, and the ladies, seeing him fall, would applaud loudly, crying out: “Worship to the ill-favoured one! The old crow has lost his beak.” Thus they compared him, for his shame, with Dirk, the old stock of the Halewyns, who had been so mighty in his day. And, acclaimed in this fashion every time he jousting, Sir Halewyn would go back from the field in sorrow to his pavilion.

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V. How it came about that Sir Halewyn, after a certain tournament, called upon the devil for aid.

At the third tournament wherein he was beaten there were on the field his father, mother, brother, and sister.

And his father said:

“Well, look at my fine son, Siewert the soft, Siewert the overthrown, Siewert the faint-heart, coming back from jousting with his tail between his legs, like a dog thrashed with a great stick.”

And his mother said:

“I suppose for certain that My Lord the Count has put a gold chain round thy neck, and acclaimed thee publicly, for having so valiantly in this jousting jousting on thy back, as in the old days my lord of Beaufort was wont to make thee do. Holy God! that was a fine tumble.”

And his sister said:

"Welcome, my fair brother, what news do you bring? Thou wert the victor for certain, as I see from thy triumphant mien. But where is the wreath of the ladies?"

And his brother said:

"Where is your lordly bearing, My Lord Siewert Halewyn the elder, descendant of the Crow with the great beak? For such a Crow vanquishes without much trouble eagles, goshawks, shrikes, gerfalcons, sparrow-hawks. Are you not thirsty, my brother, with the thirst of a baron, of a victor, I will not say of a villein? We have here some fine frog's wine, which will cool the fires of victory in your belly."

"Ha," answered the Sire, grinding his teeth, "if God gave me strength, I would make thee sing a different song Sir Brother."

And saying this, he pulled out his sword to do so, but the younger, parrying his thrust, cried out:

"Bravo, uncrowlike Crow! Bravo, capon! Raise up our house, I beg of thee, Siewert the victorious!"

"Ha," said the Sire, "and why does this chatterer not go and joust as well as I? But he would not dare, being that kind of coward who looks on at others, folding his arms and making fun of those who strive." [50]

Then he dismounted from his horse, went off and hid himself in his chamber, cried out to the four walls in a rage, prayed to the devil to give him strength and beauty, and promised him, on the oath of a knight, that he would give him his soul in exchange.

So he called on him all through the night, crying out, weeping, bewailing his lot, minded at times even to kill himself. But the devil did not come, being busy elsewhere.

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VI. Of the rovings and wanderings of Sir Halewyn.

Every day after this, whether it were fair or foul, light sky or dark, storm or gentle breeze, rain, snow, or hail, Sir Halewyn wandered alone through the fields and woods.

And children, seeing him, ran away in fear.

"Ah," said he, "I must be very ugly!" And he went on with his wandering.

But if on his way he met some common man who had strength and beauty, he would bear down on him and oftentimes kill him with his sword.

And every one grew to shun him, and to pray to God that he would soon remove their Lord from this world.

And every night, Sir Halewyn called on the devil.

But the devil would not come.

"Ah," said the Sire sorrowfully, "if thou wilt only give me strength and beauty in this life, I will give thee my soul in the other. 'Tis a good bargain."

But the devil never came.

And he, restless, always in anguish and melancholy, was soon like an old man to look at, and was given the name throughout the country of the Ill-favoured Lord.

And his heart was swollen with hatred and anger. And he cursed God. [51]

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VII. Of the Prince of the Stones and of the song.

One day in the season of plum-picking, having roved over the whole countryside, and even as far as Lille, on the way back to his castle he passed through a wood.

Ambling along he saw among the undergrowth, alongside an oak, a stone which was of great length and broad in proportion.

And he said: "That will make me a good seat, comfortable enough to rest on for a little while." And sitting down on the stone he once again prayed to the devil to let him have health and beauty.

By and by, although it was still daylight, and the small birds, warblers and finches, sang in the woods joyously, and there was a bright sun and a soft wind, Sir Halewyn went off to sleep, for he was very tired.

Having slept until it was night, he was suddenly awakened by a strange sound. And he saw, by the light of the high moon and the clear stars, as it were a little animal, with a coat like a mossy stone, who was scratching up the earth beneath the rock, now and again thrusting his head into the hole he had made, as a dog does hunting moles.

Sir Halewyn, thinking it was some wild thing, hit at it with his sword.

But the sword was broken at its touch, and a little mannikin of stone leapt up on to his shoulders, and smote his cheeks sharply with his hard hands, and said, wheezing and laughing:

"Seek, Siewert Halewyn; seek song and sickle, sickle and song; seek, seek, ill-favoured one!"

And so saying he hopped about like a flea on the back of the Miserable, who bent forward as he was bid, and with a piece of his sword dug in the hole. And the stony cheek of the little mannikin was alongside his own, and his two eyes lit up the hole better than lanterns would have done.

And biting Halewyn's flesh with his sharp teeth, striking him with his little fists, and with his nails pinching and pulling him, and laughing harshly, the little mannikin said: "I am the Prince of the Stones, I have fine treasures; seek, seek, Miserable!"

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And saying this, he pommelled him beyond endurance. "He wants," he screamed, mocking him, "Siewert Halewyn wants strength and beauty, beauty and strength; seek then, Miserable."

And he pulled out his hair in handfuls, and tore his dress with his nails until he was all in rags, and kept saying, with great bursts of laughter: "Strength and beauty, beauty and strength; seek, seek, Miserable!" And he hung from his ears with his two hands, and kicked his stone feet in his face, notwithstanding that the Sire cried out with pain.

And the little mannikin said: "To get strength and beauty, seek, Halewyn, a song and a sickle, seek, Sir Miserable!" And the Miserable went on scratching out the earth with his piece of sword.

Suddenly the earth fell away under the stone, leaving a great hole open, and Halewyn, by the light of the mannikin's eyes, saw a sepulchre, and within the sepulchre a man lying, who was of marvellous beauty and had none of the appearance of death.

This man was clad all in white, and in his hands held a sickle, whereof both handle and blade were of gold.



The Man in White

"Take the sickle," quoth the little mannikin, thumping his head with his fists.

Sir Halewyn did as he was bid, and straightway the man in the tomb became dust, and from the dust came a white flame, tall and spreading, and from the white flame a wonderfully sweet song.

And suddenly all about the wood was spread a perfume of cinnamon, frankincense, and sweet marjoram.

"Sing," said the mannikin, and the Miserable repeated the song. While he was singing his harsh voice was changed to a voice sweeter than an angel's, and he saw coming out of the depths of the wood a virgin of heavenly beauty and wholly naked; and she came and stood before him.

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"Ah," she said, weeping, "master of the golden sickle. I come, for I must obey; do not make me suffer too much in the taking of my heart, master of the golden sickle."

Then the virgin went away into the depths of the wood; and the mannikin, bursting out into laughter, threw Sir Halewyn down on to the ground, and said:

"Hast song and sickle; so shalt thou have strength and beauty; I am the Prince of the Stones; farewell, cousin."

And Halewyn, picking himself up, saw no more of either the mannikin or the naked maid; and studying well the golden sickle, and pondering in his mind what could be the meaning of the man in the tomb and the naked virgin, and inquiring within himself in perplexity what use he could make of the sickle and the sweet song, he saw suddenly on the blade a fair inscription, written in letters of fire.

But he could not read the writing, for he was ignorant of all the arts; and, weeping with rage, he threw himself into the bushes, crying out: "Help me, Prince of the Stones. Leave me not to die of despair."

Thereupon the mannikin reappeared, leapt upon his shoulder, and, giving him a stout rap on the nose, read on one side of the blade of the sickle this inscription

which follows:

Song calls,
Sickle reaps.
In the heart of a maid shalt thou find:
Strength, beauty, honour, riches,
From the hands of a dead virgin.

And upon the other side of the blade the mannikin read further:

Whoso thou art shalt do this thing,
Writing read and song sing:
Seek well, hark and go;
No man shall lay thee low.
Song calls,
Sickle reaps.

And having read this the mannikin went away once more.

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Suddenly the Miserable heard a sad voice saying:

“Wilt thou seek strength and beauty in death, blood, and tears?”

“Yes,” said he.

“Ambitious heart, heart of stone,” answered the voice. Then he heard nothing more.

And he gazed at the sickle with its flaming letters until such time as My Lord Chanticleer called his hens awake.

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VIII. What Halewyn did to the little girl cutting faggots.

The Miserable was overjoyed at what had come about, and inquired within himself whether it would be in the heart of a virgin child or of a marriageable virgin that he would find what was promised him, and so satisfy his great desire for worship and power.

Pondering this he went a little way through the wood and stationed himself near to some cottages where he knew there were maids of divers ages, and there waited until morning.

Soon after the sun was up, a little girl came out, nine years old, or rather less, and began collecting and cutting up faggots.

Going up to her, he sang the song and showed her the sickle.

Whereupon she cried out in fear, and ran away as fast as she could.

But Halewyn, having quickly overtaken her, dragged her off by force to his castle.

Going in, he met on the bridge his lady mother, who said to him: “Where goest thou, Miserable, with this child?”

He answered:

“To bring honour to our house.”

And his lady mother let him pass, thinking him mad.

He went into his room, opened the side of the girl beneath a breast just budding, cut out the heart with the sickle, and drank the blood.

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But he got no more strength from it than he had before.

And weeping bitter tears, he cried: “The sickle has played me false.” And he threw down into the moat both the heart and the body.

And the lady Halewyn seeing this poor heart and body dropping into the water, ordered that they should be taken out and brought to her.

Seeing the body rent open under the breast, and the heart taken out, she became afraid lest Siewert her first-born was following dark practices.

And she put the girl's heart back in her breast, and gave her a very fine and Christian burial, and had a fair great cross made on her winding-sheet, and afterwards she was put in the ground and a fair mass said for the quiet of her soul.

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IX. Of the heart of a maid and of the great strength which came to Sir Halewyn.

Sorely troubled, and falling on his knees, Halewyn said: "Alas, is the spell then impotent? I sang, and she would not come to my singing! What would you have me do now, Lord Prince of the Stones? If it is that I must wait until nightfall, that I will do. Then, without doubt, having no sun to hinder your powers, you will give me strength and beauty, and all prowess, and you will send me the virgin I need."

And he went at night to wander in the woods round about the cottages, and there, singing his song, and looking out to see if any were coming.

He saw by the light of the bright moon the daughter of Claes, a poor mad man, nicknamed the Dog-beater, because he used to thump and pommel grievously whomever he met, saying that these accursed dogs had robbed him of his coat, and must give it him back again.

This girl took care of Claes very well, and would not marry, though she was a beautiful maid, saying: "Since he is simple, I cannot leave him to look to himself."

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And every one, seeing her so stout-hearted, gave her, one some of his cheese, another some beans, another some flour, and so they lived together without wanting for food.

The Miserable stood still at the edge of the wood and sang. And the maid walked straight towards the singing and fell on her knees before him.

He went home to his castle, and she followed him, and entered in with him, saying no word.

On the stair he met his brother, just returned from boar-hunting, who said, in mocking wise:

"Ah, is the Miserable about to get us a bastard?" And to the girl: "Well, mistress, thy heart must be fast set on my ugly brother that thou must needs follow him in this wise, without a word spoken."

But Halewyn, in a rage, hit out at his brother's face with his sword.

Then, passing him by, went up into his own room.

And there, having shut fast the door, from fear of his brother, he stripped the girl quite naked, as he had seen the virgin in his vision. And the girl said that she was cold.

Quickly he opened her breast with the golden blade, under the left pap.

And as the maid gave the death-cry, the heart came out of itself on the blade.

And the Miserable saw before his eyes the little mannikin coming out of the stones of the wall, who said to him, grinning:

"Heart on heart gives strength and beauty. Halewyn shall hang the maid in the Gallows-field. And the body shall hang until the hour of God." Then he went back into the wall.

Halewyn put the heart on his breast, and felt it beating firmly and taking root in his skin. And suddenly his bent back was straightened; and his arm found such strength that he broke easily in two a heavy oaken bench; and looking at himself in a mirror-glass he saw an image so beautiful that he could scarce tell it for his own.

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And he felt in his veins the fire of youth burning.

Going down into the great hall he found there at supper his father, mother, brother, and sister.

None of them would have known him but for his voice, which was unchanged.

And his mother rose and peered into his face to see him better.

And he said to her: "Woman, I am thine own son, Siewert Halewyn, the Invincible."

But his brother, whom he had but lately smitten in the face, ran towards him hotly, saying: "Cursed be the Invincible!" and struck him with his knife. But the blade snapped off like glass against the body of the Miserable; whereupon the younger brother seized him in his arms, but the Miserable tore him off and threw him to one side as if he had been a caterpillar.

Then he rushed at him with his head down, like a battering-ram, but as soon as his head touched the Miserable it was cut open, and the blood ran down over his face.

And his father and mother, his sister and the wounded brother, threw themselves on their knees and asked his forgiveness, begging him, since he had become so powerful, to bring them riches and honour.

"That I will," said he.

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X. How the Miserable robbed a Lombard goldsmith, and of the pleasant speech of the ladies and gentlewomen.

On the morrow, armed only with the sickle, for he despised other arms on account of the strength which the spell gave him, Halewyn took the body of the maid to the Gallows-field and there hanged it on the tree.

Then he rode off to the city of Ghent.

And the ladies, gentlewomen and maidens of the town, seeing him pass by on his black horse, said among themselves: "Who is this fair horseman?"

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"'Tis," he cried right proudly, "Siewert Halewyn, who was called the Ill-favoured one."

"Nay, nay," said the bolder among them, "you are making fun of us, My Lord, or else you have been changed by a fairy."

"Yes," said he, "and, moreover, I had fleshly knowledge of her; and so shall have of you, if I please."

At these words the ladies and gentlewomen were not at all put out.

And he went to the shop of a Lombard goldsmith in that town, who had at one time and another lent him six-and-twenty florins. But the goldsmith did not know him for himself.

He told him that he was Sir Halewyn.

"Ah," said the goldsmith, "then I pray, My Lord, that you will repay me my six-and-twenty florins."

But Halewyn, laughing: "Take me," he said, "to the room where thou keepest thy gold."

"My Lord," said the goldsmith, "that I will not, for all that I hold you in high esteem."

"Dog," said he, "if thou dost not obey me I will strike thee dead instantly."

"Ha!" said the goldsmith, "do not come blustering here, My Lord, for I am neither serf nor peasant, but a free burgess of this town. And if you are so minded as to lay your hands on me, I shall know how to get redress, I promise you."

Then Halewyn struck him, and the burgess called for help.

Hearing this cry, apprentices to the number of six came down into the shop, and, seeing Halewyn, ran to seize him.

But he beat them off likewise and bade them show him where the gold was kept.

Which they did, saying one to another: "This is the Devil."

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And the goldsmith, weeping: "My Lord," said he, "do not take it all."

"I shall take what I will," said Halewyn; and he filled his money-bag.

And in this way he took from the goldsmith more than seven hundred golden *bezants*.

Then, seeing the poor man lamenting his lot, he struck him two or three hard blows, telling him not to whine so loud, and that before the month was out he would take from him double the amount.

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XI. Of the arrogant arms of Sir Halewyn.

And the Miserable became the richest, most powerful, and most feared baron in the whole province.

And blasphemously he compared himself to God.

And considering that the old arms of Dirk, and his device, were too mean for his new magnificence:

He sent to Bruges for painters in heraldry to fashion them afresh.

These painters put the old crow away in one quarter, and on a field *argent* and *sable* blazoned a heart *gules* and a sickle *or*, with this device: *None can stand against me*.

Moreover, he had this same blazon fashioned into a great standard which was flown from his castle keep. And also had it cut in stone over the gate. And on his shield, which he caused to be made larger so that the arrogant device might be seen to better advantage. And on his arms, his clothes, and wherever it could be put, there he had it as well.

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XII. How Sir Halewyn jousted with a knight of England.

It so happened that at about this time My Lord of Flanders let call a tournament.

And sent out to all his lords and barons to come to Ghent for that purpose.

Halewyn went thither and set up his shield among the others.

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But the barons and lords, seeing the arrogant device and the great size of the shield, were greatly put to offence thereat.

And all of them jousted with him, but each was overthrown in turn.

Among them was present an English knight of much prowess, who rode out to the middle of the tourney-field and stood straight and proud before Sir Halewyn.

"Well," quoth he, "My Lord the Invincible, it displeases me to see thee planted there so arrogantly and unhorsing us all in this fashion. Wilt thou fight with me?"

"Yes," said Sir Halewyn.

"If I overcome thee, thou shalt be my servant and I shall take thee with me into Cornwall."

"Yes," said Sir Halewyn.

"And cause thee to grease my horses' hooves, and empty the dung from the stable; and find out whether thou art invincible at such work also."

"Yes," said Sir Halewyn.

"And if thou art not invincible, the invincible stick shall thrash thee invincibly."

"Yes," said Sir Halewyn.

"But if thou overcome me, this shall be thy guerdon:

"Five-and-twenty *bezants* which are in the house of thy Lord, the noble Count of Flanders; all the accoutrement of my horse, which is of fine mail; his fair saddle of pear-wood, covered with leather, and saddle-bows richly figured with ten horsemen lustily fighting and with Our Lord driving out the devil from one

possessed; furthermore my helm of fine wrought steel, and on it a crest of silver, gilt over, with spread wings, which may very well, notwithstanding thy device, stand against thy bleeding heart, thy gaping sickle, and thy miserable crow. Well, My Lord the Invincible, dost think thou shalt win invincibly the five-and-twenty *bezants*, the helm of my head, and the trappings of my horse?"

"Yes," said Sir Halewyn.

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Then, after My Lord himself had given the signal, they ran together with a great clatter.

And the English knight was overthrown like the rest.

Then all the ladies acclaimed and applauded the Miserable, crying out: "Worship to Siewert Halewyn the noble, Siewert Halewyn the Fleming, Siewert Halewyn the Invincible."

And on his way back to the house of My Lord, there to feast with him, he was by these ladies kissed, fondled, and made much of without stint.

And, putting on the gear of the English knight, he went off to the towns of Bruges, Lille, and Ghent, thieving and ravishing everywhere.

And came back from each expedition with much booty.

And felt the heart all the while pouring live strength into his breast and beating against his skin.

Then he went back to his own castle with the five-and-twenty *bezants* and the arms of the knight of England.

When he sounded the horn there came to him his mother, who, seeing him so gilt over, was overcome with joy, and cried: "He brings us riches, as he promised."

"Yes," said Sir Halewyn.

And she fell at his feet and kissed them.

As also did the younger brother, saying: "Sir Brother thou hast lifted us up from poverty, I will willingly serve thee."

"So shouldst thou, indeed," said Halewyn. Then, going into the hall: "I would sup," he said, "thou, woman, fetch me meat, and thou, fellow, drink."

And on the morrow, and every day thereafter, he made to serve him at table, as if they had been his private servants, his father, mother, brother, and sister, turn by turn.

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XIII. Of the heart dried up and of the dame Halewyn.

But one morning while he was at meat in his castle, when his father and sister were gone to Bruges to buy corn-coloured cloth-of-scarlet for their clothes,

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And he was being served, with all humility, by his mother and brother,

He became suddenly quite cold, for the heart had ceased to beat.

Putting his hand to his breast, he touched dried-up skin.

Then he felt his face go back as it was before, his shoulders shrink down, his back hump up, and all his body lessen in stature.

Looking at his mother and brother in turn, he saw them laughing and saying to each other: "See, here is our master back in his old ugly skin, and with his old ugly face."

"Ha, My Lord," said his brother, coming boldly up to him and speaking insolently, "will you not take some of this *clauwaert* to hearten yourself? You have no longer, it seems, your former strength."

"Wilt try it?" said the Miserable, and struck him with his fist, but did him no more hurt than if he had been a fly.

Seeing this the younger brother grew bolder, and seating himself close to Halewyn

on the seat:

"My lord," said he, "you have had pudding enough, I think, 'tis my turn to eat."

And he took the pudding from off his platter.

"My lord son," said his mother, "now you shall give to me, who am old, some of this old wine you have kept for yourself."

And she took the cup out of his hand.

"My lord brother," said the younger son, "methinks you have too much of this roast of lamb with sweet chestnuts; I will take it, if you please."

And he put the roast of lamb before his own place.

"My lord son," said his mother, "you do not much like, it seems, this fair cheese and barley tart, give it to me, I pray you."

And the Miserable, dumbfounded, gave it to her.

"My lord brother," said the younger son, "you have been sitting there long enough like an emperor, will you be pleased to stir your limbs now and serve us?"

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And the Miserable, getting up, served them as he was bidden.

"My lord son," said his mother, "I see you now submissive to our orders, will you be pleased to ask my pardon for having so long kept me standing like a private servant, fetching you food and drink, though I am your mother?"

And the Miserable fell at her feet.

"My lord brother," said the younger son, "wilt thou be pleased to fall at my feet likewise, and kiss them, for that thou hast made me do the work of a serf?"

"That I will not," said the Miserable.

"Thou wilt not?"

"I will not," said the Miserable, and stepped back a pace.

"Come hither," said his brother.

"I will not," said the Miserable.

Then the younger ran at him, and, bearing him to the ground without difficulty, began thumping and pommelling him, and striking him in the face with his golden spurs, saying: "Avenge thyself, Siewert Halewyn the Invincible. None can stand against thee, save I. Thou hast long treated us as serfs in thy house, now I will treat thee as a cheese and crush thee underfoot. Why dost thou not now caper as a kid, or fly away as a bird, Siewert the enchanted?" and, going into a frenzy of rage, he drew his knife, saying: "I will cut thee off thy head unless thou cry mercy."

"I will not," said the Miserable.

But his mother, hearing these words, took quickly from the fire a handful of embers, and notwithstanding their heat, threw them into the eyes and mouth of the younger brother, saying: "Thou shalt not kill my first-born, wicked son."

And while the younger brother was howling by reason of the pain from the embers, which blinded him, his mother took the knife from him, and while he was twisting this way and that, swinging up his arms to strike whomever he could, she threw him down, shut him up in the room, and went out dragging her first-born after her. Then, although she was feeble with age, she carried Halewyn up into the tower on her back, as a shepherd carries a lamb (for he had quite lost his senses), and there tended him and bathed his face and breast, which were torn and bleeding, and there at nightfall left him and went away.

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XIV. Of the great weakness of Sir Halewyn and of the days and nights which he spent in the forest.

The Miserable, alone and somewhat comforted, rose to his feet, and was right glad to feel the sickle still at his belt; opened the door, listened to make sure that he could hear nothing, and that his brother was not there.

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And when the night was fully dark, went down the stair slowly, sitting-wise.

For he was so weakened by the blows and wounds he had received that he could not hold himself upright by any means; and in this fashion he went on until he reached the bridge, and, finding that still down, crossed over it.

And very wearily he made his way to the forest.

