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Hermann der Cherusker und die Schlacht im Teutoburger Walde

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III. Passages For Translation Into German

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III. PASSAGES FOR TRANSLATION INTO GERMAN

I

HUNTING THE AUROCHS

Two knights, one of advanced age, the other young in years, rode one fine day in May through a magnificent forest. Suddenly the attention of the youth was attracted by the broken branches of the thicket and the trodden-down grass, and he exclaimed : We are on the track of an aurochs. Holding themselves in readiness, they advanced at an accelerated pace. On reaching a small treeless plain, in the midst of which was a gloomy-looking tarn, they both perceived the wild beast at the lower end of it. The elder of the two horsemen bade his companion stay where he was. He then took a short spear and approached cautiously. But as soon as the aurochs perceived the bold rider it turned on him. He at once hurled his spear into the nape of the beast's neck, without, however, bringing it down. At the very moment when he was going to fling a second spear into the furious animal's flank his horse stumbled and the horseman fell to the ground. The enraged beast would now have run its horns into the body of its assailant, had not the youth hastened to the spot and sent a well-aimed spear into the head of the aurochs, which at once fell down and died.

II

THE PRIEST

The ceiling of the living room consisted of thick oak beams. In the middle there hung from a chain a pine-torch, which dimly lit the room. The brown wainscotted walls were covered with tremendous antlers, silver-mounted horns, hunting-spears, and swords. On the floor there lay soft bear-skins, and on a raised platform sat Prince Siegmar. By his side an old man, the hair of whose head and beard was as white as snow, occupied a high oak chair ornamented with artistic carving. He was Prince Siegmar's uncle, a priest of over ninety, who could foretell the future. His warnings about the danger that was threatening their freedom were not listened to everywhere. Acknowledging the power and bravery of the Romans, he could not help seeing that they had the intention of subjugating the German people. And that is why he considered it a disgrace that Germans should seek the friendship of the Romans. Prince Siegmar was of the same mind, and lamented that his own brother valued these foreigners more than his own people. The old priest set his hopes on Hermann, Siegmar's son, whose heart was as pure as gold, and who gave promise of becoming a true German. He was strengthened in his hope by a revelation which he had had on the night when Hermann was born. God had told him that Hermann would become the saviour of his people from Roman servitude, and that his people would be proud of him for all time.

III

SEGEST

One fine summer day Segest, accompanied by two Roman knights, paid a visit to his brother Siegmar. The watchman on the tower of the castle announced their approach by blowing his horn. At a sign from the prince

the heavy gate was opened, and the three horsemen appeared in the courtyard of the castle. Having been welcomed by Siegmur himself the guests were conducted into the large hall, where they partook of a good lunch. After the repast the old priest entered, led by Hermann, and shook hands with Segest and the two strangers. Segest now explained the purpose of his visit. Praising the many improvements that the Romans had made, and the higher culture which they were bringing to their people, he proposed that Hermann, as well as his own son, should enter the Roman service. The two strangers he had brought with him were prepared to accompany the two young gentlemen to Rome, and would arrange their reception into the Roman army. Prince Siegmur listened with growing displeasure to his brother's words, and interrupted him by saying: Hermann go to Rome? Never! The grey-haired old priest prevented a scene by motioning Siegmur to keep calm, and saying that Segest's plan was not a bad one. He himself advocated the youth's going to Rome and overcame Siegmur's opposition. Hermann's joy was great, and when the guests had left the old priest explained to his nephew in eloquent words how Hermann's stay at Rome would be the very means of attaining their object—the liberation of their country.

IV

AT THE STONE OF SACRIFICE

It was a still moonlight night. A strange procession advanced along a narrow path in the wood up to the top of a mountain. Four men-servants carried a litter on which was seated the venerable old priest. By his side walked Hermann, with his sword at his side and a spear in his hand. The summit of the mountain being reached, a silver-white horse was bound by its feet, dry pine wood was placed on the stone of sacrifice, and the horse laid on the top. The priest now plunged a knife into the horse's breast,

and the wood was set alight. The flames flared up to the sky and lit up the white skulls of sacrificed horses hanging on high poles all round the stone of sacrifice. The priest prayed to Wodan, the chief of the German gods, for his protection and blessing on Hermann on his journey to Rome. After he had finished the prayer he led Hermann to the altar, and admonished him never to think little of his people and always to value highly the Germans' most precious possession—freedom. Hermann then swore by the fire of the holy sacrifice that he would never rest until the last Roman was driven from the soil of his native land. The procession returned at dawn, and no one spoke a word on the way, so deeply was every one impressed by the solemn celebration on this memorable occasion.

V, VI

LEAVE-TAKING

The morning dawned on which Hermann was to depart from his father's castle. He rose early and paid a last visit to the many places which were so dear to his heart. At breakfast the whole family appeared in the large hall, but little was said, for every one felt sorry that Hermann, who was beloved by all, down to the meanest servant, was going to leave. After taking farewell of every member of the household he mounted his horse and galloped down the mountain. In two hours he reached the castle of his uncle Segest. Here he met with a warm reception from, among others, Thusnelda, the playmate of his childhood, whom he had not seen for a long time. She was truly devoted to her country, and could not understand why Hermann should allow himself to follow these strange men to Rome. He, however, assured her that she need not feel uneasy about him, for he would neither forget nor ever deny his country. This assurance cheered Thusnelda's heart. After a repast, which was taken in the large hall, the horses were brought and they started. Thusnelda gave him as a parting gift a

precious belt. The foot of the mountain was quickly reached, and then their journey proceeded southwards to the fortress of Aliso, thence to the Rhine past Mayence through Gaul to Italy.

VII

EXPERIENCES IN ROME

Hermann was much impressed with all the wonderful things he saw in Rome. He spent several days in sight-seeing, visiting the Forum, the Capitol, and many other celebrated monuments of Roman art. He admired the magnificence displayed on walls and ceilings, the beautifully-worked marble floors, the public gardens with their abundance of fragrant flowers and trees laden with delicious fruit. His native country seemed very poor in comparison with all this. But for all that he despised the way these rich Romans spent their lives, and did not think highly of their character. After a little time he was presented to the emperor, and was then assigned to one of the Roman legions stationed in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. Having become thoroughly acquainted with the Roman method of warfare, and shown that he was brave and skilful, he was promoted higher and higher, and finally was invested with the Roman knighthood. After five years we find him again in Rome attending the chariot-races and athletic sports at the great