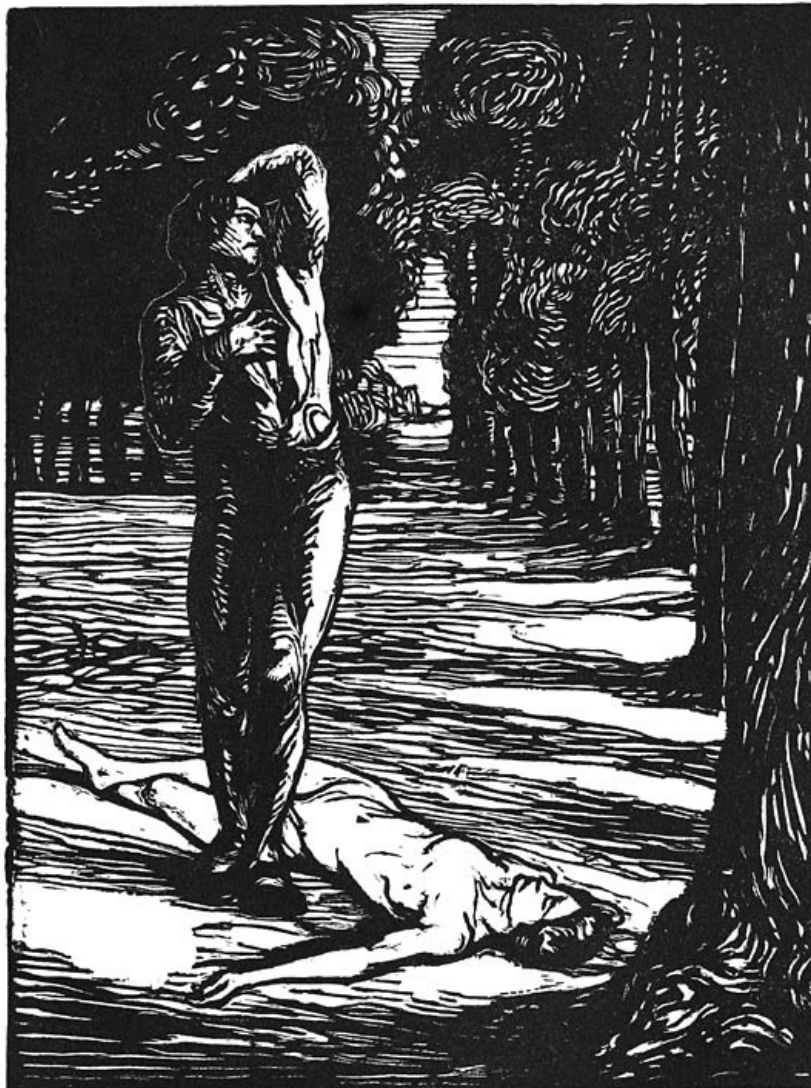
But he could not, on account of his weakness, go so far as the cottages, which were a good two leagues distant to the northward.

So, lying down among the leaves, he sang.

But no maid came, for the song could not be heard from so far away.

And so passed the first day.

When night came again, cold rain began to fall, which sent him into a fever. But notwithstanding this he would not go back to his castle, for fear of his brother. Shivering, and with his teeth a-chatter, he dragged himself northward through the brake, and saw in a clearing a fair pretty maid, rosy-cheeked, fresh, slender, and neat, and he sang his song. But the girl did not come to him.



Sir Halewyn in the Wood

And so passed the second day.

That night the rain fell anew, and he could not move, so stiff was he from the cold, and he sang, but no maid came. At dawn the rain continued, and while he was lying there among the leaves a wolf came and sniffed at him, thinking him dead, but on seeing it draw near he cried out in a terrible fashion, and the wolf took fright and went off. Then he grew hungry, but could find himself nothing to eat. At vespers he sang anew, but no maid came.

And so passed the third day.

Towards midnight the sky cleared, and the wind grew warmer. But the Miserable, though he was suffering greatly from hunger, thirst, and weariness, dared not

sleep. On the morning of the fourth day he saw a girl coming towards him who seemed to be a burgess's daughter. The girl would have run away on seeing him, but he cried out loudly: "Help me! I am worn out with hunger and sickness." Then she drew near to him and said: "I also am hungry." "Art thou," he said, "a maid?" "Ah," said she, "I have had to flee from Bruges, because the priests would have burnt me alive, on account of a brown mole which I have on my neck, of the size of a pea, coming, they say, from my having had fleshly commerce with the devil. But I have never seen the devil, and do not know what he is like."

He, without listening to her, asked again if she were a virgin, and, as the girl said nothing, he sang his song.

But she did not move from where she stood, only saying: "You have a very sweet and strong voice for one so wasted with sickness and hunger."

Then he said to her: "I am the lord Siewert Halewyn. Go to my castle and ask to be taken to my lady mother, and without speaking to any one else, whosoever he be, tell her that her son is hard put to it in the forest with hunger, fever, and weariness, and will die before long if none bring him help."

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The girl went off as he bid her, but coming out of the wood she saw in the Gallows-field the body of the maid hanging, and ran away in a fright. Passing into the territory of Sir Roel de Heurne she craved food and drink at the cottage of one of his peasants. And there she told how she had found Sir Halewyn dying of hunger. But she was told in reply that the said lord was crueller and more wicked than the devil himself, and should be left to be eaten by the wolves and other beasts of the forest.

And the Miserable waited, lying in the leaves in great anguish.

And so passed the fourth day.

And at dawn of the fifth, having seen no more of the girl, he supposed that she had been caught by the priests and taken back to Bruges to be burnt.

Quite disheartened, and chilled with the cold, and saying that he would soon die, he cursed the Prince of the Stones.

Nevertheless, at vespers he sang once more.

And he was then by the side of a forest way.

And he saw coming through the trees a fair maid, who fell on her knees before him.

And he did to her as he had done to the others.

Then rose full of fresh strength, vigour, and beauty, and with the heart resting against his own went off to the Gallows-field, carrying the body, and there hanged it by that of the first virgin.

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XV. How the Miserable, having hanged fifteen virgins in the Gallows-field, held wicked revels and cruel orgies.

Sir Halewyn became most powerful and greatly feared, and killed up to fifteen virgins, whom he hanged in the Gallows-field.

And he led a riotous life, eating, drinking, and carousing continually.

All those ladies who had made fun of him in the days of his impotence and ugliness were brought to his castle.

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And having had his will of them he turned them out of doors like bitches, so wreaking upon them his evil vengeance.

And from Lille, Ghent, and Bruges came the most beautiful courtesans, with their badge on their arms, and they ministered to his pleasure and to that of his friends, among whom the more evil were *Diederich Pater-noster*, so called because he was a great frequenter of churches; *Nellin the Wolf*, who in battle attacked only the fallen, as wolves do; and *Baudouin Sans Ears*, who in his court of justice always cried: "Death, death," without waiting to hear any defence whatever.

In company with the fair courtesans these same lords held revels and orgies

without end, and took from their poor peasants all they had, corn, cheese, jewels, cocks, oxen, calves, and swine.

Then, having stuffed themselves as full as they could hold, threw to their dogs choice viands and rich cakes.

Gave to be broken and pounded up for their hawks and falcons, the meat of fowls, cockerels, and doves; had the hooves of their horses bathed in wine.

Oftentimes until midnight, or even until cock-crow, there would be beating of drums, trilling of pipes, squeaking of viols, skirling of bagpipes, and winding of horns, for their entertainment.

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XVI. How the burgesses of the good town of Ghent gave protection to the virgins of the domain of Halewyn.

Meanwhile in the cottages of the peasant folk were tears, hunger, and great misery.

And when the fifteenth maid had been taken in the domain of Halewyn,

The mothers prayed to God that he would make them barren, or else that they might bear men-children only.

And the fathers complained and said to one another sadly: "Is it not a pitiful thing to see these sweet and gentle flowers of youth so brought to death and dishonour!"

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And some among them said: "Let us go by night to the good town of Ghent, taking with us all our virgin daughters, and tell the whole tale to the burgesses, begging their blessed protection for them, and leaving them there in the town if we are so permitted. So they will escape death at the hands of our master."

Every one who heard this plan thought it a good one; and all the peasants with daughters who were virgins took them off to Ghent, and there told the story to the commune, and the good men gave them protection.

Then with lighter hearts the peasants returned to the domain of Halewyn.

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XVII. Of what Sir Halewyn did on the borders of his domain.

Not long afterwards a hard winter set in, with bitter cold and furious storm.

And the heart of the fifteenth virgin no longer beat strong against Sir Halewyn's breast.

And he sang, but none came. Wherefore he was disappointed and angry.

But calling to mind that there were, in the castle of Sir Roel de Heurne, two girls supposed by common report to be virgins,

And that this castle was no more than the fifth part of a league from the borders of his land,

And that therefore the two maids would be able to hear and come to the call of his song,

He went each night and stationed himself on the farthest border of his demesne, and there sang towards the said castle, notwithstanding the bitter cold, and the snow beginning to fall abundantly.

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XVIII. Of the damosels Magtelt and Anne-Mie, and of Schimmel the dapple-gray.

While the Miserable was roaming the woods, Sir Roel de Heurne and the lady

Gonde, his wife, richly clad, and wrapt round with deer-skins, which give particular warmth to the body, were sitting snugly on their coffers before their good fire of oaken logs, chatting together as old folk will.

But it was the Lady Gonde who spoke most, being the woman.

And she said:

"My good man, do you hear the storm raging furiously in the forest?"

"Yes," answered Sir Roel.

And his lady said further:

"God has been kind to give us, against this great cold, such a fine castle so strongly built, such good clothes, and such a bright fire."

"Yes," answered the Sire.

"But above all," said she, "he has shown us his divine grace by giving us such good and brave children."

"True," answered the Sire.

"For," said she, "nowhere could you find a young man more valiant, courteous, gentle, and fitter to uphold our name than Toon, our son."

"Yes," said the Sire, "he has saved my life in battle."

"But," said his lady, "he has this fault, that he is so scant of words that we scarce know the tone of his voice. He is well called the Silent."

"There is better worth to a man," said the Sire, "in a good sword than in a long tongue."

"Here I see you, my lord," said the lady, "pent up with your reflections, for sadness and gravity are the lot of old age, but I know well a certain maid who would smooth out your forehead and set you laughing."

"'Tis possible," said the Sire.

"Yes," said she, "it is certainly possible, for when Magtelt our daughter comes into this room, I shall see my lord and husband turn happy at once."

At these words Sir Roel nodded his head and smiled a little.

"Yes, yes," said his lady, "for when Magtelt laughs, then laughs my old Roel; when she sings, then my old Roel grows thoughtful and nods his head happily, and if she passes by, he follows with smiling eyes each step of his little daughter."

"True, Gonde," said the Sire.

"Yes, yes," said she, "for who is the well-being and joy of this house? 'Tis not I, who am old, and losing my teeth one by one; nor you either, my fellow in antiquity; nor the Silent either; nor Anne-Mie the private servant, who, though she is very sweet and healthy in her person, is something too quiet in her ways, and laughs only when she is set laughing. But she who makes our old age happy, she who is the nightingale in the house, she who is always coming and going, passing and repassing, flying hither and thither, singing and singing again, as happy as a peal of bells at Christmastide: 'tis our good daughter."

"So it is," said the Sire.

"Ah," said his lady further, "it is a happy thing for us to have such a child, since both of us have already cold in our feet at all seasons. For without her we should pass our time in sadness, and from our old feet the cold would creep up to our hearts, and so we should be taken to our graves more quickly."

"Yes, wife," said the Sire.

"Ah," said she, "another damosel would have wished for love-suitors, and to go to the court of My Lord to get a husband. But our little maid gives no thought to that, for hereabout she loves no one but ourselves, and her who goes everywhere with her, and is as a sister to her, Anne-Mie the private servant; but not without teasing her a little in order to make her laugh."

"True," said the Sire.

"Yes, yes," said his lady, "and every one loves her, admires her, and respects her,

pages, grooms, varlets, men-at-arms, private servants, serfs, and peasants, so joyous and merry is she, so brave and gentle is her bearing. There is no one, even down to Schimmel, the great war-horse, who does not follow her like a dog. Ah! When he sees her coming he whinnies joyously; and she alone must bring him his oats and corn; from none other will he take a grain. She treats him like a man, and often gives him a great draught of *clauwaert*, which he drinks up with relish. She makes herself understood to him by words, but she must never be cross with him, or he makes as if to weep, and looks at her with so sad a manner that she cannot withstand it and then calls him to her, saying: 'Beautiful Schimmel, brave Schimmel,' and other soft words; hearing which the good dapple-gray gets up and comes close to her to have more compliments. He suffers no one on his back but she, and when he is carrying her he is as proud as My Lord of Flanders at the head of his good barons and knights. So she has her sovereignty over every one, by joyousness, goodness, and fair speaking."

"Yes," said the Sire.

"Ah," said his lady, "may the very good God watch over our little one, and may our old ears hear this fledgeling nightingale singing always."

"Amen," said the Sire.

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XIX. How Magtelt sang to Sir Roel the lied of the Lion, and the song of the Four Witches.

While Sir Roel and the lady Gonde were talking together,

The snow had fallen in great quantity,

And had quite covered Magtelt and Anne-Mie, who were coming back from having taken an eagle-stone to the wife of Josse, for her to bind to her left thigh and so get ease in her lying-in.

And the girls came into the great hall, where Sir Roel was sitting with his good wife.

Magtelt, drawing close to her father, knelt to him in salutation.

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And Sir Roel, having raised her up, kissed her on the brow.

But Anne-Mie stayed quietly in a corner, as became a private servant.

And it was a good sight to see these two maids wholly covered with snow.

"Jesus-Maria," said the lady Gonde, "see these two sillies, what have they been doing to get themselves clothed in snow in this fashion? To the fire quickly, children; draw to the fire and dry yourselves."

"Silence, wife," said Sir Roel, "you make youth faint-hearted. In my young days I went through cold, snow, hail, thunder, and tempest without a thought. And so do I still, when there is need to, and I will have Magtelt do the same. Thanks be to God! 'tis not from a fire of logs that a daughter of ours must get warmth, but from the natural fire which burns in the bodies of the children of old Roel."

But Magtelt, seeing him about to grow angry, went and knelt at his feet.

"Lord father," said she, "we are not cold at all, for we have been leaping, dancing and frolicking so heartily, thumping and drubbing each other, that we turned winter into spring; furthermore we sang some fine songs, which I beg you will give me leave to sing over again to you."

"So I will, little one," said Sir Roel. So Magtelt sang him the *lied*, of Roeland de Heurne *the Lion*, who came back from the Holy Land, and brought thence a great sword; and also the song of the *Four Witches*, wherein you may hear mewling of cats, bleating of goats, and the noise which they make with their tails in rainy weather.

And Sir Roel forgot his anger.

When Magtelt had done singing he caused supper to be served and the cross lit up, which threw over them a bright light from the four lamps burning at the end of each arm.

And he made his daughter sit at his side.

Anne-Mie came likewise to sit at table, beside the lady Gonde, who said: "Young company warms old folk."

And there were served to them that evening fine white bread, beef salted and smoked in the chimney among the sweet smoke of fir-cones, Ghent sausage, which was invented, they say, by *Boudwin the Glutton*, bastard of Flanders, and old *clauwaert*.

Supper finished, and a prayer spoken, Magtelt and Anne-Mie went off to bed, in the same room, for Magtelt loved Anne-Mie like a sister and would have her by her side at all times.

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XX. Of the sixteenth virgin hanged.

Magtelt, with laughter, singing, and frolic, soon fell asleep.

But Anne-Mie, being somewhat cold, could not close her eyes.

And the Miserable came and stationed himself on the border of his land. Thence his voice rang out clear, soft, and melodious.

And Anne-Mie heard it, and, forgetting that she was but lightly clad, rose up and went out of the castle by the postern.

When she came into the open the snow smote harshly on her face, her breast, and her shoulders.

And she tried to shield herself against this bitter cold and evil snow, but could not, for she had lain down to sleep nearly naked.

Going towards the song she passed barefoot across the moat, whereof the water was hard frozen.

And trying to mount the farther bank, which was high and slippery, she fell;

And cut a great wound in her knee.

Having picked herself up she entered the forest, wounding her bare feet on the stones, and her numbed body on the branches of trees.

But she went her way without heeding.

When she drew near to the Miserable she fell on her knees before him. And he did to her as he had done to the others.

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And Anne-Mie was the sixteenth virgin hanged in the Gallows-field.

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XXI. How Magtelt sought Anne-Mie.

On the morrow Magtelt, being, as was customary, the first awake, said her prayers to My Lord Jesus and to Madam Saint Magtelt, her blessed patron.

Having besought them earnestly for Sir Roel, the lady Gonde, the Silent, and all the household, most particularly for Anne-Mie, she looked at the maid's bed, and seeing its curtains half drawn she supposed that her companion was still asleep; and so, putting on her fine clothes, she kept saying as she moved up and down the room, or looked at herself in the mirror-glass:

"Ho, Anne-Mie, wake up, wake up, Anne-Mie! Who sleeps late comes last to grass. The sparrows are awake and the hens also, and already their eggs are laid. Wake up, Anne-Mie, Schimmel is neighing in the stable, and the sun is shining bright on the snow; my lord father is scolding the servants, and my lady mother is interceding for them. Canst not smell the savoury odour of beans and good beef broiled with spices? I can smell it well enough, and it makes me hungry; wake up, Anne-Mie." But the girl could not possess herself in patience any longer, and threw the curtains wide open.

Finding no Anne-Mie: "There!" she said, "the rogue, she has gone down without me; and without me, no doubt, is at this same moment eating those good beans and beef."

And going down the stairs at a run Magtelt entered the great hall, where, seeing Sir Roel her father, she knelt to him and asked his blessing, and then likewise to the lady Gonde.

But her mother said to her: "Where is Anne-Mie?"

"I cannot tell," said Magtelt, "she is having some fun with us, I suppose, hidden in some corner."

"That," said Sir Roel, "is not her way, for if any one here makes fun of others 'tis not she, but thou, little one."

"My lord father," said Magtelt, "you make me anxious by talking so."

"Well," said Sir Roel, "go and seek Anne-Mie; as for us, mother, let us eat; our old stomachs cannot wait for food as well as these young ones."

"Ah," said the lady Gonde, "I have no mind to eat; go, Magtelt, and find me Anne-Mie."

But Sir Roel helped himself to a great platterful of beans and good beef, and, falling to it, said that nothing was so easily put out, troubled, made anxious, as a woman, and this for nothing at all.

Nevertheless he was himself a little uneasy, and from time to time looked up at the door, saying that the rascal of a girl would show herself suddenly from somewhere.

But Magtelt, after searching the whole castle over, came back and said: "I can find Anne-Mie nowhere."

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XXII. How Magtelt wept bitterly, and of the fine dress which she had.

And Magtelt had great sorrow in her heart, and wept, and made lament, crying: "Anne-Mie, where art thou? Would I could see thee again!" And falling on her knees before Sir Roel, she said: "My lord father, I pray you to send our men-at-arms in goodly number in search for Anne-Mie."

"So I will," said he.

The men-at-arms went out, but dared not pass on to the lands of Halewyn from fear of the spell.

And on their return they said: "We can hear nothing of Anne-Mie."

And Magtelt went up and stretched herself on her bed, and prayed to the good God to send her back her sweet comrade.

On the second day she went and sat before the glazed window, and without intermission looked out all day at the countryside and the falling snow, and watched to see if Anne-Mie were coming.

But Anne-Mie could not come.

And on the third day the lids of her eyes bled for weeping. And on that day the snow ceased falling, the sky became clear, the sun shone therein, and the earth was hard frozen.

And every day in the same place went and sat the sorrowing Magtelt, watching the countryside, thinking of Anne-Mie and saying nothing.

Sir Roel, seeing her so low-hearted, sent to Bruges for some blue cloth-of-scarlet, for her to make herself a dress, and fine Cyprian gold for the border, and fine gold buttons of rich workmanship.

Magtelt worked away at making this dress, but took no pleasure at all at the thought of all this fine apparel.

And so passed away the week, and each day Magtelt worked at her dress, saying nothing and singing never, but weeping oftentimes.

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On the fifth day, when the dress was finished, well trimmed with the Cyprian gold and embellished with the rich buttons, the lady Gonde bade Magtelt don it, and then showed her her magnificence in a great mirror-glass; but Magtelt had no heart to be glad at seeing herself so beautiful, for she was thinking of Anne-Mie.

And the lady Gonde, seeing how sad she was and silent, wept also, saying: "Since our Magtelt stopped singing I have felt more bitterly the chill of winter and old age."

And Sir Roel made no murmur, but became sullen and pensive, and drank *clauwaert* all day.

And at times, turning angry, he bade Magtelt sing and be cheerful.

And the maid sang merry *lieds* to the old man, who then turned joyous again, and Gonde as well.

And they spent all their time before the fire, nodding their heads. And they said: "The nightingale is come back again to the house, and her music makes the fires of spring sunshine stir in our bones."

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And Magtelt, having done singing, would go off to hide herself in a corner and weep for Anne-Mie.

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XXIII. Of Toon the Silent.

On the eighth day, the Silent went wolf-hunting.

Following a certain beast he rode into the domain of Halewyn.

And at vespers the lady Gonde, leaving the great hall to go to the kitchen for the ordering of supper, on opening the door saw Toon before her. He seemed loth to come in, and hung his head as if with shame.

The lady Gonde, going to him, said: "My son, why do you not come into the hall to bid good evening to the lord your father?"

The Silent, without answering, went into the hall, and muttering short and sullen words by way of salutation, went to sit in the darkest corner.

And the lady Gonde said to Sir Roel: "Our son is angry at something, I think, since he goes off into a dark corner far away from us, against his habit."

Sir Roel said to the Silent: "Son, come hither to the light that we may see thy face."

He obeyed, and Sir Roel, the lady Gonde, and the sorrowing Magtelt saw that he was bleeding from the head and from the neck, and cast down his eyes, not daring to look them in the face.

The lady Gonde cried out with fright on seeing the blood, and Magtelt came to him, and Sir Roel said: "Who has given my son this shamed countenance, this downcast heart, and these wounds in his body?"

The Silent answered: "Siewert Halewyn."

"Why," said Sir Roel, "was my son so presumptuous as to attack the Invincible?"

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The Silent answered: "Anne-Mie hanged in the Gallows-field of Siewert Halewyn."

"Woe!" cried Sir Roel, "our poor maid hanged! shame and sorrow upon us!"

"Lord God," said Gonde, "you smite us hard indeed." And she wept.

But Magtelt could neither weep nor speak from the bitterness of the grief which laid hold upon her.

And she looked at her brother fixedly, and his sunken face blanched, and from the wounds against his eyes dropped tears of blood, and his body was shaken with spasms.

And the Silent sank into a seat, weeping dully like a wounded lion.

"Ha," quoth Sir Roel, hiding his face, "this is the first man of the house of Heurne

that has found need to sit weeping. Shame upon us, and without redress, for there is a spell woven."

And the Silent stuffed his fingers into the wound in his neck, pressing out the blood; but he felt nothing of the pain.

"Toon," said the lady Gonde, "do not dirty your wound with your fingers in this wise; you will poison it, my son."

But the Silent did not seem to hear.

"Toon," said the lady Gonde, "do not do it; I, your mother, order you. Let me wash away this blood and dress with ointment these ugly sores."

While she hurried to prepare the ointment and to warm the water in a washing-basin, Toon did not cease his groaning and weeping. And he tore out the hair from his beard in a rage.

And Sir Roel, watching him, said: "When a man weeps 'tis blood and shame, shame without redress. Halewyn has a spell. Ah, presumptuous one, must thou then go to his castle to brave the Invincible?"

"Woe, my lord," said the lady Gonde, "be not so bitter angry with the Silent, for he showed fine courage in wishing to avenge Anne-Mie on the Miserable."

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"Yes," said Sir Roel, "fine courage that brings shame to our house."

"Tell," said she, "tell, Toon, the tale to thy father, to show him that thou art a worthy son to him none the less."

"I wish it," said Sir Roel.

"My lord father," said the Silent, groaning, and speaking in short breaths, "Anne-Mie hanging, Siewert Halewyn near to the gallows. He was laughing. I ran at him, cutting at his belly with my sword in the fashion of a cross to break the spell. Invincible! He laughed, saying: 'I will take Magtelt.' I struck him with a knife; the blade turned. He laughed. He said: 'I do not care for punishment, be off.' I did not go. I struck him with sword and knife together; in vain. He laughed. He said again: 'Be off.' I could not. Then he struck me with the flat of his sword in the neck and breast, and with the hilt in the back, like a serf. He laughed. I lost sense from the blows. Beaten like a serf, my lord father, I could do naught against him."

Sir Roel, having heard Toon speak, was less angered, understanding that he had not been presumptuous, thinking also of his great pain and of his bitter groaning and his grievous shame.

With the ointment ready and the water warm, the lady Gonde set to work to dress the wounds of her son, particularly that on his neck, which was a deep one.

But Magtelt wept never a tear, and soon went off to her bed, not without a blessing from Sir Roel her father, and her lady mother.

The three stayed a long while together before the fire, father, mother, and son, without a word spoken, for the Silent, moaning all the while, could not bear his defeat, and the lady Gonde wept and prayed; and Sir Roel, sad and ashamed, hid his face.

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XXIV. How the damosel Magtelt made a good resolution.

Magtelt, before she lay down on her bed, prayed, but not aloud. And her face was hard set with anger.

And having undressed she lay down in her bed, tugging at her breast with her finger-nails from time to time, as if she were fighting for breath.

And her breathing was as if she were in agony.

For she was bitter sad and out of heart.

But she did not weep.

And she heard the high wind, forerunner of snow, lifting over the forest, and roaring like a stream in spate after heavy rain.

And it tossed against the window glass dried leaves and branches, which beat on the pane like dead men's finger-nails.

And it howled and whistled sadly in the chimney.

And the sorrowing maid saw in her mind's eye Anne-Mie hanging in the Gallows-field and her poor body pecked by the crows, and she thought of the stain on her brave brother's honour, and of the fifteen poor virgins outraged by the Miserable.

But she did not weep.

For in her breast was a dumb pain, harsh anguish, and a bitter thirst for vengeance.

And she asked very humbly of Our Lady if it were a good thing to let the Miserable any longer go killing the maidens of the land of Flanders.

And at cock-crow she rose from her bed, and her eyes were bright, and proud was her countenance, and her head held high, and she said: "I will go to Halewyn."

And throwing herself on her knees she prayed to the very strong God to give her courage and strength for the revenge of Anne-Mie, Toon the Silent, and the fifteen virgins.

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XXV. Of the sword of the Lion.

At sun-up she went to Sir Roel, who was still in bed, on account of the cold.

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Seeing her come in and fall on her knees before him, he said: "What wilt thou, little one?"

"My lord father," she said, "may I go to Halewyn?"

At this he became afraid, and saw well enough that Magtelt, unable to rid her heart of the thought of Anne-Mie, was minded to avenge her. And he said with love and anger:

"No, my daughter, no, not thou; who goes there will not come again!"

But seeing her go out of the room he never supposed that she would fail in her obedience.

And Magtelt went thence to the lady Gonde, who was praying in the chapel for the repose of Anne-Mie's soul; and she pulled at her mother's dress, to show that she was there.

When the lady Gonde turned her head, Magtelt fell on her knees before her:

"Mother," said she, "may I go to Halewyn?"

But her lady mother: "Oh no, child, no, not thou; who goes there will not come again!"

And so saying, she opened her arms and let fall the golden ball wherewith she warmed her hands, so that the embers spread this way and that on the floor. Then she fell to moaning, weeping, trembling, and chattering with her teeth, and embraced the girl tightly as if she would never let her go.

But she never supposed that she could fail in her obedience.

And Magtelt went thence to Toon, who, despite his wounds, was already out of bed, and seated on his coffer, warming himself before a new-lit fire.

"Brother," she said, "may I go to Halewyn?"

Saying this she held herself straight before him.

The Silent lifted his head and looked at her severely, waiting for her to speak further.

"Brother," she said, "Siewert Halewyn has killed this sweet maid whom I loved; and has done the same to fifteen other pitiful virgins, who are hanging in the Gallows-field shamefully; he is for this country a greater evil than war, death, and pestilence; brother, I would kill him."

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But Toon looked at Magtelt and answered nothing.

“Brother,” said she, “thou must not refuse me, for my heart bids me go. Canst thou not see how sad and downcast I am in this house, and how I shall die of sorrow if I do not that which I should. But having been to him I shall come back joyous and singing as before.”

But the Silent said not a word.

“Ah,” she said, “dost fear for me, seeing how many good knights have assailed him and been by him shamefully overthrown, even thyself, my brave brother, who carriest even now his marks? I am not ignorant that on his shield is written: ‘None can stand against me.’ But what others could not, one may do. He goes glorying in his strength, more terrible than an oliphant, prouder than a lion, thinking himself invincible, but when the beast goes with assurance the hunter follows the more easily. Brother, may I go to Halewyn?”

When Magtelt had reached so far in her speech, suddenly there fell from the wall whereon it was fastened a fair sword well set and sharpened, and with the blade stout to the hilt. The handpiece was of cedar of Lebanon, set out with golden cresslets, and in the castle this sword was held to be of marvellous virtue and holiness, because it had been brought from the crusade by Roeland de Heurne, *the Lion*. And none dared use it.

The sword, falling, lay at the feet of Magtelt.

“Brother,” said Magtelt, crossing herself, “the good sword of the Lion has fallen at my feet; ’tis the very strong God showing thus his will. He must be obeyed, brother; let me go to Halewyn.”

And Toon the Silent, crossing himself as Magtelt had done, answered:

“’Tis all one to me where thou go, if thou cherish thine honour and carry thy crown straight.”

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“Brother,” she said, “I thank you.” And the noble maid began to tremble mightily from head to foot; and she who had not shed a tear on hearing of Anne-Mie’s death and her brother’s dishonour, fell to weeping abundantly, whereby her bitter anger was melted, and bursting into tears by reason of her great joy she said again: “Brother, brother, ’tis the hour of God! I go to the reckoning!”

And she took the good sword.

The Silent, seeing her so brave, lifted himself straight before her and put his hand on her shoulder. “Go,” said he.

And she went out.

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XXVI. Of the noble apparel of the maid Magtelt.

In her own room she dressed herself in her most beautiful clothes as quickly as she could.

What did the fair maid put on her white body? A bodice finer than silk.

And over the fine bodice?

A robe of cloth-of-scarlet of Flemish blue, whereon were the arms of *de Heurne* marvellously worked, and the edges next to the feet and the neck embroidered with fine Cyprian gold.

Wherewith did the fair maid bind in her slender waist?

With a girdle of the hide of a lion, studded with gold.

What had the fair maid on her beautiful shoulders?

Her great *keirle*, which was of cramoisy stitched with Cyprian gold, and covered her from head to foot, for it was an ample cloak.

What had the fair maid on her proud head?

A fine crown of beaten gold, whence fell tresses of pale hair as long as herself.

What held she in her little hand?

The blessed sword brought from the crusade.

So apparelled she went out to the stable, and harnessed Schimmel, the great war-horse, with his saddle of State, a fine leathern seat, painted in divers colours, and richly worked with gold.

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And they set out together, through the snow falling thickly.

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XXVII. How Sir Roel and the lady Gonde questioned Toon the Silent, and of what he answered.

While Magtelt was on her way to Halewyn, and when the first hour of her journey had already gone by, the lady Gonde questioned Sir Roel: "Sir," she said, "do you know where our daughter may be?"

Sir Roel said that he knew nothing of it; and speaking to the Silent: "Son," said he, "dost thou know where thy sister has gone?"

The Silent answered quietly: "Magtelt is a brave maid; whom God leads he leads well."

"Sir," said the lady Gonde, "do not put yourself to the trouble of questioning him further, for saying so much he has used up his words."

But Sir Roel to Toon: "Son, dost thou not know where she is?"

"Magtelt," answered he, "is a fair maid, and carries her crown straight."

"Ah," exclaimed the lady Gonde, "I am growing anxious; where is she then?"

And she went off to search the castle thoroughly.

But coming back she said to Sir Roel: "She is nowhere in the house; she has defied our orders and gone to Halewyn."

"Wife," said Roel, "that cannot be. Children, in this country, were always obedient to their parents."

"Toon," said she, "where is she? Toon, do you not know?"

"The Miserable," he answered, "fears the beautiful maid; whom God leads he leads well."

"Roel," cried out the lady Gonde, "he knows where our Magtelt has gone!"

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"Son, answer," said Sir Roel.

The Silent answered:

"The sword of the crusade fell from the wall at the maid's feet. Whom God guides succeeds in everything."

"Toon," cried the lady Gonde, "where is Magtelt?"

"The virgin," he said, "rides without fear, she goes faster than the armed man: whom God leads he leads well."

The lady Gonde groaned:

"Ah," she said, "our Magtelt will be killed, even now she is stiff frozen, sweet Jesus! The sword of the crusade is of no avail against Siewert Halewyn."

The Silent answered:

"He glories in his strength, thinking himself invincible, but when the beast goes with assurance the hunter follows more easily."

"Wicked son, how couldst thou think to send the little bird to the hawk, the virgin to the enemy of virgins?"

The Silent answered:

"She will come whither none looks to see her: whom God leads he leads well."

"Sir," said the lady Gonde to Roel, "you hear what he says; she has gone to Halewyn, and 'tis this wicked son that gave her leave."

Sir Roel going to Toon:

"Son," said he, "we had here but one joy, that was our Magtelt. Thou hast abused thy privilege in giving her leave to go thither. If she comes not back to us by nightfall I will curse thee and banish thee from my house. May God hear me, and take from thee, in this world bread and salt, and in the other thy portion in Paradise."

"God," said the Silent, "will guide the sword. Whosoever has done wrong, on him let fall the punishment."

Gonde began crying out, weeping and making dole. Roel bade her be silent, and sent a goodly troop of men-at-arms in the direction she had taken.

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But they came back without having seen anything of Magtelt, for they had not dared to go into the territory of Halewyn by reason of the spell.

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XXVIII. The riding of the maid Magtelt.

Singing and winding her horn, rides the noble damosel.

And she is beautiful with a beauty from heaven; fresh and rosy are her cheeks.

And straight she carries her crown.

And her little hand holds fast beneath her *keirle* the good sword of Roel the Lion.

And wide open are her fearless eyes, searching the forest for Sir Halewyn.

And she listens for the sound of his horse.

But she hears nothing, except, in the heavy silence, the still sound of snowflakes falling quietly like feathers.

And she sees nothing, except the air whitened with snow, and white also the long road, and white also the leafless trees.

What is it makes the flame glow in her clear brown eyes? It is her high courage.

Why does she carry so straight her head and her crown? Because of the great strength in her heart.

What is it so swells her breast? The cruel thought of Anne-Mie, and her brother's shame and the great crimes of Sir Halewyn.

And ceaselessly she looks to see if he be not coming, and if she can hear nothing of the sound of his horse.

But she sees nothing, except the air whitened with snow, and white also the long road, and white also the leafless trees.

And she hears nothing, except, in the heavy silence, the still sound of snowflakes falling quietly like feathers.

And she sings.

Then, speaking to Schimmel, she said: "Together, good Schimmel, we are going to a lion. Canst not see him in his cavern, awaiting passers-by, and devouring poor maids?"

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And Schimmel, hearing her, whinnied joyously.

"Schimmel," said Magtelt, "thou art glad, I see, to be going to the revenge of Anne-Mie with the good sword."

And Schimmel whinnied a second time.

And Magtelt sought Sir Halewyn everywhere as she went through the forest. And she listened well for the sound of his horse, and looked to see if he were nowhere coming.

And she saw nothing, except the air whitened with snow, and white also the long road, and white also the leafless trees.

And she heard nothing, except, in the heavy silence, the still sound of snowflakes falling quietly like feathers.

And she wound her horn.

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XXIX. Of the crow and the sparrow, of the hound, the horse and the seven echoes.

When she reached the middle part of the forest, she saw through the thick snowflakes Sir Halewyn coming towards her.

The Miserable had that day on his body a fine dress of blue cloth, on which was brodered in two colours his ugly arms. Round his waist he had a fair belt studded with lumps of gold, and at his belt the golden sickle, and over his dress a fair *opperst-kleed* of corn-coloured cloth-of-scarlet.

Riding on his roan horse he came up to Magtelt, and she saw that he was handsome.

Before his horse, barking and making a great noise, ran a hound like a wolf, which, on seeing Schimmel, leapt at him and bit him. But Schimmel, with a great kick which he let fly, set him dancing a sorry dance, and singing a pitiful song over his broken paw.

"Ah," thought the maid, "God grant, brave Schimmel, that I may do better for the master than thou hast done for the dog."

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And the Miserable came to her:

"Salutation," he said, "fair maid with clear brown eyes."

"Salutation," she said, "Siewert Halewyn the Invincible."

But the Miserable: "What brings thee," he said, "into my lands?"

"My heart," said Magtelt, "bade me come, I wished greatly to see thee, and am content now that I can look at thee face to face."

"So," said he, "have done and shall do all virgins, even more beautiful than thou art."

While they were talking together the wounded hound made a rush at the horse and hung on to Halewyn's *opperst-kleed* as if he would drag him down to the ground.

Having done this, he went off and sat down in the snow beside the road, and there lifting up his muzzle howled most lamentably.

"See," said he, "my hound crying out to death. Hast no fear, maid?"

"I go," she said, "in God's keeping."

Having moved forward a little way, talking and riding together, they saw in the air above their heads, a crow of great size, on whose neck was perched an angry little sparrow, pecking him, clutching him, pulling out his feathers and piping furiously. Wounded, torn open, flying this way and that, right, left, upward, downward, banging against the trees blindly, and croaking with pain, this crow at length fell dead, with his eyes pecked out, across Halewyn's saddle. Having looked at it a moment, he tossed it aside into the road; while the sparrow flew off to a bough, and there, shaking out his feathers merrily, fell a-piping at the top of his voice in celebration of his victory.

"Ah," said Magtelt, laughing to the sparrow, "thou art of noble blood, little bird; come hither, I will find thee a fair cage and give thee thy fill of wheat, millet, hemp, and linseed."

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But Halewyn became mightily angry: "Common little insolent!" he cried, "would that I had thee in a snare! Shouldst not then sing for long thy victory over this noble crow?"

None the less the sparrow went on singing without a break, and in this wise

seemed to mock at Halewyn, who said to Magtelt:

"Dost dare to applaud and give heart to this little animal, knowing that my shield bears on it the crow of my glorious ancestor Dirk! Knowest thou not that like him thou hast but little longer to sing?"

"I," she said, "shall sing as long as it pleases God, my master."

"There is for thee," said he, "no other master than I, for here I rule alone." Suddenly he turned very cold, for the heart of Anne-Mie, though it still beat, was become like ice in his breast. So, thinking that this heart was about to dry up, he said to Magtelt: "Thou comest in good season, fair virgin."

"Whom God leads," said she, "comes always in good season."

"But," he said, "who art thou, riding in my land, singing and winding the horn, who bringest hither such insolent talk?"

"I," said she, "am the Lady Magtelt, daughter of Roel *le Preux*, Lord of Heurne."

"And," said he, "art thou not chilled, riding thus in the snow?"

"None," she said, "feels the cold in the race of the Lords of Heurne."

"And," said he, "hast thou no fear, here at my side and on my own land, where no one dares to set foot?"

"None," she said, "knows of fear in the race of the Lords of Heurne."

"Thou art," said he, "a brave maid."

"I," she said, "am daughter of Roel *le Preux*, Lord of Heurne."

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He answered nothing to that, and they went on a while without speaking.

Suddenly he said, lifting his head arrogantly: "Am I not truly the Invincible, the Beautiful, the Strong? Shall I not be so always? Yes, for all things come to my aid in the hour of victory. In former times I must needs sing, in cold, snow, wind, and darkness, to call virgins to me, but now the most proud, noble, and beautiful of maids comes hither in broad day without song to call her: sure sign of growing power. Who is my equal? None, save God. He has the heavens and I the earth, and over all living things triumph and mastery. Let come what may, armies, lightning, thunder, tempest; who can stand but I?"

"I!" answered to his hideous blasphemy seven voices speaking together.

Those voices were the echo of the *Seven Giants*, which sent back every sound seven times over with great force and volume.

But the Miserable: "Hark!" said he, "my Lord Echo dares to mock the Invincible."

And he burst out laughing.

But the echo burst out laughing likewise, and laughed loud, long, and terribly.

And Halewyn appeared well pleased at the noise, and went on laughing, with the seven echoes after him.

And it seemed to Magtelt as it were a thousand men hidden in the forest.

And meanwhile the hound had taken fright and howled so desperately that it seemed to Magtelt as it were a thousand hounds in the forest crying out to death.

The Miserable's horse had taken fright also, and was so terrified at his master's laughter, the dog's howls, and his own neighing, all ringing out together, that he plunged, reared, stood up on his hind legs like a man, laid back his ears with fear, and would, without doubt, have thrown Halewyn from his back, if, driving him onward with his spurs, he had not made him pass by force the place of the seven echoes.

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But Schimmel had not moved at all, and this strangely enough, for he was a young horse, apt to be alarmed.

When the noise was over they rode on their way, speaking few words together as they rode.

And together they came to the Gallows-field.

XXX. How Magtelt came to the Gallows-field.

There Magtelt saw the sixteen virgins hanging, and amongst them Anne-Mie, and all were covered over with snow.

Halewyn's horse began again to rear, plunge, and lay back his ears as a sign of fear; but Schimmel neighed, and pawed the ground proudly with his hoof.

And Halewyn said to Magtelt: "Thou hast there an unfaithful friend, who can neigh happily at the hour of thy death."

But Magtelt answered nothing, and looking steadfastly at those poor virgins prayed to the very strong God to help her in their revenge.

Meanwhile the Miserable alighted from his horse, and taking the golden sickle in his hand came towards Magtelt.

"It is," he said, "the hour of thy death. Get down, therefore, as I have done."

And in his impatience he would have lifted her from Schimmel's back.

But Magtelt:

"Leave me," she said, "to get down by myself; if I must die 'twill be without weeping."

"Thou art a fine girl," said he.

And she, having dismounted from her horse, said: "My lord, before thou strikest, doff thine *opperst-kleed* of the colour of corn, for the blood of virgins gushes fiercely, and if mine should stain thee I should be grieved."

But before the *opperst-kleed* was off his shoulders, his head fell to the ground at his feet.

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And Magtelt, looking at the body, said: "He strode confidently, thinking himself invincible; but when the beast goes with assurance the hunter follows more easily."

And she crossed herself.

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XXXI. Of the sixteen deaths and of the Prince of the Stones.

Suddenly the head spoke, saying: "Go thou to the end of the road, and sound my horn aloud, so that my friends may hear."

But Magtelt:

"To the end of the road will I not go; thine horn will I not sound; murderer's counsel will I not follow."

"Ah," said the head, "if thou art not the Virgin without pity, join me to my body, and with the heart that is in my breast anoint my red wound."

But Magtelt:

"I am the Virgin without pity; to thy body will I not join thee, and with the heart that is in thy breast will I not anoint thy red wound."

"Maid," said the head, weeping and speaking with great terror, "maid, quickly, quickly, make on my body the sign of the cross, and carry me into my castle, for he is coming."

While the head was speaking, suddenly came out of the wood the Prince of the Stones, and he came and seated himself on the body of the Miserable, and taking in his hands the head: "Salutation," he said, "to the Ill-favoured one; art thou now content? What of thy triumphant bearing, my lord the Invincible? She whom thou calledst not came without a song: the virgin without fear, in whose hands is death. But thou must sing once again thy sweet song, the song to call virgins."

"Ah," said the head, "make me not sing, Lord Prince of the Stones, for I know well

enough that at the end there is great suffering."

"Sing," said the Prince of the Stones, "sing, coward that hast never wept to do evil, and now weepst at the time of punishment: sing, Miserable."

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"Ah," said the head, "have pity, Lord."

"Sing," said the Prince of the Stones, "sing, 'tis the hour of God."

"My lord Prince," said the head, "be not so hard in my evil hour."

"Sing, Miserable," said the Prince of the Stones, "sing, 'tis the hour of the reckoning."

"Ah," said the head, weeping, "I will sing, since you are my master."



The Song of the Head

And the head sang the faery song.

And suddenly there spread abroad in the air a smell of cinnamon, frankincense, and sweet marjoram.

And the sixteen virgins, hearing the song, came down from the gallows and drew near to the body of Halewyn.

And Magtelt, crossing herself, watched them pass, but felt no fear.

And the first virgin, who was the daughter of the poor simpleton, Claes the Dog-beater, took the golden sickle, and cutting into the breast of the Miserable below the left nipple drew out a great ruby, and put this on her wound, where it melted into rich red blood in her breast.

And the head let a great pitiful cry of pain.

"So," said the Prince of the Stones, "did the poor virgins cry out when thou madest them pass from life unto death; sixteen times hast thou brought death about, sixteen times shalt thou die, besides the death thou hast suffered already. The cry is the cry of the body when the soul leaves it; sixteen times hast thou drawn this

cry from other bodies, sixteen times shall cry out thine own; sing, Miserable, to call the virgins to the reckoning."

And the head sang again the faery song, while the first virgin walked away silently towards the wood like a living person.

And the second virgin came to the body of the Miserable and did to it as the first had done.

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And she also walked away into the wood like a living person.

So did each of the sixteen virgins, and for each of them a ruby was changed into good red blood.

And sixteen times the head sang the faery song, and sixteen times gave the death-cry.

And one by one all the virgins went away into the depth of the wood.

And the last of all, who was Anne-Mie, came to Magtelt, and kissing her right hand wherein she had held the sword: "Blessed be thou," she said, "who camest without fear, and, delivering us from the spell, leadest us into paradise."

"Ah," said Magtelt, "must thou go so far away, Anne-Mie?"

But Anne-Mie, without hearing her, passed like the others into the depth of the wood, walking silently over the snow like a living person.

While the head was weeping and uttering bitter complaints, came out from the forest the child of nine years old, whom the Miserable had killed first of all. Still wearing her shroud she approached and fell at the feet of the mannikin Prince of the Stones.

"Ah," she said, kissing the head tenderly, stroking it, caressing it, and wiping away its tears, "poor Miserable, I will pray for thee to the very good God, who readily hears the prayers of children."

And the girl prayed in this wise:

"Dear Lord, see how much he is suffering! Is it not payment enough that he should die sixteen times? Ah, Lord, sweet Lord, and you, Madam Mary, who are so kind, deign to hear me and grant him forgiveness."

But the mannikin, starting up, pushed the child away and said harshly: "This head is mine, thy prayers avail nothing; be off, little ragamuffin, go back whence thou came."

And the child went away like the other maids into the depth of the wood.

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Then he thrust his hand into the breast of the Miserable and pulled out a heart of stone: then, in his rasping voice, which hissed like a viper and scraped like a thousand pebbles under the iron sole of an armed man, he said: "Ambitious heart, heart of stone, thou wast in thy lifetime cruel and a coward; thou couldst not be content with such ample gifts as God in His bounty had given thee, thou hadst no desire towards goodness, courage, or just dealing, but towards gold, power, and vain honours; thou hadst no love for anything, neither father, mother, brother, nor sister; and so, to get more power and higher jurisdiction, thou killedst the people of the land of Flanders, without shame: and so also thou didst set thyself to hurt the weak, sucking thy life from their life, and thy blood from their blood. So have done and so shall always do this reptile order of ambitious ugly men. Blessed be God, who, by the hands of this frail and winsome maid, has cut off thine head from thy neck and taken thee from the world."

As he spoke he had thrown the heart down into the snow, and trampling over it with great despite, kicking it with his toe like a vile thing, and laughing bitterly, he spoke again in his rasping voice:

"Stone thou art, stone shalt thou be a thousand years, but a live stone, a suffering stone. And when men come and carve thee, cleave thee, grind thee to powder, thou shalt endure it all without being able to cry out. Ambitious heart, heart of stone, suffer and bleed, my cousin.

"Thou hast starved poor folk, so shalt thou starve a thousand years; thou hast brought cold into their homes, thou shalt freeze in like manner. Ambitious heart, heart of stone, suffer and bleed, my cousin.

"Thou shalt be a hearth-stone and burn with the heat; paving-stone, and let men walk over thee; stone of a church, and bear upon thee all the weight of the

building; and thou shalt suffer every evil, pain, and anguish. Ambitious heart, heart of stone, suffer and endure, my cousin."

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Having said this the Prince of the Stones, driving before him with his foot the Miserable's heart, disappeared among the trees of the forest.

Then Magtelt looked at the head, and saw that its eyes were open wide. She took it up and washed it with snow, then, carrying it with her, rode away on Schimmel, leaving near the body Halewyn's horse and hound, the one moaning softly, the other watching it with sorrowful wonderment.

As she took up the head, the hound growled, but did not dare touch her.

And while she rode away, horse and hound stayed by the body, downcast and sad, and covered with the snow which fell without ceasing.

And they seemed to be guarding their master.

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XXXII. How father, mother, and sister sought everywhere their son and brother, and could not find him.

Singing and winding her horn rides the noble maid Magtelt.

And in her heart is joy, at the thought that Anne-Mie, the fifteen virgins, and Toon the Silent are avenged.

And her hand holds fast beneath her *keirle* the good sword and the head of Halewyn.

And Schimmel trots quickly, eager to be back in his stable.

While she was riding she saw, through the thick snow falling, an old man coming towards her on a black horse.

And the old man said:

"Beautiful maid, riding so fast, hast seen my son Halewyn?"

And Magtelt:

"I left thy son Halewyn well placed, taking his diversion in the snow with sixteen maidens."

And the old man rode on.

When she had gone farther she saw, through the thick snow falling, a young and rosy-cheeked damosel coming towards her on a white palfrey.

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And the damosel said:

"Beautiful maid, riding so fast, hast seen my brother Halewyn?"

But Magtelt:

"Go farther, to the Gallows-field, where thou shalt see thy brother in like guise to the sixteen maidens."

And the damosel rode on.

Farther still on her way, Magtelt saw, through the thick snow falling, a young man of haughty and stiff-necked countenance coming towards her on a roan charger.

And the young man said:

"Beautiful maid, riding so fast, hast seen my brother Halewyn?"

But Magtelt:

"Thy brother is a fair lord, so fair that round him sixteen maidens stand sentinel, unwilling to let him go."

And the young man rode on.

After travelling on her way still farther, she saw, through the thick snow falling, an old woman, high-coloured and of robust seeming, despite her great age, coming

towards her.

And the old woman said:

“Beautiful maid, riding so fast, hast seen my son Halewyn?”

But Magtelt:

“Thy son Siewert Halewyn is dead; see, here is his head beneath my *keirle*, and his blood running thick on my dress.”

And the old woman cried out:

“If thou had spoken these words earlier thou shouldst not have ridden so far.”

But Magtelt:

“Thou art fortunate, old woman, in that I have left thee thine own body and not slain thee as I have thy son.”

And the old dame took fright and made off.

And night fell.

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XXXIII. Of the feast in the castle of Heurne, and of the head upon the table.

Schimmel trotted quickly, and soon Magtelt reached her father’s castle and there sounded the horn.

Josse van Ryhove, who was gate-keeper that night, was filled with amazement at the sight of her. Then he cried out: “Thanks be to God, ’tis our damosel come home again.”

And all the household ran to the gate crying out likewise with great noise and much shouting: “Our damosel is come home.”

Magtelt, going into the great hall, went to Sir Roel and knelt before him:

“My lord father,” she said, “here is the head of Siewert Halewyn.”

Sir Roel, taking the head in his hands and looking at it well, was so overcome with joy that he wept for the first time since the eyes were in his head.

And the Silent, rising up, came to Magtelt, kissed her right hand wherewith she had held the sword, and wept likewise, saying: “Thanks be to thee who hast brought about the reckoning.”

The lady Gonde was like a woman drunk with joy, and could not find her tongue. At last, bursting into sobs, melting into tears, and embracing Magtelt eagerly:

“Ah, ah,” she cried out, “kiss me, kiss me, kiss me, little one! She has slain the Miserable, the sweet maid; the nightingale has vanquished the falcon! My child is come home again, home again my child. Noël! Thanks be to God who loves aged mothers and will not have them robbed of their children. Noël! See, Magtelt the beautiful, Magtelt the singing-bird, Magtelt the joyous, Magtelt the bright of heart, Magtelt the glorious, Magtelt the victorious, Magtelt my daughter, my child, my all, Noël!”

And Magtelt smiled at her, caressing her and stroking her hands gently.

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And the lady Gonde, weeping freely, let her do, without speaking.

“Ah,” said Sir Roel, “I never saw my wife before in such festival mood.” Then suddenly he cried out:

“Festival,” quoth he, “this should be a day of festival, the great feast of the house of Heurne!”

And he threw open the door to call his pages, grooms, men-at-arms, and all the household.

But they all held back, not daring to enter.

“Ho!” cried he, in his great joyous voice, “where are cooks and kitchen-maids? Where are cauldrons, pots, and frying-pans? Where are barrels, kegs, flagons and bottles, tankards, mugs, and goblets? Where is *clauwaert* simple and double? Where is old wine and new wine? Where are hams and sausages, whales’ tongues, and loins of beef, meat of the air, meat of the waters, and meat of the fields? Bring in everything there is and set it on the table, for this must be a feast-day in this house, feast for an emperor, a king, a prince; for”—and so saying he held up the Miserable’s head by the hair—“our beloved maid has slain with her own hand the lord Siewert Halewyn.”

Hearing this they all cried out with a roar like thunder:

“Praise be to God! Noël to our damosel!”

“Go then,” said Sir Roel, “and do as I have bid.”

And when the great feast was served the head was put in the middle of the table.

On the morrow there was let cry war in the seignury of Heurne. And Sir Roel went with a goodly force of men to attack by arms the castle of the Miserable, whereof all the relatives, friends, and followers were either hanged or slain.

And My Lord the Count gave to the family of Heurne, the goods, titles and territories of Halewyn, excepting only the ugly shield, and theirs they remain to this day.

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SMETSE SMEE

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I. Of Smetse, his belly, and his forge.

Smetse Smeë lived in the good town of Ghent, on the Quai aux Oignons, beside the fair River Lys.

He was well skilled in his trade, rich in bodily fat, and with so jolly a countenance that the most melancholy of men were cheered and took heart for no more than the sight of him in his smithy, trotting about on his short legs, head up and belly forward, seeing to everything.

When work was in full swing in his shop, Smetse, listening to the busy sounds round the fire, would say, with his hands clasped across his stomach, quietly and happily: “By Artevelde! what are drums, cymbals, fifes, viols, and bagpipes worth? For heavenly music give me my sledges beating, my anvils ringing, my bellows roaring, my good workmen singing and hammering.”

Then, speaking to them all: “Courage,” he would say, “my children! Who works well from daybreak drinks the better for it at vespers. Whose is that feeble arm down there, tapping with his hammer so gently? Does he think he is cracking eggs, the faint-heart? To those bars, Dolf, and plunge them in the water. To that breastplate, Pier, beat it out for us fine and true: iron well beaten is proof against bullets. To that plough-share, Flipke, and good work to it, too: from the plough comes the world’s bread. To the door, Toon, here comes the raw-boned nag of Don Sancio d’Avila, the knight with the sour countenance, brought hither by his raw-boned groom, who is for having him shod, no doubt: let him pay double for his Spanish haughtiness and his harshness to poor folk!”

So went Smetse about his smithy, singing mostly, and whistling when he was not singing. And for the rest getting much honest gain, profiting in health, and, at vespers, drinking *bruinbier* with a will in the inn of Pensaert.

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II. How Slimbroek the Red put out the fire in Smetse’s forge.

By and by there came to the Quai aux Oignons a certain Adriaen Slimbroek, who

set up, with the licence of the guild, another smithy. This Slimbroek was an ugly, wizened, lean and puny personage, white-faced, underhung in the jaw like a fox, and nicknamed the Red on account of the colour of his hair.

Skilled in intrigue, expert in sharp-practice, master of arts in cant and hypocrisy, and making himself out to be the finest of smiths, he had interested in his business all the rich and gentle folk of the town, who from fear or otherwise held to the Spaniards and wished ill to those of the reformed faith. They were before, for the most part, customers of Smetse, but Slimbroek had put them against him, saying: "This Smetse is a knave to the bottom of his heart, he was a marauder in his young days, sailing the seas with the men of Zeeland in despite of Spain, on the side of this religion which they call reformed. He still has many friends and relatives in Walcheren, more particularly at Middelburg, Arnemuiden, Camp-Veere, and Flushing, all obstinate Protestants, and speaking of the Pope of Rome and my Lords the Archdukes without veneration.

"And for the rest," added he, "this fellow Smetse is altogether an atheist, reading the bible of Antwerp in despite of the decrees, and going to church only because he is afraid, and not at all because he will."

By such slanders as these Slimbroek robbed Smetse of all his customers.

And soon the fire was out in the forge of the good smith, and soon, too, the savings were eaten up, and Dame Misery came to the dwelling.

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III. Wherein Slimbroek is seen in the river prettily tricked out.

Brought to this pass Smetse, nevertheless, would not let himself take to despair; but he was always sad and heavy of heart when, sitting in his cold smithy and looking at all his good tools lying idle on the ground, he heard the fair sound of hammers and anvils coming from Slimbroek's shop.

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But what angered him most was that whenever he passed before Slimbroek's dwelling the traitor carrot-head would appear suddenly on the threshold, and, saluting him graciously and giving him fair compliments, would make a hundred flattering speeches, accompanied by as many hypocritical salutations, and all for the sake of poking fun at him and to laugh unkindly at his misery.

These ugly encounters and grimaces went on a long while, and Smetse came to the end of his patience: "Ah," said he, "it angers me to be in such poor case; although I must submit, for such is the holy will of God. But it irks me too bitterly to see this wicked knave, who by his trickeries has taken away all my customers, so amusing himself with my misery."

Meanwhile Slimbroek spared him not at all, and each day became sharper in speech, for the more wrong he did to the good smith the more hate he bore him.

And Smetse swore to have his revenge on him, in such a way as to spoil thenceforward his taste for mockery.

It so happened that one Sunday when he was standing on the Quai des Bateliers, looking at the river with a crowd of watermen, townsfolk, boys, and scholars who were idle for the holy day, suddenly there came out of a pothouse, wherein he had been swallowing many pints of ale, Slimbroek, bolder than usual on account of the drink. Seeing Smetse he came and placed himself close to him, and with much gesticulation, loud bursts of talk and laughter, said to him in an insolent tone: "Good day, Smetse, good day, my worthy friend. How is thy fine face? It seems to lose its fat, which was of good quality, Smetse. 'Tis a great pity. What is the reason for it? Art thou angry at the loss of thy customers, Smetse? Thou must drink well to bring back the joy to thy stomach, Smetse. We never see thee now at vespers in the inn of Pensaert; why, Smetse? Hast no pennies to get drink? I have plenty for thee, if thou wilt, Smetse." And he shook his money-bag to make it ring.

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"Thank thee kindly," said Smetse, "thou art too generous, Master Slimbroek, 'tis my turn to stand thee drink now."

"Ah," cried Slimbroek, feigning pity and compassion, "why wilt thou stand drink to me? The world knows thou art not rich, Smetse."

"Rich enough," answered the smith, "to stand thee the best draught thou ever had."

"Hark to him," said Slimbroek to the crowd of watermen and townsfolk, "hark to

him. Smetse will stand us drink! The world is coming to an end. 'Tis the year of golden rags. Smetse will stand us drink! Ah! I shall taste with great pleasure the *bruinbier* that Smetse will stand us. I am thirsty as an African desert, thirsty as Sunday, thirsty as a devil half-boiled in the cauldrons of Lucifer."

"Drink then, Slimbroek," said Smetse, and threw him into the river.

Seeing this the people who were on the quay applauded heartily, and all ran to the edge to have a good look at Slimbroek, who, falling into the water head first, had struck and broken through the belly of a dog a long while dead, which was floating down on the stream as such carrion will. And he was tricked out round the neck with this dog in a most marvellous manner, nor could he get rid of it, being busy with his arms at keeping himself afloat, and his face was smeared all over with offensive matter.

Notwithstanding that he was half-blinded, he dared not come out on to the quay where Smetse was, but swam off towards the other bank, decked with his carrion and blowing like a hundred devils.

"Well," said Smetse, "dost find the *bruinbier* to thy liking; is it not the best in all the land of Flanders? But my good sir, take off thy bonnet to drink; such headgear is not worn for river parties."

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When Slimbroek was in midstream, over against the bridge, Smetse went up on to this bridge with the other onlookers, and Slimbroek, in the midst of his puffing and snorting, cried out to Smetse: "I'll have thee hanged, accursed reformer!"

"Ah," said the good smith, "you are mistaken, my friend; 'tis not I who am the reformer, but you, who devise these new bonnets. Where got you this one? I have never seen such a one, neither so beautiful, nor so richly ornamented with tufts and hangings. Is the fashion coming to Ghent by and by?"

Slimbroek answered nothing, and struggled to get rid of the dead dog, but in vain, and having paused in his swimming for this purpose, went down to the bottom, and came up again more furious than ever, blowing harder, and trying all the while to tear off the body."

"Leave your hat on, my master," said Smetse, "do not so put yourself out in order to salute me, I am not worth the trouble. Leave it on."

At last Slimbroek climbed out of the water. On the quay he shook off the dog hastily and made away as fast as he could to his dwelling. But he was followed by a crowd of young watermen and boys, who ran after him hooting, whistling, covering him with mud and other filth. And they continued to do the same to his house-front after he had gone in.

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IV. Of the two branches.

In this wise Smetse had his revenge on Slimbroek, who thereafter dared not look him in the face, and hid when he passed.

But the good smith, nevertheless, had no more pleasure in anything than before, for with every passing day he became more and more needy, having already, with his wife, used up what help came to them from the guild, and also a small sum of silver from Middelburg in Walcheren.

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Ashamed to get his living by begging and knavery, and knowing how to bear with his lot no longer, he resolved to kill himself.

So one night he left his house, and went out to the moats of the town, which are bordered by fine trees, forked and spreading down to the ground. There he fastened a stone to his neck, commended his soul to God, and, stepping back three paces to get a better start, ran and jumped.

But while he was in the very act he was caught suddenly by two branches, which, falling upon his shoulders, gripped him like man's hands and held him fast where he was. These branches were neither cold nor hard, as wood naturally is, but supple and warm. And he heard at the same instant a strange and scoffing voice saying: "Where goest thou, Smetse?"



Smetse caught by the Two Branches

But he could not answer by reason of his great astonishment.

And although there was no wind the trunks and branches of the tree moved and swung about like serpents uncoiling, while all around there crackled above ten hundred thousand sparks.

And Smetse grew more afraid, and a hot breath passed across his face, and the voice, speaking again, but nearer, or so it seemed, repeated: "Where goest thou, Smetse?"

But he could not speak for fear, and because his throttle was dry and his teeth chattering.

"Why," said the voice, "dost not dare answer him who wishes thee naught but well? Where goest thou, Smetse?"

Hearing so pleasant and friendly a speech, the good smith took heart and answered with great humility: "Lord whom I cannot see, I was going to kill myself, for life is no longer bearable."

"Smetse is mad," said the voice.

"So I am, if you will, Lord," answered the smith; "nevertheless when my smithy is lost to me by the cunning of a wicked neighbour, and I have no way to live but by begging and knavery, 'twould be greater madness in me to live than to die."

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"Smetse," said the voice, "is mad to wish himself dead, for he shall have again, if he will, his fair smithy, his good red fire, his good workmen, and as many golden *royals* in his coffers as he sees sparks in this tree."

"I," exclaimed the smith in great delight, "shall never have such fine things as that! They are not for such miserables as I."

"Smetse," said the voice, "all things are possible to my master."

"Ah," said the smith, "you come from the devil, Lord?"

"Yes," answered the voice, "and I come to thee on his account to propose a bargain: For seven years thou shalt be rich, thou shalt have thy smithy the finest in the town of Ghent; thou shalt win gold enough to pave the Quai aux Oignons; thou shalt have in thy cellars enough beer and wine to wet all the dry throattles in Flanders; thou shalt eat the finest meats and the most delicate game; thou shalt have hams in plenty, sausages in abundance, mince-pies in heaps; every one shall respect thee, admire thee, sing thy praises; Slimbroek at the sight of it shall be filled with rage; and for all these great benefits thou hast only to give us thy soul at the end of seven years."

"My soul?" said Smetse, "'tis the only thing I have; would you not, My Lord Devil, make me rich at a less price?"

"Wilt thou or wilt thou not, smith?" said the voice.

"Ah," answered Smetse, "you offer me things that are very desirable, even, My Lord Devil (if I may say it without offence), more than I wish; for if I might have only my forge and enough customers to keep the fire alight I should be happier than My Lord Albert or Madam Isabella."

"Take or leave it, smith," said the voice.

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"Lord Devil," answered Smetse, "I beg you not to become angry with me, but to deign to consider that if you give me but my forge, and not all this gold, wine, and meats, you might perhaps be content to let my soul burn for a thousand years, which time is not at all to be compared with the great length of all eternity, but would seem long enough to whomever must pass it in the fire."

"Thy forge for thee, thy soul for us; take or leave it, smith," said the voice.

"Ah," lamented Smetse, "'tis dear bought, and no offence to you, Lord Devil."

"Well then, smith," said the voice, "to riches thou preferest beggary? Do as thou wilt. Ah, thou wilt have great joy when, walking with thy melancholy countenance about the streets of Ghent, thou art fled by every one and dogs snap at thy heels; when thy wife dies of hunger, and thou chantest *mea culpa* in vain; then when, alone in the world, thou beatest on thy shrunken belly the drum for a feast, and the little girls dancing to such music give thee a slap in the face for payment; then, at last, when thou dost hide thyself in thy house so that thy rags shall not be seen in the town, and there, scabby, chatter-tooth, vermin-fodder, thou diest alone on thy dung-hill like a leper, and art put into the earth, and Slimbroek comes to make merry at thy downfall."

"Ah," said Smetse, "he would do it, the knave."

"Do not await this vile end," said the voice, "it were better to die now: leap into the water, Smetse; leap, Smee."

"Alas," lamented he, "if I give myself to you, I shall burn for all eternity."

"Thou wilt not burn," said the voice, "but serve us for food, good smith."

"I?" cried Smetse, much frightened at these words, "do you think to eat me down there? I am not good for eating, I must tell you. There is no meat more sour, tough, common, and vulgar than mine is. It has been at one time and another diseased with plague, itch, and other vile maladies. Ah, I should make you a shabby feast, you and the others, My Lord Devil, who have in hell so many souls which are noble, succulent, tasty, and well-fed. But mine is not at all good, I declare."

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"Thou art wrong, smith," said the voice. "Souls of wicked emperors, kings, princes, popes, famous captains of arms, conquerors, slayers of men, and other brigands, are always as hard as an eagle's beak; for so their omnipotence fashions them; we break our teeth off bit by bit in eating them. Others, having been eaten up beforehand by ambition and cruelty, which are like ravenous worms, give us hardly a crumb to pick. Souls of girls who, without want or hunger, sell for money what nature bids them give for nothing, are so rotten, putrid, and evil-smelling that the hungriest of devils will not touch them. Souls of vain men are bladders, and within there is nothing but wind; 'tis poor food. Souls of hypocrites, canters, liars, are like beautiful apples without, but beneath the skin are full of bile, gall, sour wine, and frightful poison; none of us will have any ado with them. Souls of envious men are as toads, who from spleen at being so ugly, run yellow spittle on whatever is clean and shining, from mouth, feet, and all their bodies. Souls of gluttons are naught but cow-dung. Souls of good drinkers are always tasty, and above all when they have about them the heavenly smell of good wine and good *bruinbier*. But there is no soul so tasty, delectable, succulent, or of such fine flavour as that of a good woman, a good workman, or a good smith such as thou. For, working without intermission, they have no time for sin to touch and stain

them, unless it be once or twice only, and for this reason we catch them whenever we can; but 'tis a rare dish, kept for the royal table of My Lord Lucifer."

"Ah," said Smetse, "you have made up your mind to eat me, I see well enough; nevertheless 'twould not cost you much to give me back my forge for nothing."

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"'Tis no great discomfort," said the voice, "to be so eaten, for My Lord and King has a mouth larger than had the fish whereby Jonah the Jew was swallowed in olden time; thou wilt go down like an oyster into his stomach, without having been wounded by his teeth in any wise; there, if it displease thee to stay, thou must dance with feet and hands as hard as thou canst, and My Lord will at once spit thee out, for he will not find it possible to stand for long such a drubbing. Falling at his feet thou wilt show him a joyous face, a steady look in his eyes, and a good countenance, and the same to Madam Astarte, who, without a doubt, will take thee for her pet, as she has done already to several; thereafter thou wilt have a joyous time, serving My Lady merrily and brushing his hair for My Lord; as for the rest of us, we shall be right glad to have you with us, for, among all these familiar vile and ugly faces of conquerors, plunderers, thieves, and assassins, 'twill do us good to see the honest countenance of a merry smith, as thou art."

"My Lord Devil," said Smetse, "I do not merit such honour. I can well believe, from what you tell me, that 'tis pleasant enough down there with you. But I should be ill at ease, I must tell you, being naturally uncouth in the company of strangers; and so I should bring no joy with me, and should not be able to sing; and therefore you would get but poor amusement from me, I know in advance. Ah, give me back rather my good forge and my old customers, and hold me quit; this would be the act of a royal devil and would sit well upon you."

Suddenly the voice spoke with anger: "Smith, wilt thou pay us in such ape's coin? Life is no longer of benefit to thee, death is abhorrent, and thou wouldst have from us without payment the seven full, rich and joyous years which I offer thee. Accept or refuse, thy forge for thee, thy soul for us, under the conditions I have told thee."

"Alas," said Smetse, "then I will have it so, since it must be, Lord Devil!"

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"Well then," said the voice, "set thy mark in blood to this deed."

And a black parchment, with a crow's quill, fell from the tree at the smith's feet. He read on the parchment, in letters of fire, the pact of seven years, opened his arm with his knife, and signed with the crow's quill. And while he was still holding the parchment and the quill, he felt them suddenly snatched from his hands with violence, but he saw nothing, and only heard a noise as of a man running in slipper-shoes, and the voice saying as it went into the distance: "Thou hast the seven years, Smetse." And the tree ceased its swaying, and the sparks in the branches went out.

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V. Of the flaming ball, of the forge relit, and of the terrible great buffet which the man with the lantern gave to Smetse's wife.

Smetse, greatly amazed, rubbed his eyes, thinking he was dreaming. Suddenly shaking himself: "This devil," said he, "was he not making fun of me after all? Have I verily gotten my good forge back again? I will go and see."

Having said this he started running in haste, and from far away saw a great light reddening the sky above the houses, and it seemed to him that the fire sending up this light was on the Quai aux Oignons; and he said to himself: "Could that be my forge?" And he ran the faster.

Coming to the quay he found it lit up as if by a sun, from the paving-stones up to the tops of the trees which stood alongside, and he said to himself: "It is my forge."

Then he was seized and shaken with joy, his legs failed him, and his breath grew short; but he kept running as hard as he could, and coming at last to his house he saw his smithy wide open as in the daytime, and at the back of it a great bright fire.

Unable to contain himself at this sight he fell to dancing, leaping, and bursting out into laughter, crying: "I have my forge, my own forge! Ghent is mine!" Then he went in. Inspecting, examining, touching everything, he saw at the sides, laid out in good order, iron of all kinds: armour-iron, iron bars, plough-iron. "By Artevelde!" he said, "the devil was not lying!" And he took up a bar, and having

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made it red with the fire, which was done quickly, started beating it, making the hammer ring on the anvil like thunder, and crying: "Ha, so I have my good tools back again, and hear once more this good music which has so long been silent!" And while he was wiping away a tear of joy, which gave an unaccustomed wetness to his eye, he saw on a chest near by a good pewter pot standing, and beside it a fine mug, and he filled up the mug several times and drank it down with relish: "Ah," he said, "the good *bruinbier*, the drink which makes men! I had lost the taste for it! How good it is!" Then he went back to hammering the iron bar.

While he was making all this noise, he heard himself called by name, and looking to see whence the voice came he perceived his wife in the half-open door which led from the kitchen, thrusting through her head and looking at him with a startled face.

"Smetse," she said, "is it thou, my man?"

"Yes, wife," said he.

"Smetse," she said, "come close to me, I dare not set foot in this forge."

"And why not, wife?" said he.

"Alas," she said, clinging to him and gazing into the forge, "wert thou alone there, my man?"

"Yes," said he.

"Ah," she said, "Smetse, while you were away there were strange happenings!"

"What happenings, wife?"

"As I was lying in bed," she said, "suddenly the house trembled, and a flaming ball passed across our room, went out through the door, without hurting anything, down the stairs, and into the forge, where, bursting, as I suppose, it made a noise like a hundred thunder-claps. Suddenly all the windows and doors were thrown open with a great clatter. Getting out of bed, I saw the quay all lit up, as it is now. Then, thinking that our house was on fire, I came down in haste, went into the forge, saw the fire lit, and heard the bellows working noisily. In each corner the iron of different kinds arranged itself in place according to the work for which it was used; but I could see no hands moving it, though there must have been some for sure. I began to cry out in a fright, when suddenly I felt, as it were, a glove of hot leather pressed against my mouth and holding it shut, while a voice said: 'Do not cry out, make no sound, if thou wilt not have thy husband burnt alive for the crime of sorcery.' Nevertheless he who thus ordered me to keep silent made himself more noise than I should ever have dared, but by a miracle none of our neighbours heard it. As for me, my man, I had no more heart to make a sound, and I fled back hither into the kitchen, where I was praying to God when I heard thy voice, and dared to open the door a crack. Oh, my man, since thou art here, explain, if thou can, all this tumult."

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"Wife," answered Smetse, "we must leave that to those more learned than ourselves. Think only to obey the order of the voice: keep thy mouth shut, speak to no one of what thou hast seen to-night, and go back to thy bed, for it is still pitch-dark."

"I go," she said, "but wilt thou not come also, my man?"

"I cannot leave the forge," said he.

While he was speaking thus there came towards them, one after another, a baker carrying new-baked bread, a grocer carrying cheeses, and a butcher carrying hams.

Smetse knew well enough that they were devils, from their white faces, hollow eyes, scorched hair, twisted fingers, and also from the fact that they walked with so little sound.

His wife, amazed to see them coming into her house with all this food, would have stopped them, but they slipped between her hands like eels, and went into the kitchen, walking straight and silently.

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There, without a word spoken, the baker arranged his loaves in the pan, while the butcher and grocer put their cheeses and hams in the cool-of the cellar. And they finished their work, taking no notice of the smith's wife, who kept crying: "'Tis not here you must bring these things; you have made a mistake, I tell you, my good men. Go elsewhere."

But they, notwithstanding her voice, arranged the loaves, meat, and cheeses quietly.

This made the good woman more than ever put out, and she grew angry: "I tell you," she exclaimed, "you have made a mistake; do you not hear me? You have made a mistake, 'tis not here you should be; I say here, with us, in this place, in the house of Smetse the beggar, who has not a farthing to his name, who will never pay you. Alas, they will not listen to me!"

And crying out at the top of her voice: "Masters, you are at Smetse's, do you not understand? Smetse the beggar! Do I not say it loud enough? Jesus, Lord, God! Smetse the needy! Smetse the ragged! Smetse the starved! Smetse who is rich in nothing but lice! Who will pay you nothing; do you hear me? Who will pay you nothing, nothing, nothing!"

"Wife," said the smith, "you are losing your head, my dear. 'Tis I who sent for these good men."

"Thou!" said his wife, "thou! but thou art mad, my man; yes, he is mad, my masters, altogether mad. Ah, 'tis thou who sent for them! 'Tis thou who sendest for loaves, hams, and cheeses in this profusion, like a rich man, when thou knowest well enough we cannot pay for them, and so showest thy bad faith!"

"Wife," answered Smetse quietly, "we are rich, and will pay for everything."

"We rich?" she said, "ah, poor beggar-man. Do I not know what is in our chest? Hast ever put thy nose in to see, any more than in the bread-pan? Art thou become the housewife? Alas, my man is mad, God help us!"

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Meanwhile the three men came back into the smithy.

Seeing them again, the wife ran to them: "Master trades-men," said she, "you heard me well enough, for you are not deaf, I believe; we have nothing, we can pay you nothing; take back your provisions."

But without looking at her, nor seeming to hear her, the three went off, walking stiff and silently.

No sooner had they gone out than a brewer's cart drew up at the door, and the brewer's men came into the smithy carrying between them a great barrel full of *bruinbier*.

"Smetse," said his wife, "this is too much! Master brewers, this is not for us; we do not like beer at all, we drink water. Take this barrel to one of our neighbours, it is no concern of ours, I tell you."

None the less the brewer's men took down the barrel of *bruinbier* into the cellar, came up again, and went out to fetch others, and placed them alongside the first to the number of twenty. The good wife, trying to stop them, was pushed aside, while Smetse could not speak for laughing, and could only draw her to his side, and so prevent her from hurting herself on the barrels, which the men were carrying from street to cellar with marvellous speed and dispatch.

"Oh," she wailed, "let me be! This is too much, Smetse! Alas! Now we are worse than beggars, we are debtors, Smetse: I shall go and throw myself into the river, my man. To run up debts to fill a famished stomach, that is shame enough; but to do so from simple gluttony, that is unbearable deceit. Canst thou not be content with bread and water got honestly with thy two hands? Art thou then become such a delicate feeder that thou must have cakes, fine cheeses, and full barrels? Smetse, Smetse, that is not like a good man of Ghent, but rather like a Spanish rogue. Oh, I shall go and drown myself, my man!"

"Wife," said Smetse, troubled at seeing her in such distress, "do not weep. 'Tis all ours, my dear, duly, and by right."

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"Ah," she said moaning, "'tis an ill thing to lose in this wise in your old age that honesty which was your only crown."

While the smith was endeavouring, but in vain, to console her, there entered a vintner followed by three-and-thirty porters, each carrying a basket full of bottles containing precious wines of great rarity, as was shown by the shape of those said bottles.

When the good wife saw them she was overcome with despair, and her courage failed her: "Come in," she said in a piteous voice, "come in, master vintners; the cellar is below. You have there a goodly number of bottles, six score for certain. That is none too much for us who are wealthy, wealthy of misery, vermin, and lice;

come in, my masters, that is the door of the cellar. Put them all there, and more besides if you will."

And giving Smetse a push: "Thou art happy, no doubt," said she, "for 'tis a fine sight for a drunkard, such as thou art, to see all this good wine coming into the house without payment. Ah, he laughs!"

"Yes, wife," said Smetse, "I laugh with content, for the wines are ours, ours the meats, ours the loaves and cheeses. Let us make merry over it together." And he tried to embrace her: but she, shaking herself free: "Oh, oh," she said, "he runs up debts, he tells lies, he laughs at his shame: he has all the vices, none is wanting."

"Wife," said Smetse, "all this is ours, I tell thee again. To this amount am I paid in advance for certain large orders which have been graciously given me."

"Art thou not lying?" said she, growing a little calmer.

"No," said he.

"All this is ours?"

"Yes," he said, "by the word of honour of a citizen of Ghent."

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"Ah, my man, then we are henceforward out of our trouble."

"Yes, wife," said he.

"'Tis a miracle from God."

"Alas," said he.

"But these men come hither by night, against the usual custom, tell me the reason of that."

"He who knows the reason for everything," said Smetse, "is an evil prier. Such a one am not I."

"But," said she, "they speak never a word."

"They do not like to talk," said Smetse, "that is clear. Or it may be that their master chose them dumb, so that they should not waste time chattering with housewives."

"Yes, that may be," she said, while the thirty-first porter was going past, "but 'tis very strange, I cannot hear their footfalls, my man?"

"They have for certain," said Smetse, "soles to suit their work."

"But," she said, "their faces are so pale, sad, and motionless, that they seem like faces of the dead."

"Night-birds have never a good complexion," said Smetse.

"But," said his wife, "I have never seen these men among the guilds of Ghent."

"Thou dost not know them all," said Smetse.

"That may be, my man."

In this manner the smith and his wife held converse together, the one very curious and disturbed, the other confused and ashamed at his lies.

Suddenly, as the three-and-thirtieth porter of the master-vintner was going out of the door, there rushed in in great haste a man of middling height, dressed in a short black smock, pale-haired, large-headed, wan-faced, stepping delicately, quick as the wind, stiff as a poker; for the rest, smiling continually, and carrying a lantern.

The man came up to Smetse hurriedly, without speaking bade him follow, and seized him by the arm. When Smetse hung back he made him a quick sign to have no fear, and led him into the garden, whither they were followed by the good wife. There he took a spade, gave his lantern to Smetse to hold, dug in the earth rapidly and opened a great hole, pulled out of the hole a leathern bag, opened it quickly, and with a smile showed Smetse and his wife that it was full of gold coin. The good wife cried out at the sight of the gold, whereupon he gave her a terrible great buffet in the face, smiled again, saluted, turned on his heel and went off with his lantern.

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The good wife, knocked down by the force of the blow, and quite dazed, dared not

cry out again, and only moaned softly: "Smetse, Smetse," said she, "where art thou, my man? my cheek hurts me sorely."

Smetse went to her and picked her up, saying: "Wife, let this buffet be a lesson to thee henceforward to control thy tongue better; thou hast disturbed with thy crying all the good men who have come here this night for my good; this last was less patient than the rest and punished thee, not without good reason."

"Ah," she said, "I did ill not to obey thee; what must I do now, my man?"

"Help me," said Smetse, "to carry the bag into the house."

"That I will," she said.

Having taken in the bag, not without some trouble, they emptied it into a coffer.

"Ah," she said, seeing the gold run out of the bag and spread itself this way and that, "'tis a fine sight. But who was this man who showed thee this sack with such kindness, and who gave me this terrible great blow?"

"A friend of mine," said Smetse, "a great discoverer of hidden treasure."

"What is his name?" said she.

"That," said Smetse, "I am not allowed to tell thee."

"But, my man..."

"Ah, wife, wife," said Smetse, "thou wilt know too much. Thy questioning will be thy death, my dear."

"Alas," said she.

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VI. Wherein the wife of Smetse shows the great length of her tongue.

When the day was up, Smetse and his wife sat down together to the good loaves, the fat ham, the fine cheese, the double *bruinbier*, and the good wines, and so eased their stomachs, hurt a little by being such a long while hungry.

Suddenly there came in all the old workmen, and they said:

"*Baes* Smetse, thou didst send for us; here we are, right glad to see thy fire lit up again, and to work for thee who wast always so good a master."

"By Artevelde!" said Smetse, "here they all are: Pier, Dolf, Flipke, Toon, Hendrik, and the rest. Good day, my lads!" and he gripped them by the hand, "we must drink."

While they were drinking, his wife said suddenly with a toss of the head: "But no one sent for you all! Is that not so, Smetse?"

"Wife, wife," said the smith, "wilt thou never learn to hold thy tongue?"

"But," said she, "I am speaking the truth, my man."

"Thou art speaking foolishly," said he, "of things whereof thou knowest nothing. Stay in thy kitchen and do not come meddling in my forge."

"*Baesine*," said Flipke, "without wishing to belie you, I must tell you that a message was sent to us in the name of the *baes*. For a man came in the middle of the night knocking on the doors of our houses, shouting out that we should all of us come hither without fail this morning for work of great urgency, and that for this we should each be given a *royal* as forfeit to our several masters. And we came, all of us, not wishing to leave our *baes* in the lurch."

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"'Tis good of you," said Smetse, "ye shall have the promised *royal*. But come with me, I will apportion to each of you the usual task." This he did, and once again the good music of sledges beating, anvils ringing, bellows blowing, and workmen singing was heard in the forge of the good smith.

Meanwhile Smetse went to his wife and said to her with great heat: "Dost think it a fine thing to gainsay me before these good men! Chattering magpie, wilt never learn to hold thy tongue? Hast not already to-night been admonished sharply enough? Must thou have more telling?"

"But, Smetse," said his wife, "I did not know that you had sent for them."

"That is no reason," he said, "why thou shouldst give me the lie before all my workmen; canst thou not leave thy speaking until I have done, or else hold thy tongue altogether, which would be better still."

"Smetse," said his wife, "I never saw you so angry before. Do not beat me, my man, I will be henceforward as dumb as this cheese."

"So you should," said Smetse.

"But, my man," said she, "canst not explain to me somewhat of all these happenings?"

"Sometime," he said, and went back into his smithy.

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VII. Of Smetse the Rich.

That day there came to Smetse many persons, both notable and common, nobles, priests, burgesses, and peasants, to give him orders for much work, and so it went on again on other days, and all through the year.

Soon the smithy became too small, and Smetse had to enlarge it by reason of the ever-growing numbers of his workmen. And the work which they did was so beautiful and so marvellously well done that the fame of it spread abroad to foreign and distant countries, and people came to see and admire it from Holland, Zeeland, Spain, Germany, England, and even from the land of the Turk.

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But Smetse, thinking of the seven years, was not happy at all.

Soon his coffers were full of fine *crusats*, *angelots*, *rose nobles*, and golden jewels. But he found no pleasure in looking at all this wealth, for he thought them poor payment for giving his soul to the devil for all the length of eternity.

Red Slimbroek lost all his customers, who came back one by one to Smetse. Ragged and miserable he used to come every day and lounge on the quay, watching from there the bright fire glowing in the forge of the good smith, and, so standing, he seemed dazed and stupid, like an owl watching a *doit*. Smetse, knowing that he was needy, sent him several customers to bring him some means of sustenance, and also more than once a gift of money. But although he thus repaid evil with good he was no longer happy, thinking of the seven years.

Smetse's wife, finding him so wealthy, bought for dinner each Sunday legs of fat mutton, geese, capons, turkeys, and other good meats; invited to her table his relatives, friends, and workmen; and then there would be a great feast, well washed down with double *bruinbier*. But Smetse, though he ate and drank like an emperor, was not at all happy, thinking of the seven years. And the steam from the roast meats spread abroad on the *Quai aux Oignons*, so fragrant and succulent, and so sweetening the air, that all the dogs wandering in the streets of the town would stop before the house and sniff at the smell, and there on their haunches, nose in air, would wait for crumbs: and the beggars, of whom there were great numbers, came thither likewise and tried to drive away the dogs. Thereupon ensued furious battles, in which many were badly bitten. Seeing this, Smetse's wife and other women would come every Sunday to the door with baskets of alms, and there, before the meal began, would give the beggars good bread, slices of meat, and two farthings to get themselves drink, and all this with soft words and fair speaking; then they charged them to go away from the quay, which they did in an orderly manner. But the dogs stayed behind, and at the end of the feast there was given to them likewise food of some sort. And then they would go off also, taking each his bone or other booty.

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Smetse and his wife together took both dogs and men into their affection; to the beggars he gave food and shelter; and so also to all the dogs of Ghent that were lame, infirm, or sickly, until at length his house came to be called the Dogs' Hospital and the Home of the Poor.

Nevertheless he was not at all happy, thinking of the seven years.

Worn and troubled with these thoughts, Smetse stopped singing and lost his fat, shrivelled visibly, became melancholy and moody, and in his smithy said never a word, except to give a necessary order.

And he was no longer called *Smetse the Merry*, but *Smetse the Rich*.

VIII. How there came a ragged, wayfarer to Smetse's door, and with him, on an ass, a sweet wife and a little child.

On the two hundred and forty-fifth day of the seventh year, when the plum-trees were in bloom, Smetse, dumb as a stone, was taking a little noontime rest. He sat on a wooden bench opposite his door, and with melancholy mien looked at the trees planted all along the quay, and the small birds playing among the branches or squabbling and pecking one another over some morsel of food, and blinked in the bright sun which made these birds so merry, and heard at his back the goodly sounds of his forge, his wife preparing dinner, and his workmen hurrying at their work so that they might be off to their meal, for it was nearing the time; and he said to himself that in hell he would see neither the sun, nor the birds, nor the trees with their load of green leaves, nor hear any more the sounds of his forge, nor the smiths hurrying, nor his good wife preparing dinner.

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By and by the workmen came out, and Smetse was left sitting alone on his bench, pondering in his mind whether there were not some way whereby he might outwit the devil.

Suddenly there drew up at his door a man of piteous appearance, with brown hair and beard, dressed like a ragged townsman, and carrying a great staff in his hand. He was walking beside an ass, and leading it along by a rein. On the ass rode a sweet and beautiful young woman with a noble mien, suckling a little child, who was quite naked, and of such gentle and winsome countenance that the sight of it warmed Smetse's heart.

The ass stopped at the door of the smithy and began to bray loudly.

"Master smith," said the man, "our ass has cast one of his shoes on his way hither, wilt thou be pleased to give orders that another should be given him?"

"I will do it myself," said Smetse, "for I am alone here."

"I should tell thee," said the man, "that we are beggars, without money."

"Have no care for that," said Smetse, "I am rich enough to be able to shoe in silver without payment all the asses in Flanders."

Hearing this the woman alighted from the ass and asked Smetse if she might sit down on the bench.

"Yes," said he.

And while he was fastening up the beast, paring his hoof and fitting the shoe, he said to the man: "Whence come you, with this woman and this ass?"

"We come," said the man, "from a distant country, and have still far to go."

"And this child whom I see naked," said Smetse, "does he not oftentimes suffer from the cold?"

"Nay," said the man, "for he is all warmth and all life."

"Well, well," said Smetse, "you do not cry down your own children, master. But what is your meat and drink while you are travelling in this manner?"

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"Water from streams," said the man, "and such bread as is given us."

"Ah," said Smetse, "that is not much, I see, for the ass's panniers are light. You must often go hungry."

"Yes," said the man.

"This," said Smetse, "is displeasing to me, and it is most unwholesome for a nursing mother to suffer hunger, for so the milk turns sour, and the child grows in sickly wise." And he called out to his wife: "Mother, bring hither as many loaves and hams as will fill the panniers of this beast. And do not forget some double *bruinbier*, 'tis heavenly comfort for poor travellers. And a good peck of oats for the ass."

When the panniers were filled and the beast shod, the man said to Smetse: "Smith,

it is in my mind to give thee some recompense for thy great goodness, for such as thou seest me I have great power."

"Yes," said Smetse, with a smile, "I can see that well enough."

"I am," said the man, "Joseph, nominal husband of the very blessed Virgin Mary, who is sitting on this bench, and this child that she has in her arms is Jesus, thy Saviour."

Smetse, dumbfounded at these words, looked at the wayfarers with great astonishment, and saw about the man's head a nimbus of fire, a crown of stars about the woman's, and, about the child's, beautiful rays more brilliant than the sun, springing from his head and girdling him round with light.

Thereupon he fell at their feet and said: "My Lord Jesus, Madam the Virgin, and my Master St. Joseph, grant me pardon for my lack of understanding."

To this St. Joseph replied: "Thou art an honest man, Smetse, and righteous as well. For this reason I give thee leave to make three requests, the greatest thou canst think of, and my Lord Jesus will listen to them favourably."

At these words Smetse was filled with joy, for it seemed to him that in this way he might perhaps escape the devil; but at the same time he did not dare to avow that he had traded his soul away. So he remained in silence for a few moments, thinking of what things he could ask, then suddenly said, with great respect: "My Lord Jesus, Madam St. Mary, and you, Master St. Joseph, will you please to enter my dwelling? There I can tell you what boons I ask."

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"We will," said St. Joseph.

"Mother," said Smetse to his wife, "come hither and look to the ass of these noble lords."

And Smetse went in before them, sweeping the threshold so that there should be no dust to touch the soles of their feet.

And he took them into his garden, where there was a fine plum-tree in full blossom. "My Lord, Madam, and Sir," said Smetse, "will it please you to order that whosoever shall climb up into this plum-tree shall not be able to come down again unless I so desire?"

"It will," said St. Joseph.



In Smetse's Garden

Thence he led the way into the kitchen, where there stood a great and precious arm-chair, well padded in the seat, and of enormous weight.

"My Lord, Madam, and Sir," said Smetse, "will it please you that whosoever shall sit in this chair shall not be able to rise unless I so desire?"

"It will," said St. Joseph.

Then Smetse fetched a sack, and, showing it to them, said: "My Lord, Madam, and Sir, will it please you that, whatsoever his stature, man or devil shall be able to get into this sack, but not out again, unless I so desire?"

"It will," said St. Joseph.

"My Lord, Madam, and Sir," said Smetse, "thanks be unto you. Now that I have made my three requests I have naught else to ask of your goodness, save only your blessing."

"We will give it," said St. Joseph.

And he blessed Smetse, and thereafter the holy family went upon their way.

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IX. What Smetse did in order to keep his secret.

The good wife had heard nothing of what was said to her man by the celestial wayfarers, and she was amazed to see the behaviour and hear the speech of the good smith. But she was more so than ever when, on the departure of the all-powerful visitors, Smetse began to give forth bursts of laughter, to rub his hands, take hold of her, thump her on the chest, twist her this way and that, and say in a triumphant tone: "It may be, after all, that I shall not burn, that I shall not roast, that I shall not be eaten! Art not glad of it?"

"Alas," she said, "I cannot understand what you are talking about, my man; have you gone mad?"

"Wife," said Smetse, "do not show me the whites of thine eyes in this pitiful manner, 'tis no time for that. Canst not see how light my heart has grown? 'Tis because I have got rid of a burden on my shoulders heavier than the belfry itself; I say this belfry, our own, with the dragon taken from that of Bruges. And I am not to be eaten. By Artevelde! my legs bestir themselves of their own accord at the thought of it. I dance! Wilt not do likewise? Fie, moody one, brewing melancholy when her man is so happy! Kiss me, wife, kiss me, mother, for my *proficiat*; and so thou shouldst, for instead of despair I have found a good and steadfast hope. They think to roast me with sauces and feast off my flesh to their fill. I will have the laugh of them. Dance, wife, dance!"

"Ah, Smetse," said she, "you should take a purge, my man; they say 'tis good for madness."

"Thou," he said, tapping her on the shoulder with great affection and tenderness, "talkest boldly."

"Hark," said she, "to the good doctor preaching reason to me! But wert thou mad or not, Smetse, doffing thy bonnet as thou did to those beggars who came hither sowing their lice; giving to me, thy wife, their ass to hold; filling their hampers with our best bread, *bruinbier*, and ham; falling on thy knees before them to have their blessing, and treating them like archdukes, with a torrent of My Lords, Sirs, and Madams."

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At these words Smetse saw well enough that the lordly wayfarers had not wished to discover themselves to any but he. "Wife," he said, "thou must not question me further, for I can tell thee nothing of this mystic happening, which it is not given thee to understand."

"Alas," said she, "then 'tis worse than madness, 'tis mystery. Thou dost ill to hide thyself from me in this wise, Smetse, for I have always lived in thy house, faithful to thee only, cherishing thine honour, husbanding thy wealth, neither lending nor borrowing, holding my tongue in the company of other wives, considering thy secrets as mine own and never breathing a word of them to any one."

"I know it," said Smetse, "thou hast been a good and true wife."

"Then why," said she, "knowing this, hast thou not more faith in me? Ah, my man, it hurts me; tell me the secret, I shall know how to keep it, I promise thee."

"Wife," said he, "knowing nothing thou wilt be able to hold thy tongue the more easily."

"Smetse," said she, "wilt thou verily tell me nothing?"

"I cannot," said he.

"Alas," said she.

By and by the workmen came back, and Smetse gave each of them a good *royal* to get themselves drink.

Whereat they were all so merry, and felt themselves so rich, that for three days none of them put his nose into the smithy, save one old man who was too withered, stiff, short of breath, and unsteady on his legs to go swimming with the others in the Lys, and afterwards drying in the sun among the tall grasses, dancing in the meadows to the music of rebecks, bagpipes, and cymbals, and at night in the tavern emptying pots and draining glasses.

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X. Of the Bloody Councillor.

At length the day came on which the good smith was due to hand over his soul to the devil, for the seventh year had run out, and plums were once again ripe.

At nightfall, when certain workmen were busy on a grating for the Franciscan brothers which was to be done that night, and had stayed behind with Smetse for that purpose, there came into the forge an evil-looking fellow, with greasy white hair, a rope round his neck, his jaw dropped, his tongue hanging out, and dressed in an ill-found habit like a nobleman's servant fallen on evil days.

This fellow, without being heard by any one there as he walked across the floor, came quickly up to Smetse and put his hand on his shoulder. "Smetse," he said, "hast packed thy bundle?"

Hearing this the smith swung round. "Packed," he said, "and how does my packing concern thee, master bald-pate?"

"Smetse," replied the fellow in a harsh voice, "hast forgotten thy restored fortunes, and the good times thou hast enjoyed, and the black paper?"

"No, no," said Smetse, doffing his bonnet with great humility, "I have not forgotten; pardon me, my lord, I could not call to mind your gracious countenance. Will you be pleased to come into my kitchen, and try a slice of fat ham, taste a pot of good *bruinbier*, and sip a bottle of wine? We have time enough for that, for the seven years are not yet struck, but want, if I am not mistaken, still two hours."

"That is true," said the devil; "then let us go into thy kitchen."

So they entered in and sat down to the table.

The good wife was greatly astonished to see them come in. Smetse said to her: "Bring us wine, *bruinbier*, ham, sausages, bread, cakes, and cheeses, and the best of each that we have in the house."

"But, Smetse," said she, "you waste the good things which God has given you. 'Tis well to come to the help of poor folk, but not to do more for one than another. Beggar-men are beggar-men, all are equal!"

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"Beggar-men!" exclaimed the devil, "that I am not and never was. Death to the beggar-men! To the gallows with the beggar-men!"

"My lord," said Smetse, "I beg you not to be angry with my good wife, who knows you not at all. Wife, consider and look at our guest with great attention, but greater respect, and afterwards thou mayest tell thy gossips that thou hast seen my Lord Jacob Hessels, the greatest reaper of heretics that ever was.

"Ah, wife, he mowed them down grandly, and had so many of them hanged, burnt, and tortured in divers ways, that he could drown himself a hundred times in the blood of his dead. Go, wife, go and fetch him meat and drink."

While he was munching, Smetse said: "Ah, my lord, I soon recognized you by your particular way of saying: 'To the gallows!' and also by this rope which finished off your life in so evil a manner. For Our Lord said: 'Whoso liveth by the rope shall perish by the rope.' My Lord Ryhove was harsh and treacherous toward you, for besides taking your life he took also your beard, which was a fine one.

"Ah, that was an evil trick to play on so good a councillor as you were in those days when you slept so quietly and peaceably in the Bloody Council—I should say the Council of Civil Disorders, speaking respectfully—and woke up only to say: 'To the gallows!' and then went to sleep again."

"Yes," said the devil, "those were good times."

"So they were," said Smetse, "times of riches and power for you, my lord. Ah, we owe you a great deal: the tithe tax, dropped by you into the ear of the Emperor Charles; the arrest of my lords of Egmont and Hoorn, whereof the warrant was written in your own fair hand, and of more than two thousand persons who perished at your command by fire, steel, and rope!"

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"I do not know the number," said the devil, "but it is large. Give me, Smetse, some more of this sausage, which is excellent."

"Ah," said the smith, "'tis not good enough for your lordship. But you are drinking nothing. Empty this tankard, 'tis double *bruinbier*."

"Smith," said the devil, "it is good also, but I tasted better at Pierkyn's tavern one day when five girls of the Reformed Faith were burnt together in the market-place. That frothed better. While we were drinking we heard these five maids singing psalms in the fire. Ah, we drank well that day! But think, Smetse, of the great perversity of those maids, all young and strong, and so fast set in their crimes that they sang their psalms without complaint, smiling at the fire and invoking God in a heretical fashion. Give me more to drink, Smetse."

"But," said Smetse, "King Philip asked for your canonization at Rome, for having served Spain and the Pope so well; why then are you not in paradise, my lord?"

"Alas," wept the devil, "I had no recognition of my former services. Those traitors of Reformers are with God, while I burn in the bottom of the pit. And there,

without rest or respite, I have to sing heretical psalms; cruel punishment, unspeakable torment! These chants stick in my throat, scrape up and down in my breast, tearing my inner flesh like a bristling porcupine with iron spines. At every note a new wound, a bleeding sore: and always, always I have to keep singing, and so it will go on through all the length of eternity."

At these words Smetse was very much frightened, thinking how heavily God had punished Jacob Hessels.

"Drink, my lord," he said to him; "this *bruinbier* is balm to sore throattles."

Suddenly the clock struck.

"Come, Smetse," said the devil, "'tis the hour."

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But the good smith, without answering, heaved a great sigh.

"What ails thee?" said the devil.

"Ah," said Smetse, "I am grieved at your incontinence. Have I welcomed you so ill that you will not let me go, before I leave here, to embrace my wife a last time and bid farewell to my good workmen, and to take one more look at my good plum-tree whose fruits are so rich and juicy? Ah, I would gladly refresh myself with one or two before I go off to that land where there is always thirst."

"Do not think to escape me," said the devil.

"That I would not, my lord," said Smetse. "Come with me, I pray you most humbly."

"Very well," said the devil, "but not for long."

In the garden Smetse began to sigh afresh.

"Ah," he said, "look at my plums, my lord; will you be pleased to let me go up and eat my fill?"

"Go up then," said the devil.

Up in the tree Smetse began to eat in a most greedy manner, and suck in the juice of the plums with a great noise. "Ah," cried he, "plums of paradise, Christian plums, how fat you are! Princely plums, you would solace a hundred devils burning in the lowest parts of hell. By you, sweet plums, blessed plums, is thirst driven out of my throat; by you, adorable plums, gentle plums, is purged from my stomach all evil melancholy; by you, fresh plums, sugary plums, is diffused in my blood an infinite sweetness. Ah, juicy plums, joyous plums, faery plums, would that I could go on sucking you for ever!"

And while he was saying all this, Smetse went on picking them, eating them and sipping the juice, without ever stopping.

"Pox!" said the devil, "it makes my mouth water; why dost not throw me down some of these marvellous plums?"

"Alas, my lord," said Smetse, "that I cannot do; they would melt into water on their fall, so delicate are they. But if you will be pleased to climb up into the tree you will find much pleasure in store for you."

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"Then I will," said the devil.

When he was well settled on a stout branch and there regaling himself with plums, Smetse slipped down, picked up a stick lying on the grass and fell to belabouring him with great vigour.

Feeling the stick on his back the devil would have leapt down on the smith, but could not move, for the skin of his seat held fast to the branch. And he snorted, ground his teeth, and foamed at the mouth with great rage, and also by reason of the pain which his tender skin caused him.

Meanwhile Smetse gave him a good drubbing, caressed with his stick every quarter of his body in turn, bruised him to the bone, tore his habit, and gave him as strong and straight a beating as was ever given in the land of Flanders. And he kept saying: "You say not a word about my plums, my lord; they are good, none the less."

"Ah," cried Hessels, "why am I not free!"

"Alas, yes! why are you not free!" answered Smetse, "you would give me to some

little butcher among your friends who would cut me up freely into slices like a ham, under your learned instruction, for you are, as I know well, a doctor of torment. But are you not being well tormented in turn by my stick? Alas, yes! why are you not free! You would hoist me up on some blessed gallows, and every one would see me hanging in the air, and freely would Master Hessels laugh. And so he would have his revenge on me for this excellent drubbing which I am giving him with such freedom. For nothing in this world is so free as a free stick falling freely on an unfree councillor. Alas, yes! why are you not free! You would free my head from my body, as you did with such satisfaction to my masters of Egmont and Hoorn. Alas, yes! why are you not free! then we should see Smetse in some good little fire, which would roast him freely, as was done to the poor maids of the reformed faith; and Smetse, like them, would be heard singing with a free soul to the God of free believers, and with a free conscience stronger than the flame, while Master Hessels drank *bruinbier* and said that it frothed nicely.”

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“Oh,” said the devil, “why beat me so cruelly, without pity for my white hairs?”

“As for thy white hair,” said Smetse, “’tis the hair of an old tiger who ate up our country. For this reason it gives me sweet pleasure to beat thee with this oaken stick; and also in order that thou mayst give me permission to stay another seven years on this earth, where I find myself so well content, if it so please thee.”

“Seven years!” said the devil, “do not count on that; I would rather bleed under thy stick.”

“Ah,” said Smetse, “I see that your skin is fond of good blows. These are tasty ones, it is true. But the best of cheer is unwholesome if taken in excess. So when you have had enough of them, be so good as to tell me. I will put a stop to this feast, but for that I must have the seven years.”

“Never,” said Hessels; and lifting his snout into the air like a baying dog, he cried out: “Devils to the rescue!” But this he did so loudly, and in such screeching wise, that at the sound of his cracked voice blaring out like a trumpet, all the workmen came to see what it was about.

“You do not shout loud enough,” said Smetse, “I will help you.” And he beat him the harder, so that the devil cried the louder.

“See,” said Smetse, “how well this stick makes the little nightingale sing in my plum-tree. He is saying over his *lied* of love to call hither his fair mate. She will come by and by, my lord; but come down, I pray you, and await her below, for they say that the night dew is deadly at a height from the ground.”

“*Baes*,” said certain workmen, “is it not my lord Jacob Hessels, the Bloody Councillor, who is perched up there in thy plum-tree?”

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“Yes, lads,” answered Smetse, “’tis indeed that worthy man. He seeks high places now as he did all his life, and so also at the end of it, when he swung in the air, putting out his tongue at the passers-by. For that which is of the gallows returns to the gallows, and the rope will take back its own. ’Tis written.”

“*Baes*,” said they, “can we not help to bring him down?”

“Yes,” said he. And the workmen went off to the smithy.

Meanwhile the devil said nothing, trying all the time to get his seat away from the branch. And he struggled, wriggled about, twisted himself a hundred different ways, and used as levers, to lift himself up, feet, hands, and head, but all in vain.

And Smetse, belabouring him well, said to him: “My lord Councillor, you are fast stuck, it seems, to the saddle; but I will have you out of it, have you out as fast as I can, for if I do not so, beating you with all my strength, you will tear up out of the ground the tree and its roots, and the good folk will see you walking along, dragging a plum-tree from your seat like a tail, which would be a piteous and laughable spectacle for such a noble devil as yourself to make. Give me rather the seven years.”

“*Baes*,” said the workmen, who had returned from the smithy with hammers and iron bars, “here we are at your orders; what shall we do?”

“Well,” said Smetse, “since I have combed him down with oaken staves we will now louse him with hammers and bars.”

“Mercy, Smetse, mercy!” cried the devil; hammers and bars, this is too much; thou hast the seven years, smith.”

“Make haste,” said Smetse, “and write me the quittance.”

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"Here it is," said he.

The smith took it, saw that it was in good order, and said: "I desire that thou come down."

But the devil was so weak and enfeebled by the blows he had had that when he tried to leap he fell on his back. And he went off limping, shaking his fist at Smetse, and saying: "I await thee, in seven years, in hell, smith."

"So you may," said Smetse.

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XI. Wherein the workmen hold fair speech with Smetse.

While the devil was making off, Smetse, watching his workmen, saw that they were looking at one another strangely, spoke together in low voices, and seemed awkward in their manner, like people who would speak out, but dare not.

And he said to himself: "Are they going to denounce me to the priests?"

Suddenly Flipke the Bear came up to him. "*Baes*," said he, "we know well enough that this ghost of Hessels was sent to thee by him who is lord below; thou hast made a pact with the devil and art rich only by his money. We have guessed as much for some time. But so that thou should not be vexed, none of us have spoken of it in the town, and none will so speak. We would tell thee this to put thy mind at rest. And so now, *baes*, good night and quiet sleep to thee."

"Thank you, lads," said Smetse, greatly softened.

And they went their several ways.

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XII. How that Smetse would not give his secret into his wife's tongue's keeping.

In the kitchen Smetse found his wife on her knees beating her breast, weeping, sighing, sobbing, and saying: "Jesus Lord God, he has made a pact with the devil; but 'tis not with my consent, I swear. And you also, Madam the Virgin, you know it, and you also, all my masters the saints. Ah, I am indeed wretched, not on my own account, but for my poor man, who for the sake of some miserable gold sold his soul to the devil! Alas, yes, sell it he did! Ah, my saintly masters, who are yourselves so happy and in such glory, pray the very good God for him, and deign to consider that if, as I dare hope, I die a Christian death and go to paradise, I shall be all alone there, eating my rice pudding with silver spoons, while my poor man is burning in hell, crying out in thirst and hunger, and I not able to give him either meat or drink.... Alas, that will make me so unhappy! Ah, my good masters the saints, Madam the Virgin, My Lord Jesus, he sinned but this once, and was all the rest of his life a good man, a good Christian, kind to the poor and soft of heart. Save him from the fires which burn for ever, and do not separate above those who were so long united below. Pray for him, pray for me, alas!"

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"Wife," said Smetse, "thou art very wretched, it seems."

"Ah, wicked man," said she, "now I know all. 'Twas hell fire which came bursting into the house and lit up the forge; those master-bakers, brewers, and vintners were devils, all of them, and devil also that ugly man who showed thee the treasure and gave me so grievous a buffet. Who will dare to live peaceably in this house from now on? Alas, our food is the devil's, our drink also; devil's meat, loaves, and cheeses, devil's money, house, and all. Whoever should dig under this dwelling would see the fires of hell gush out incontinent. There are all the devils, I see them above, below, on the right hand, on the left, awaiting their prey with dropped jaws, like tigers. Ah, what a fine sight 'twill be to see my poor man torn into a hundred pieces by all these devils, and that in seven years, for he said, as I heard well enough, that he would come back in seven years."

"Weep not, wife," said Smetse, "in seven years I may again be master as I was today."

"But," said she, "if he had not gone up into the plum-tree, what wouldst thou have done, poor beggar-man? And what if he will not let himself fall a second time into

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thy snare as he did to-day?"

"Wife," said Smetse, "he will so fall, for my snares are from heaven, and the things which are from God can always get the better of devils."

"Art not lying again?" she said. "And wilt tell me what they are?"

"That I cannot," said he, "for devils have sharp ears and would hear me telling thee, no matter how low I spoke; and then I should be taken off to hell without mercy."

"Ah," said she, "then I will not ask, though 'tis not pleasant for me to live here in ignorance of everything, like a stranger. Nevertheless I would rather have thee silent and saved than talking and damned."

"Wife," he said, "thou art wise when thou speakest so."

"I will pray," she said, "every day for thy deliverance, and have a good mass said for thee at St. Bavon."

"But," said he, "is it with devil's money thou wilt pay for this mass?"

"Have no care for that," said she, "when this money enters the church coffers 'twill become suddenly holy."

"Do as thou wilt, wife," said Smetse.

"Ah," said she, "My Lord Jesus shall have a stout candle each day, and Madam the Virgin likewise."

"Do not forget my master St. Joseph," said Smetse, "for we owe him much."

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XIII. Of the Bloody Duke.

The end of the seventh year came again in its turn, and on the last evening there crossed the threshold of Smetse Smee's dwelling a man with a sharp and haughty Spanish face, a nose like a hawk's beak, hard and staring eyes, and a white beard, long and pointed. For the rest he was dressed in armour finely worked and most richly gilt; decorated with the illustrious order of the Fleece; wore a fine red sash; rested his left hand on the hilt of his sword, and held in his right the seven years' pact and a marshal's wand.

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Coming into the forge he walked straight towards Smetse, holding his head loftily and without deigning to notice any of the workmen.

The smith was standing in a corner, wondering how he could make the devil who was sent for him sit down in the arm-chair, when Flipke ran quickly up to him and said in his ear: "*Baes*, the Bloody Duke is coming, take care!"

"Woe!" said Smetse, speaking to himself, "'tis all up with me, if d'Alva has come to fetch me."

Meanwhile the devil approached the smith, showed him the pact, and took him by the arm without a word to lead him off.

"My Lord," said Smetse in a most sorrowful manner, "whither would you take me? To hell. I follow you. 'Tis too great honour for one so mean as I to be ordered by so noble a devil as yourself. But is it yet the appointed time? I think it is not, and your highness has too upright a soul to take me off before the time written in the deed. In the meantime I beg your highness to be seated: Flipke, a chair for My Lord; the best in my poor dwelling, the large, well-padded arm-chair which stands in my kitchen, beside the press, near the chimney, beneath the picture of my master St. Joseph. Wipe it well, lad, so that no dust may be left on it; and quick, for the noble duke is standing."

Flipke ran into the kitchen and came back, saying: "*Baes*, I cannot lift that arm-chair alone, 'tis so heavy."

Then Smetse feigned great anger and said to his workmen: "Do ye not hear? He cannot lift it alone. Go and help him, and if it takes ten of you let ten go. And quick now. Fie! the blockheads, can ye 'not see that the noble duke is standing?"

Nine workmen ran to obey him and brought the chair into the forge, though not

without difficulty. Smetse said: "Put it there, behind My Lord. Is there any dust on it? By Artevelde! they have not touched this corner. I will do it myself. Now 'tis as clean as new-washed glass. Will your highness deign to be seated?"

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This the devil did, and then looked round him with great haughtiness and disdain. But of a sudden the smith fell at his feet, and said with mocking laughter: "Sir duke, you see before you the most humble of your servants, a poor man living like a Christian, serving God, honouring princes, and anxious, if such is your lordly pleasure, to continue in this way of life seven years more."

"Thou shalt not have one minute," said the devil, "come, Fleming, come with me."

And he tried to rise from the chair, but could not. And while he was struggling with might and main, making a thousand vain efforts, the good smith cried joyously: "Would your highness get up? Ah, 'tis too soon! Let your highness wait, he is not yet rested after his long journey; long, I make bold to say, for it must be a good hundred leagues from hell to my smithy, and that is a long way for such noble feet, by dusty roads. Ah, My Lord, let yourself rest a little in this good chair. Nevertheless, if you are in great haste to be off, grant me the seven years and I will give you in return your noble leave and a full flask of Spanish wine."

"I care nothing for thy wine," answered the devil.

"*Baes*," said Flipke, "offer him blood, he will drink then."

"My lad," said Smetse, "thou knowest well enough we have no such thing as blood in our cellars hereabouts, for that is no Flemish drink, but one that we leave to Spain. Therefore his highness must be so good as to excuse me. Nevertheless, I think he is thirsty, not for blood, but for blows, and of those I will give him his illustrious fill, since he will not grant me the seven years."

"Smith," said the devil, looking at Smetse with great contempt, "thou wouldst not dare beat me, I think?"

"Yes, My Lord," said the good man. "You would have me dead. For my part I hold to my skin, and this not without good reason, for it has always been faithful to me and well fastened. Would it not be a criminal act to break off in this sudden fashion so close a partnership? And besides, you would take me off with you to hell, where the air is filled with the stench of the divers cookeries for damned souls which are set up there. Ah, rather than go thither I would beat your highness for seven years."

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"Fleming," said the devil, "thou speakest without respect."

"Yes, My Lord," said Smetse, "but I will hit you with veneration."

And so saying he gave him with his clenched fist a terrible great blow on the nose, whereat the devil seemed astonished, dazed, and angry, like a powerful king struck by a low-born servant. And he tried to leap upon the smith, clenched his fists, ground his teeth, and shot out blood from his nose, his mouth, his eyes, and his ears, so angry was he.

"Ah," said Smetse, "you seem angry, My Lord. But deign to consider that since you will not listen to my words, I must speak to you by blows. By this argument am I not doing my best to soften your heart to my piteous case? Alas, deign to consider that my humble fist is making its supplication as best it can to your illustrious eyes, begs seven years from your noble nose, implores them from your ducal jaw. Do not these respectful taps tell your lordly cheeks how happy, joyous, and well-liking I should be during those seven years? Ah, let yourself be convinced. But, I see, I must speak to you in another fashion, with the words of iron bars, the prayers of tongs, and the supplications of sledge-hammers. Lads," said the smith to his workmen, "will you be pleased to hold converse with My Lord?"

"Yes, *baes*," said they.

And together with Smetse they chose their tools. But it was the oldest who picked the heaviest ones, and were the hottest with rage, because it was they who in former days had lost, through the duke's doing, many friends and relatives by steel, by stake, and by live burial, and they cried: "God is on our side, he has delivered the enemy into our hands. Out upon the Bloody Duke, the master-butcher, the lord of the axe!"

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And all of them, young and old, cursed the devil with a thunder of cries; and they came up to him menacingly, surrounding the chair and raising their tools to strike.

But Smetse stopped them and spoke again to the devil. "If your highness," he said, "is minded to hold to his noble bones, let him deign to grant me the seven years,

for the time for laughter is past, let me tell you."

"*Baes*," said the workmen, "whence comes to thee this kindness beyond measure? Why hold so long and fair parley with this fellow? Let us first break him up, and then he will offer thee the seven years of his own accord."

"Seven years!" said the devil, "seven years! he shall not have so much as the shadow of a minute. Strike, men of Ghent, the lion is in the net; ye who could not find a hole deep enough to hide yourselves in when he was free and showed his fangs. Flemish cowards, see what I think of you and your threats." And he spat on them.

At this spittle the bars, hammers, and other tools fell on him thick as hail, breaking his bones and the plates of his armour, and Smetse and his workmen said as they beat to their hearts' content:

"Cowards were we, who wished to worship God in the sincerity of our hearts; valiant was he who prevented us with steel, stake, and live burial.

"Cowards were we for having always laughed readily and drunk joyously, like men who, having done what they had to do, make light of the rest: valiant was this dark personage when he had poor men of the people arrested in the midst of their merrymaking at *Kermis*-time and put death where had been laughter.

"Cowards were the eighteen thousand eight hundred persons who died for the glory of God; cowards those numberless others who by the rapine, brutality and insolence of the fighting men, lost their lives in these lands and others. Valiant was he who ordained their sufferings, and more valiant still when he celebrated his own evil deeds by a banquet.

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"Cowards were we always, we who, after a battle, treated our prisoners like brothers; valiant was he who, after the defeat in Friesland, had his own men slaughtered.

"Cowards were we, who laboured without ceasing, spreading abroad over the whole world the work of our hands; valiant was he when, under the cloak of religion, he slew the richer among us without distinction between Romans and Reformers, and robbed us by pillage and extortion of thirty-six million florins. For the world is turned upside down; cowardly is the busy bee who makes the honey, and valiant the idle drone who steals it away. Spit, noble duke, on these Flemish cowards."

But the duke could neither spit nor cough, for from the roughness of the blows they had given him he had altogether lost the shape of a man, so mingled and beaten together were bones, flesh, and steel. But there was no blood to be seen, which was a marvellous thing. Suddenly, while the workmen, wearied with beating, were taking breath, a weak voice came out from this hotch-potch of bones, flesh, and steel, saying:

"Thou hast the seven years, Smetse."

"Very well then, My Lord," said he, "sign the quittance."

This the devil did.

"And now," said Smetse, "will your highness please to get up."

At these words, by great marvel, the devil regained his shape. But while he was walking away, holding up his head with great haughtiness and not deigning to look at his feet, he tripped over a sledge lying on the ground, and fell on his nose with great indignity, thereby giving much occasion for laughter to the workmen, who did not fail to make use of it. Picking himself up he threatened them with his fist, but they burst out laughing more loudly than ever. He came at them, grinding his teeth; they hooted him. He tried to strike with his sword a short and sturdy little workman; but the man seized the sword from his hands and broke it in three pieces. He struck another in the face with his fist, but the man gave him so good and valiant a kick as to send him sprawling on the quay with his legs in the air. There, flushing with shame, he melted into red smoke, like a vapour of blood, and the workmen heard a thousand joyous and merry voices, saying: "Beaten is the Bloody Duke, shamed is the lord of the axe, inglorious the prince of butchers! *Vlaenderland tot eeuwigheid!* Flanders for ever!" And a thousand pairs of hands beat applause all together. And the dawn broke.

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XIV. Of the great fears and pains of Smetse's wife.

Smetse, going to look for his wife, found her in the kitchen on her knees before the picture of St. Joseph. "Well, mother," said he, "what didst think of our dance? Was it not a merry one? Ah, henceforth they will call our house the House of Beaten Devils."

"Yes," said his wife, wagging her head, "yes, and also the house of Smetse who was carried away to hell. For that is where thou wilt go; I know it, I feel it, I foretell it. This devil's coming all accoutred for war presages evil. He will come back, no longer alone, but with a hundred thousand devils armed like himself. Ah, my poor man! They will carry lances, swords, pikes, hooked axes, and arquebuses. They will drag behind them canon which they will fire at us; and everything will be levelled to pieces, thou, I, the smithy, and the workmen. Alas, everything will be levelled to the ground! And where our smithy now stands will be nothing but a sorry heap of dust. And the folk walking past along the quay will say when they see this dust: 'There lies the house of Smetse, the fool who sold his soul to the devil.' And I, after dying in this fashion, shall go to Paradise, as I dare to hope. But thee, my man, oh, woe unspeakable! they will take away with them and drag through fire, smoke, brimstone, pitch, boiling oil, to that terrible place where those are punished who, wishing to break a pact made with the devil, have no special help from God or his holy saints. Poor little man, my good comrade, dost know what there is in store for thee? Ho, a gulf as deep as the heavens are high, and studded all down its terrible sides with jutting points of rock, iron spikes, horrid spears, and a thousand dreadful pikes. And dost know what manner of gulf this is, my man? 'Tis a gulf wherein a man may keep falling always—dost understand me, always, always—gashed by the rocks, cut about by the spears, torn open by the pikes, always, always, down all the long length of eternity."

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"But, wife," said Smetse, "hast ever seen this gulf whereof thou speakest?"

"Nay," said she, "but I know what manner of place it is, for I have often heard tell of it in the church of St. Bavon. And the good canon predicant would not lie."

"Ah, no," said Smetse.

XV. Of the Bloody King.

When the last night of the seventh year was come Smetse was in his smithy, looking at the enchanted sack, and asking himself with much anxiety how he could make the devil get into it.

While he was wondering, the smithy suddenly became filled with an evil stench of the most putrid, offensive and filthy kind. Innumerable lice swarmed over the threshold, ceiling, anvils, sledges, bars and bellows, Smetse and his men, who were all as if blinded, for these lice were as thick in the smithy as smoke, cloud, or fog.

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And a melancholy but imperative voice spoke, saying: "Smetse, come with me; the seven years have struck."

And Smetse and his workmen, looking as well as they could in the direction whence the voice came, saw a man coming towards them with a royal crown on his head, and on his back a cloak of cloth-of-gold. But beneath the cloak the man was naked, and on his breast were four great abscesses, which formed together a single wide sore, and from this came the stench which filled the smithy, and the clouds of lice which swarmed round about. And he had on his right leg another abscess, more filthy, rank, and offensive than the rest. The man himself was white-faced, auburn-haired, red-bearded, with lips a little drawn, and mouth open somewhat. In his grey eyes were melancholy, envy, dissimulation, hypocrisy, harshness, and evil rancour.

When the older workmen saw him they cried out in a voice like thunder: "Smetse, the Bloody King is here, take care!"

"Silence," cried the smith, "peace there, silence and veneration! Let every man doff his bonnet to the greatest king that ever lived, Philip II by name, King of Castile, Leon, and Aragon, Count of Flanders, Duke of Burgundy and Brabant,

Palatine of Holland and Zeeland, most illustrious of all illustrious princes, great among the great, victorious among victors. Sire," said he to the devil, "you do me unparalleled honour to come hither in person to lead me to hell, but my humble Ghentish lowness makes bold to suggest to your Royal and Palatine Highness that the appointed hour has not yet struck. Therefore if it pleases your Majesty I will pass on earth the brief time which is still left to me to live."

"I allow it," said the devil.

Meanwhile Smetse seemed unable to take his eyes off the devil, and showed himself very sorrowful and heavy, nodding his head, and saying several times:

"Alas, alas! cruel torment! evil hour!"

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"What ails thee?" said the devil.

"Sire," said Smetse, "nothing ails me but the great sorrow which I have at seeing how harsh God has been towards you, leaving you to bear in hell the malady whereof you died. Ah, 'tis a most pitiful sight to see so great a king as you consumed by these lice and eaten up with these abscesses."

"I care nothing for thy pity," answered the king.

"Sire," said Smetse further, "deign to think no evil of my words. I have never been taught fine ways of speech; but notwithstanding this I make bold to sympathize with your illustrious sufferings, and this the more in that I myself have known and suffered your ill, and you can still see, Sire, the terrible marks on my skin." And Smetse, uncovering his breast, showed the marks of the wounds which he had received from the traitor Spanish when he sailed the seas with the men of Zeeland.

"But," said the devil-king, "thou seemest well enough cured, smith! Wast thou verily as sick as I?"

"Like you, Sire," said Smetse, "I was nothing but a heap of living filth; like you I was fetid, rank, and offensive, and every one fled from me as they fled from you; like you I was eaten up with lice; but what could not be done for you by the most illustrious doctor Olias of Madrid, a humble carpenter did for me."

At these words the devil-king cocked his ear. "In what place," said he, "does this carpenter dwell, and what is his name?"

"He dwells," said Smetse, "in the heavens, and his name is Master St. Joseph."

"And did this great saint appear to thee by especial miracle?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And by virtue of what didst thou merit this rare and blessed favour?"

"Sire," answered Smetse, "I have never by my own virtue merited so much as the shadow of a single grain of particular grace, but in my sufferings I prayed humbly and with faith to my blessed patron, Master St. Joseph, and he deigned to come to my succour."

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"Tell me of this happening, smith."

"Sire," said Smetse, holding up the sack, "this was my remedy."

"This sack?" asked the devil.

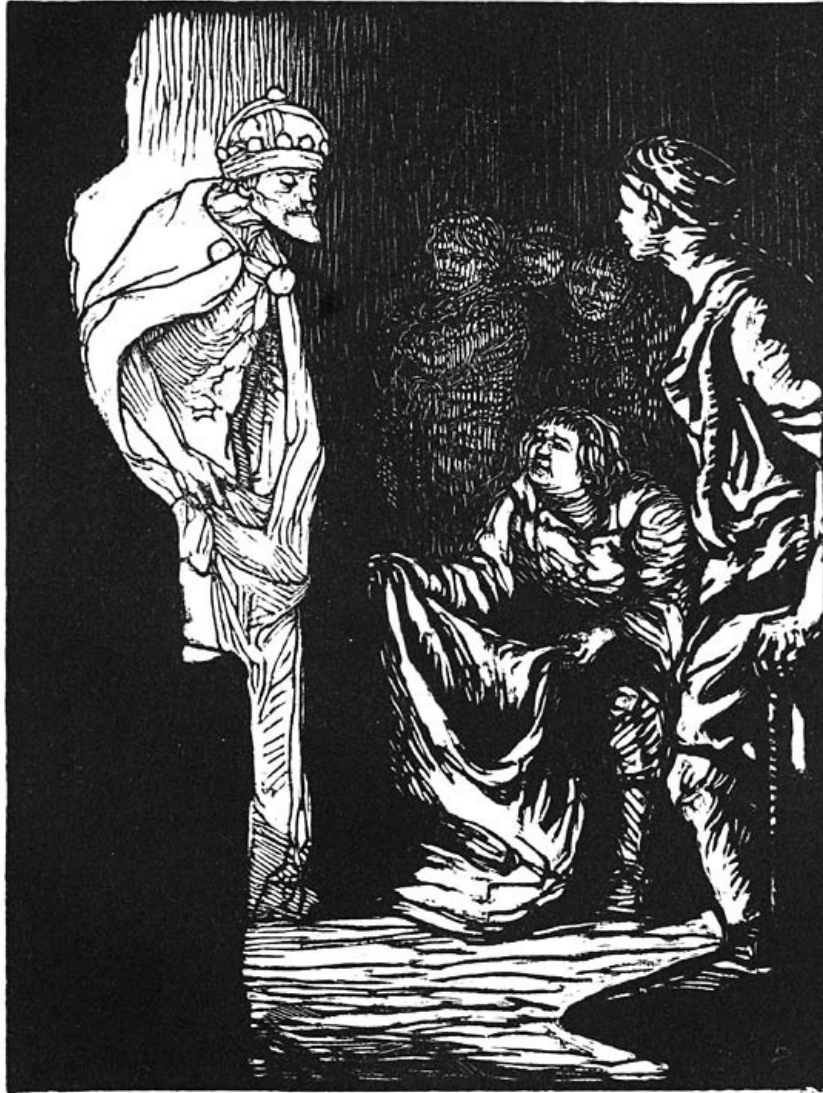
"Yes, Sire; but will your Majesty deign to look closely at the hemp whereof it is woven. Do you not think its quality altogether strange! Alas," said Smetse, running on with his talk, and appearing to go into an ecstasy, "'tis not given to us poor men to see every day such hemp as this. For this is not earthly hemp, but hemp of heaven, hemp from the good Paradise, sown by my master St. Joseph round about the tree of life, harvested and woven under his especial orders to make sacks wherein the beans are stored which my masters the angels eat on fast-days."

"But," asked the devil, "how did this sack come into thy hands?"

"Ah, Sire, by great marvel. One night I was in my bed, suffering twenty deaths from my ulcers, and almost at the point of giving up my soul. I saw my good wife weeping; I heard my neighbours and workmen, of whom there were many, saying round about my bed the prayers for the dying; my body was overcome with pain and my soul with despair. Nevertheless I kept praying to my blessed patron and swore that if he brought me out of that pass, I would burn to his honour in the church of St. Bavon such a candle as the fat of twenty sheep would not suffice to make. And my prayers were not in vain, Sire, for suddenly a hole opened in the

ceiling above my head, a living flame and a celestial perfume filled the room, a sack came down through the hole, a man clothed in white followed the sack, walked in the air to my bed, pulled down the sheets which covered me, and in the twinkling of an eye put me in the sack and drew the strings tight round my neck. And then, behold the miracle! No sooner was I wrapped about with this good hemp than a genial warmth passed through me, my ulcers dried up, and the lice all perished suddenly with a terrible noise. After that the man told me with a smile about the hemp of heaven and the angelic beans, and finished his discourse by saying: 'Keep safe this remedy, 'tis sent thee by my master St. Joseph. Whosoever shall use it shall be cured of all ills and saved for all eternity, if in the meantime he do not sell his soul to the devil!' Then the man went away. And what the good messenger told me was true, for by means of this sack from heaven, I cured Toon, my workman, of the king's evil; Pier of fever, Dolf of scurvy, Hendrik of the phlegm, and a score of others who owe it to me that they are still alive."

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The Devil-King and the Sack

When Smetse had finished his speech the devil-king seemed lost in deep reflection, then suddenly lifted his eyes to heaven, joined his hands, crossed himself again and again, and, falling to his knees, beat upon his breast, and with most lamentable cries prayed as here follows: "Ah, my Master St. Joseph, sweet Lord, blessed saint, immaculate husband of the Virgin without stain, you have deigned to make whole this smith, and he would have been saved by you for all eternity had he not sold his soul to the devil. But I, Master, I, a poor king, who pray to you, do you disdain to make me whole also, and to save me as you would have saved him? You know well, sweet Lord, how I devoted my life, my person, my goods and those of my subjects to the defence of our blessed religion; how I hated, as is right, the freedom to believe other things than those which are ordained for us; how I combated it by steel, stake, and live burial; how I saved in this wise from the venom of reform Brabant, Flanders, Artois, Hainault, Valenciennes, Lille, Douai, Orchies, Namur, Tournai, Tournaisie, Malines, and my other lands. Nevertheless I have been thrown into the fires of hell, and there suffer without respite the unutterable torment of my consuming ulcers and my devouring vermin. Ah, will you not make me whole, will you not save me? You are able, my Master. Yes, you will perform again for the sorrowing king the miracle which saved the smith. Then shall I be able to pass into paradise, blessing and glorifying your name through centuries and centuries. Save me, Master St. Joseph, save me. Amen."

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And the devil-king, crossing himself, beating his breast, and babbling paternosters turn by turn, rose to his feet and said to Smetse: "Put me in the sack, smith."

This Smetse did gladly, rolled him into the sack, leaving only his head thrust out, drew tight round his neck the stout cords, and placed the devil on an anvil.

At this spectacle the workmen burst out laughing, clapping their hands together, and saying a hundred merry things to one another.

"Smith," asked the devil, "are these Flemings laughing at me?"

"Yes, Sire."

"What are they saying, smith?"

"Oh, Sire, they are saying that horses are caught by means of corn; dogs by liver; asses by thistles; hogs by swill; trout by curdled blood; carp by cheese; pike by gudgeon; and a humbug of your kidney by tales of false miracles."

"Ho, the traitor smith," howled the devil, grinding his teeth, "he has taken in vain the name of my Master St. Joseph, he has lied without shame."

"Yes, Sire."

"And thou wilt dare to beat me as thou didst Jacob Hessels and my faithful duke?"

"Even more heartily, Sire. Nevertheless 'tis only if you so wish it. You shall be set free if you please. Free if you give me back the deed; beaten if you are fixed in your idea of carrying me off to hell."

"Give thee back the deed!" roared the devil, "I would rather suffer a thousand deaths in a single moment."

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"Sire King," said Smetse, "I pray you to think of your bones, which seem to me none too sound as it is. Consider also that the opportunity is a good one for us to avenge on your person our poor Flanders, so drenched in blood at your hands. But it displeases me to pass a second time where has passed already the wrath of the very just God. So give me back the deed; grace, Sire King, or 'twill begin raining presently."

"Grace!" said the devil, "grace to a Fleming! perish Flanders rather! Ah, why have I not again, one single day, as much power, armies, and riches as I will; Flanders would give up her soul quickly. Then famine should reign in the land, parching the soil, drying up the water-springs and the life of plants; the last ghostly inhabitants of the empty towns would wander like phantoms in the streets, killing one another in heaps to find a little rotten food; bands of famished dogs would snatch newborn children from their mothers' withered breasts and devour them; famine should lie where had been plenty, dust where had been towns, crows where had been men; and on this earth stripped naked, stony, and desolate, on this burial-ground, I would set up a black cross with this inscription: Here lies Flanders the heretic, Philip of Spain passed over her breast!"

So saying the devil foamed at the mouth with wrath, but scarce were his last words cold from his lips when all the hammers and bars in the smithy fell on him at once. And Smetse and his workmen, striking in turn, said: "This is for our broken charters and our privileges violated despite thine oath, for thou wast perjurer.

"This is for that when we called thee thou didst not dare come into our land, where thy presence would have cooled the hottest heads, for thou wast coward.

"This is for the innocent Marquess of Berg-op-Zoom, whom thou poisoned in prison, so that his inheritance might be thine; and for the Prince of Ascoly, whom thou madest to marry Dona Eufrasia, in child by thy seed, so that his wealth might enrich the bastard that was coming. The Prince died also, like so many others, for thou wert poisoner of bodies.

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"This is for the false witnesses paid by thee, and thy promise to ennoble whomever would kill Prince William for money, for thou wast poisoner of souls."

And the blows fell heavy, and the king's crown was knocked off, and his body, like the duke's, was no more than a hotch-potch of bones and flesh, without any blood. But the workmen went on with their hammering, saying:

"This is for thine invention of the *Tourniquet*, wherewith thou didst strangle Montigny, friend of thy son, for thou wast seeker of new tortures.

"This is for the Duke of Alva, for the Counts of Egmont and Hoorn, for all our poor

dead, for our merchants who went off to enrich England and Germany, for thou wast death and ruin to our land.

"This is for thy wife, who died by thy deed, for thou wast husband without love.

"This is for thy poor son Charles, who died without any sickness, for thou wast father without bowels.

"This is for the hatred, cruelty, and slaughter with which thou didst make return for the gentleness, confidence, and goodwill of our land, for thou wast king without justice.

"And this is for the Emperor, thy father, who, with his execrable proclamations and edicts, first sounded for our land the stroke of the evil hour. Give him a good drubbing on our account, and tell us thou wilt give back the deed to the *baes*."

"Yes," wept a melancholy voice, coming from the heap of bones and flesh, "thou hast everything, Smetse, thou art free."

"Give me back the parchment," said Smetse.

"Open the sack," answered the voice.

"Ho," cried Smetse, "yes, yes, indeed, I will open the sack wide, and Master Philip will leap out and take me off to hell with all speed. Oh, the good little devil! But 'tis not now the time for such high pranks. Therefore I make bold to beg your Majesty to give me first the parchment, which he may without difficulty pass up through this gap which is between his neck and the edge of the sacking."

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"I will not do it," said the devil.

"That," said Smetse, "is as it pleases your subtle Majesty. In the sack he is, in the sack he may remain; I make no objection. Every man his own humour. But mine will be to leave him in his sack, and in this wise carry him off to Middelburg in Walcheren, and there ask the prefect that leave be given me to build a good little stone box in the market-place and therein to place your Majesty, leaving outside his melancholy countenance. So placed he will be able to see at a close view the happiness, joy, and prosperity of the men of the reformed faith: that will be a fine treat for him, which might be added to, on feast-days and market-days, by an unkind blow or two which people would give him in the face, or some wicked strokes with a stick, or some spittle dropped on him without respect. You will have besides, Sire, the unutterable satisfaction of seeing many good pilgrims from Flanders, Brabant, and your other blood-soaked countries come to Middelburg to pay back with good coin of their staves their old debt to your Most Merciful Majesty."

"Ah," said the devil, "I will not have this shame put upon me. Take, smith, take the parchment."

Smetse obeyed, and saw that it was indeed his own, then went and dipped it in holy water, where it turned into dust.

At this he was filled with joy and opened the sack for the devil, whose bones moved and became joined again to one another. And he took on again his withered shape, his hungry vermin, and his devouring sores.

Then, covering himself with his cloak of cloth-of-gold, he went out of the smithy, while Smetse cried after him: "Good journey to you, and a following wind, Master Philip!"

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And on the quay the devil kicked against a stone, which opened of itself and showed a great hole, wherein he was swallowed suddenly up like an oyster.

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XVI. Wherein Smetse beholds on the River Lys a most marvellous sight.

When the devil had gone Smetse was almost off his head with joy, and ran to his wife, who had come to the door of the kitchen, and thumped her for joy, seized her, kissed her, hugged the good woman, shook her, pressed her to him, ran back to his men, shook them all by the hand, crying: "By Artevelde! I am quits, Smetse is quits!" And he seemed to have a tongue for nothing else but that he was quits! And he blew in his wife's ear, into his workmen's faces, and under the nose of a bald and wheezing old cat who sat up in one corner and got quit with him by a

scratch in the face.

"The rascal," said Smetse, "does not seem glad enough at my deliverance. Is he another devil, think you? They say they disguise themselves in every kind of shape. Ho," said he to the cat, who was arching her back in annoyance, "hast heard, listened, and understood, devil cat? I am quit and free, quit and franked, quit and happy, quit and rich! And I have made fools of all the devils. And from now on I will live gaily as becomes a quit smith. Wife, I will send this very day a hundred *philipdalers* to Slimbroek, so that that poor sinner may also rejoice at Smetse's quittance."

But his wife said nothing, and when Smetse went to look for her he found her on the stair with a great bowl of holy water in her hands, in which she was dipping a fair sprig of palm branch.

Coming into the smithy she began to sprinkle with the palm her man and the workmen, and also the hammers, anvils, bellows, and other tools.

"Wife," said Smetse, trying to escape the wetting, "what art thou at?"

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"I am saving thee," said she, "presumptuous smith. Dost verily think that, being freed of devils, thou hast for thine own the chattels that come from them? Dost think that though they have lost the soul which was to be their payment they will leave thee thy riches. Ho, the good fool! They will come back again, yes; and if I do not sprinkle thee with this holy water, and myself likewise, and all these good men, who knows with what evils they may not torment us, alas!"

And the good wife was working away with her palm-branch when suddenly a great thunder rumbled under the earth, shaking the quay, and the stones cracked, the panes shivered in the windows, all the doors and casements in the smithy opened of themselves, and a hot wind blew.

"Ah," said she, "they are coming; pray, my man!"

And suddenly there appeared in the sky the figure of a man, naked and of marvellous beauty. He was standing in a chariot of diamond, drawn by four flaming horses. And he held in his right hand a banner, whereon was written: "More beautiful than God." And from the body of this man, whereof the flesh shone brightly, came golden rays which lit up the Lys, the quay and the trees like sunlight. And the trees began to sway and swing their stems and branches, and all the quay seemed to roll like a ship upon the sea, and thousands of voices called out together: "Lord, we cry hunger and thirst; Lord, feed us; Lord, give us to drink."

"Ah," said the good wife, "here is my Lord Lucifer and all his devils!"

And when the voices had ceased the man made a sign with his hand, and of a sudden the waters of the Lys rose as if God had lifted up the river-bed. And the river became like a rough sea; but the waves did not roll on the quay, but each lifted separately, bearing on its crest a foam of fire. Then each of these flames rose into the air, drawing up the water like a pillar, and there seemed to poor Smetse and his wife and the men to be hundreds of thousands of these pillars of water, swaying and foaming.

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Then each pillar took on the form of a fearful animal, and suddenly there appeared, mingled together, striking and wounding one another, all the devils whose work was to torment poor damned souls. There were to be seen, crawling over crooked and shivering men's legs, monstrous crabs, devouring those who were servile in their lives. Near these crabs were ostriches bigger than horses, who ran along flapping their wings. Under their tails they had laurel-wreaths, sceptres, and crowns, and behind their tails were made to run those men who in our world spent all their time running after vain honours, without a care for doing good. And the ostriches went quicker than the wind, while the men ran without respite behind them in the effort to get the wreaths, crowns, and sceptres; but they could never reach them. In this way they were led to a treacherous pond full of loathsome mud, wherein they fell shamefully and stayed stuck for all eternity, whilst the mocking ostriches walked up and down on the bank dangling their bawbles.

Among the ostriches were squadrons of many-coloured apes, diapered like butterflies, whose concern was with miserly Jewish and Lombard usurers. These men, when they entered hell, looked round them carefully, screwing up their eyes under their spectacles, collected from the ground divers rusty nails, old breeches, filthy rags, buttons showing the wood, and other old stuff, then dug a hole hastily, hid their treasures in it and went off to sit down some way away. The apes, seeing this, would leap on the hole, empty out its content, and throw it into the fire. Then the misers would weep, make lamentations, and be beaten by the apes, and at last

go off to find some more secret place, hide there once again their new depredations, and see once again the hole emptied and the apes coming once again to beat them, and so on for all eternity.

In the air, above the apes, soared eagles, who had, instead of a beak, four-and-twenty matchlock barrels firing together. These eagles were called Royal, because their concern was with conqueror princes, who were too fond in their lifetime of the sounds of war and cannon. And for their punishment these matchlocks were fired off in their faces again and again throughout eternity.

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Besides the ostriches, apes, and eagles, reared up a great serpent with a bear's coat, who writhed and twisted this way and that. He was of great length and breadth, beyond all measure, and had a hundred thousand hairy arms, in each of which he held an iron pike as sharp as a razor. He was called the Spaniards' Serpent, because in hell it was his task to gash about with his pikes without mercy all the bands of traitor pillagers who had despoiled our good country.

Keeping clear of this serpent with great prudence, darted about mischievous little winged pigs whose tails were eels. These tails were designed for the perpetual teasing of such gluttons as came to hell. For the pig would come up to such a one, hold the eel close to his mouth, and, when he tried to bite it, suddenly fly away from him, and so on throughout eternity.

There were to be seen also, marching up and down in their gorgeous feathers, monstrous peacocks. Whenever some vain dandy came their way, giving himself airs in his fine clothes, one of these peacocks would go to him and spread its tail, as if inviting him to pluck out a fine feather for his bonnet. But as soon as the dandy approached to take his feather, Master Peacock would let fly in his face with filthy and evil-smelling water, which spoilt all his fine clothes. And throughout eternity the dandy would try to get the feather, and throughout eternity be so swilled down.

Among these fearful animals, wandered two by two male and female grasshoppers as big as a man, the one playing on a pipe, and the other brandishing a great knotted stick. Whenever they saw a man who, in his lifetime, leapt, by cowardice, from good to evil, from black to white, from fire to water, always on the side of the strongest, these grasshoppers would go to him, and one would play the pipe, while the other, leaning on his stick with great dignity, would say: "Leap for God," and the man would leap; "Leap for the Devil," and the man would leap again; "Leap for Calvin, leap for the Mass, leap for the goat, leap for the cabbage," and the man would keep leaping. But he never leapt high enough for the liking of the grasshopper with the stick, and so he was each time belaboured in a most pitiless manner. And he leapt without ceasing and was belaboured without respite, while the pipe made continual pleasant music, and so on throughout eternity.

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Farther on, naked and lying on cloths of gold, silk, and velvet, covered with pearls and a thousand resplendent gems, more beautiful than the most beautiful ladies of Ghent, Brussels, or Bruges, lascivious and smiling, singing, and playing on sweet instruments, were the wives of the devils. These dealt out punishment to old rakes, corrupters of youth and beauty. To them these she-devils would call out amorously, but they could never get near them. Throughout eternity these poor rakes had to look at them without being able to touch them even with the tip of the nail of their little finger. And they wept and made lamentation, but all in vain, and so on through centuries and centuries.

There were also mischievous little devils with drums, made of the skins of hypocrites, whose masks hung down over the drum case as ornament. And the hypocrites to whom they belonged, without their skins, without their masks, in all their ugliness, ashamed, hooted, hissed, spat at, eaten up by horrible flies, and followed by the little devils beating their drums, had to wander up and down hell throughout eternity.

It was good to see also the devils of conceited men. These were fine great leathern bottles full of wind, finished off with a beak, at the end of which was a reed. These bottles had eagle's feet and two good little arms, with fingers long enough to go round the widest part of the bottle. When the conceited man came into hell, saying: "I am great, I am grand, strong, beautiful, victorious, I will overcome Lucifer and marry his dam Astarte," the leathern bottles would come up to him and say, with a deep reverence: "My lord, will you be pleased to let us speak a word to you in secret, touching your high designs?" "Yes," he would say. Then two bottles would stuff their reeds into his ears in such a manner that he could not get them out again, and begin to press in their bellies with their long fingers, so as to force wind into his head, which thereupon swelled up, large and always larger, and Master Self-Conceit rose into the air and went off to wander throughout eternity, with his head bumping the ceiling of hell, and his legs waving in the air in the efforts to get down again; but all in vain.

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Marvellous devils were certain apes of quicksilver, always running, tumbling, leaping, coming, and going. These devils bore down on the lazy fellows who were thrown to them, gave them a spade to dig earth with, a sword to polish, a tree to trim, or a book to con. The lazybones would look at the task set him, saying: "Tomorrow," and would stretch his arms, scratching and yawning. But as soon as he had his mouth wide open the ape would stuff into it a sponge soaked in quintessence of rhubarb. "This," he would say mockingly, "is for to-day; work, slug, work." Then, while the lazybones was retching, the devil would thump him, shake him a hundred different ways, giving him no more peace than a gadfly gives a horse, and so on throughout eternity.

Pleasing devils were pretty little children very wide-awake and mischievous, whose concern was to teach learned orators to think, speak, weep, and laugh according to common nature. And when they did otherwise the little devils would rap them sharply on the knuckles. But the poor pedants could no longer learn, being too heavy, old, and stupid; so they had a rap on the knuckles every day and a whipping on Sundays.

And all these devils cried out together: "Master, we are hungry; Master, give us to eat, pay somewhat for the good services we render thee."

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And suddenly the man in the chariot made a sign, and the good River Lys threw all these devils on the quay, as the sea splashes on the shore, and they hissed loud and terribly at landing.

And Smetse, his wife, and the workmen heard the doors of the cellars open with a loud noise, and all the casks of *bruinbier* came hissing up the stairs, and hissing across the floor of the forge, and still hissing described a curve in the air and fell among the crowd of all the devils. And so also did the bottles of wine, so also the hams, loaves, and cheeses, and so also the good *crusats*, *angelots*, *philipdalers*, and other moneys, which were all changed into meat and drink. And the devils fell over one another, fought, scrambled, wounded themselves, forming only one great mass of battling monsters, howling and hissing, and each trying to get more than the others. When there was left neither drop nor crumb, the man in the chariot made another sign, and all the devils melted into black water and flowed into the river, where they disappeared. And the man vanished from the sky.

And Smetse Smee was as poor as before, save for one little bag of golden *royals*, which his wife had by chance sprinkled with holy water, and which he kept, although it came from the devil. But this, as you shall see, did not profit him at all. And he lived with great content until he died suddenly one day in his smithy, at the great and blessed age of ninety-three years.

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XVII. Of Hell, of Purgatory, of the long ladder, and finally of Paradise.

When he was dead his soul had to pass through Hell in the guise of a smith. Coming thither he saw, through the open windows, the devils which had so frightened him in the vision on the Lys, and who were now busy torturing and tormenting the poor damned souls as terribly as they could. And Smetse went to the doorkeeper; but the doorkeeper, on seeing him, howled out in a most awful fashion: "Smetse is here, Smetse Smee the traitor smith!" And he would not let him in. Hearing the hubbub, My Lord Lucifer, Madam Astarte, and all their court came to the windows, and all the other devils after them.

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And they all cried out in fear:

"Shut the doors, 'tis the enchanted Smetse, Smetse the traitor smith, Smetse the beater of poor devils. If he comes in here he will overset, spoil, break up everything. Begone, Smetse!"

"My masters," said Smetse, "if I do indeed come hither to look at your snouts, which are not beautiful I promise ye, 'tis not at all for my pleasure; and besides, I am not by any means anxious to come in. So do not make such a noise, master devils."

"Yes, indeed, my fine smith," answered Madam Astarte, "thou showest a velvet pad now, but when thou art within thou wilt show thy claws and thine evil intention, and will slay us all, me, my good husband, and all our friends. Be off, Smetse; be off, Smee."

"Madam," said Smetse, "you are indeed the most beautiful she-devil I ever saw, but that is, nevertheless, no reason why you should think so ill of a fellow-

creature's intentions."

"Hark to the fellow!" said Madam Astarte, "how he hides his wickedness under sugared words! Drive him away, devils, but do him no great harm."

"Madam," said Smetse, "I beg you to listen."

"Be off, smith!" cried out all the devils; and they threw burning coals at him, and whatever else they could find. And Smetse ran off as fast as his legs would take him.

When he had travelled some way he came before Purgatory. On the other side was a ladder, with this inscription at its foot: "This is the road to the good Paradise."

And Smetse, filled with joy, began to climb the ladder, which was made of golden thread, with here and there a sharp point sticking out, in virtue of that saying of God which tells us: "Broad is the way which leadeth to Hell, strait and rough the way to Heaven." And, indeed, Smetse soon had his feet sore. Nevertheless, he made his way upward without halting, and only stopped when he had counted ten hundred thousand rungs and could see no more of either earth or hell. And he became thirsty. Finding nothing to drink he became a little sullen, when suddenly he saw a little cloud coming past, and drank it up joyfully. It did not indeed seem to him as good drink as *bruinbier*, but he took consolation from the thought that it is not possible to have comforts everywhere alike. A little higher up the ladder he suddenly had hard work to keep his bonnet on his head, by reason of a treacherous autumn wind which was going down to earth to pull off the last leaves. And by this wind he was sorely shaken, and nearly lost his hold. After he was out of this pass he became hungry, and regretted the good earthly beef, smoked over pine-cones, which is so good a food for poor wayfarers. But he took heart, thinking that it is not given to man to understand everything.

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Suddenly he saw an eagle of terrible aspect coming upon him from the earth. Thinking for certain that he was some fat sheep, the eagle rose above him and would have dropped on him like a cannon-ball; but the good smith had no fear, bent to one side and caught the bird by the neck, which he wrung subtly. Then, still going up, he hastened to pluck it, ate morsels of it raw, and found them stringy. Nevertheless, he took this meat with patience, because he had no other. Then, patiently and bravely, he climbed for several days and several nights, seeing nothing but the blue of the sky and innumerable suns, moons, and stars above his head, under his feet, to right, to left, and everywhere. And he seemed to be in the midst of a fair great globe, whereof the inner walls had been painted this fair blue, strewn with all these suns, moons, and stars. And he was frightened by the great silence and by the immensity.

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Suddenly he felt a genial warmth, heard sweet voices singing, distant music, and the sound of a city toiling. And he saw a town of infinite size girt about with walls, over which he could see housetops, trees, and towers. And he felt that he was moving more quickly despite his own legs, and by and by, leaving the last rung behind, he set foot before the gate of the town.

"By Artevelde!" said he, "here is the good Paradise."

And he knocked on the gate; St. Peter came to open to him.

Smetse was somewhat frightened at the gigantic appearance of the good saint, his great head of hair, his red beard, his large face, his high forehead, and his piercing eyes, with which he looked at him fixedly.

"Who art thou?" quoth he.

"Master St. Peter," said the smith, "I am Smetse Smee, who in his lifetime lived at Ghent on the Quai aux Oignons, and now prays you to let him enter your good Paradise."

"No," said St. Peter.

"Ah, my master!" said Smetse most piteously, "if 'tis because in my lifetime I sold my soul to the devil, I make bold to tell you that I repented most heartily, and was redeemed from his power and kept nothing that was his."

"Excepting a sackful of *royals*," said the saint, "and on that account thou shalt not come in."

"Master," said the smith, "I am not so guilty as you suppose; the sack stayed in my house because it had been blessed, and for that reason I thought I might well keep it. But take pity on me, for I knew not what I was doing. I pray you also to deign to consider that I come from a far country, that I am greatly tired, and would gladly

rest in this good Paradise.”

“Be off, smith,” said the saint, who was holding the door a crack open.

Meanwhile Smetse had slipped through the opening, and taking off his leathern apron sat down, saying:

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“Master, I am here rightfully, you cannot turn me out.”

But St. Peter bade a troop of halberdier angels who were near at hand drive him away: and this the halberdier angels did with great dispatch.

Thereafter, Smetse did not cease to beat on the door with his fists, and lamented, wept, and cried out: “Master, have pity on me, let me in, my master; I repent of all the sins I have committed, and even the others as well. Master, grant me permission to enter the blessed Paradise. Master....” But Master St. Peter, hearing this, put his head over the wall:

“Smith,” said he, “if thou wilt persist in this uproar, I shall have thee sent to Purgatory.”

And poor Smetse held his peace, and sat down on his seat, and so passed sad days, watching others enter.

In this wise a week went by, during which he lived on a few scraps of bread which were thrown to him over the wall, and on grapes gathered from a sour vine which grew on the outer face of the wall of Paradise in this part.

And Smetse was most unhappy, leading this idle existence. And he sought in his head for some work or other which would gladden him somewhat. Having found it, he shouted as loud as he could, and St. Peter put his head over the wall.

“What wilt thou, Smetse?” said he.

“Master,” answered the smith, “will you be pleased to let me go down to earth for one night, so that I may see my good wife and look to my affairs?”

“Thou mayst, Smetse,” answered St. Peter.

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XVIII. Wherein it is seen why Smetse was whipped.

It was then All Saints’ Eve; bitter was the cold, and Smetse’s good wife was in her kitchen, brewing some good mixture of sugar, yolk of egg, and *bruinbier*, to cure her of an evil catarrh, which had lain upon her ever since her man died.

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Smetse came and knocked at the window of the kitchen, whereat his wife was greatly frightened.

And she cried out sadly: “Do not come and torment me, my man, if ’tis prayers thou wilt have. I say as many as I can, but I will say more if need be. Wilt thou have masses said? Thou shalt have them, and prayers and indulgences likewise. I will buy them, my man, I promise thee; but go back quickly whence thou camest.”

Nevertheless Smetse went on knocking. “’Tis not masses or prayers,” said he, “that I want, but shelter, food, and drink, for bitter is the cold, rude the wind, sharp the frost. Open, wife.”

But she, on hearing him speak thus, prayed the more and cried out the louder, and beat her breast and crossed herself, but made no move to open the door, saying only: “Go back, go back, my man; thou shalt have prayers and masses.”

Suddenly the smith discerned an open window in the attic. He climbed up and entered the house by that means, went down the stair, and, opening the door, appeared before his wife; but as she kept drawing back before him as he advanced, crying out and calling the neighbours at the top of her voice, Smetse stood still so as not to frighten her further, sat down on a stool, and said:

“Dost not see, mother, that I am indeed Smetse, and wish thee no harm?”

But his wife would listen to nothing and crept back into a corner. Thence with her teeth a-chatter, and her eyes open wide, she made a sign to him to leave her, for she could no longer find her tongue, by reason of her great fear.

“Wife,” said the smith in friendly tones, “is it thus that thou givest greeting and

welcome to thy poor husband, after the long time he has been away? Alas, hast forgot our old comradeship and union?"

Hearing this soft and joyous voice she answered in a low tone and with great timidity:

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"No, dead master."

"Well then," said he, "why art thou so afraid? Dost not know thy man's fat face, his round paunch, and the voice which in former days sang so readily hereabout?"

"Yes," she said, "I know thee well enough."

And why," said he, "if thou knowest me, wilt not come to me and touch me?"

"Ah," said she, "I dare not, master, for 'tis said that whatever member touches a dead man is itself dead."

"Come, wife," said the smith, "and do not believe all these lying tales."

"Smetse," said she, "will you in good truth do me no hurt?"

"None," said he, and took her by the hand.

"Ah," she said suddenly, "my poor man, thou art cold and hungry and thirsty indeed!"

"Yes," said he.

"Well then," said she, "eat, drink, and warm thyself."

While Smetse was eating and drinking he told his wife how he had been forbidden the door to Paradise, and how he designed to take from the cellar a full cask of *bruinbier* and bottles of French wine, to sell to those who went into the Holy City, so that he might be well paid, and with the money he received buy himself better food.

"This, my man," she said, "is all very well, but will Master St. Peter give thee permission to set up at the gates of Paradise such a tavern?"

"Of that," he said, "I have hope."

And Smetse, laden with his cask and bottles, went his way back, up towards the good Paradise.

Having reached the foot of the wall he set up his tavern in the open air, for the weather is mild in this heavenly land, and on the first day all who went in drank at Smetse's stall, and paid him well out of compassion.

But one or two became drunk, and entering Paradise in this state, set Master Peter inquiring into the cause of it; and having found it out he enjoined Smetse to stop his selling, and had him whipped grievously.

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XIX. Of the fair judgment of My Lord Jesus.

Not long afterwards the good wife died also, by reason of the terror that had seized hold of her at the sight of her man's ghost.

And her soul went straight towards Paradise, and there she saw, sitting with his seat against the wall, the poor Smetse in a fit of melancholy brooding. When he saw her he jumped up with great joy, and said:

"Wife, I will go in with thee."

"Dost thou dare?" said she.

"I will hide myself," said he, "under thy skirt, which is wide enough for us both, and so I shall pass without being seen."

When he had done this she knocked on the door, and Master St. Peter came to open it. "Come in," he said, "good wife." But seeing Smetse's feet below the hem of the skirt: "This wicked smith," he cried, "will he always be making fun of me? Be off, devil-baggage!"

"Ah, my master," said she, "have pity on him, or else let me stay out, too, to keep him company."

"No," said Master St. Peter, "thy place is here, his is outside. Come in then, and let him be off at once."

And the good wife went in while Smetse stayed outside. But as soon as the noonday hour came, and the angel cooks had brought the good wife her beautiful rice pudding, she went to the wall and put her head over it.

"Art thou there," she said, "my man?"

"Yes," said he.

"Art thou hungry?" she said.

"Yes," said he.

"Well then," she said, "spread thy leathern apron; I will throw thee the pudding which has just been given me."

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"But thou," said he, "wilt thou eat nothing?"

"No," said she, "for I have heard it said that there is supper by and by."

Smetse ate the rice pudding, and was suddenly filled with comfort, for the pudding was more succulent and delicious than the finest meats of the earth. Meanwhile his wife went off to walk about in the good Paradise, and afterwards came back to Smetse to tell him what she had seen.

"Ah," she said, "my man, 'tis a most beautiful place. Would that I could see thee within! Round about My Lord Jesus are the pure intelligences who discuss with him whatever is goodness, love, justice, knowledge, and beauty, and also the best means of governing men and making them happy. Their speech is like music. And all the while they keep throwing down to earth the seeds of beautiful, good, just and true thoughts. But men are so wicked and stupid that they tread underfoot these fair seeds or let them wither away. Farther on, established in their several places, are potters and goldsmiths, masons, painters, tanners and fullers, carpenters and shipbuilders, and thou shouldst see what fine work they do, each in his own trade. And when they have made some progress they cast down the seed of that also towards the earth, but 'tis lost oftentimes."

"Wife," said Smetse, "didst see no smiths?"

"Yes," said she.

"Alas," said he, "I would gladly be working alongside them, for I am ashamed to be sitting here like a leper, doing nothing and begging my bread. But listen, wife; since Master St. Peter will not let me in, go thou and ask grace for me from My Lord Jesus, who is kind and will let me in for certain."

"I go, my man," said she.

My Lord Jesus, who was in council with his doctors, saw her coming towards him. "I know thee, good wife," said he; "thou wast in thy lifetime wedded to Smetse the smith, who entreated me so well when, in the guise of a little child, I came down to earth with Master Joseph and Madam Mary. Is he not in Paradise, thy good man?"

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"Alas, no, My Lord!" answered she, "my man is at the door, most sad and out of heart, because Master St. Peter will not let him in."

"Why is that?" said My Lord Jesus.

"Ah, I cannot tell," said she.

But the angel who writes down the faults of men in a record of brass, speaking suddenly, said: "Smetse cannot enter Paradise, for Smetse, delivered from the devil, kept devil's money."

"Ah," said My Lord Jesus, "that is a great sin; but has he not repented of it?"

"Yes," said the good wife, "he has repented, and, moreover, he has been all his life good, charitable, and compassionate."

"Go and find him," said My Lord Jesus, "I will question him myself."

Two or three halberdier angels ran to obey him, and brought Smetse before the Son of God, who spoke in this wise:

"Smetse, is it true that thou didst keep devil's money?"

"Yes, My Lord," answered the smith, whose knees were knocking together with fear.

"Smetse, this is not good, for a man should rather suffer every ill, pain, and anguish, than keep the money of one who is wicked, ugly, unjust, and a liar, as is the devil. But hast thou no meritorious deed to tell me, to mitigate this great sin?"

"My Lord," answered Smetse, "I fought a long while beside the men of Zeeland for freedom of conscience, and, doing this, suffered with them hunger and thirst."

"This is good, Smetse, but didst thou persist in this fair conduct?"

"Alas, no, My Lord!" said the smith, "for, to tell truth, my courage lacked constancy, and I went back to Ghent, where, like so many another, I came under the Spanish yoke."

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"This is bad, Smetse," answered My Lord Jesus.

"My Lord," wept the good wife, "none was more generous than he to the poor, kind to every one, charitable to his enemies, even to the wicked Slimbroek."

"This is good, Smetse," said My Lord Jesus; "but hast thou no other merit in thy favour?"

"My Lord," said the smith, "I have always laboured with a good heart, hated idleness and melancholy, loved joy and merriment, sung gladly, and drunk with thankfulness the *bruinbier* which came to me from you."

"This is good, Smetse, but it is not enough."

"My Lord," answered the smith, "I thrashed as soundly as I could the wicked ghosts of Jacob Hessels, the Duke of Alva, and Philip II, King of Spain."

"Smetse," said My Lord Jesus, "this is very good. I grant thee leave to enter my Paradise."

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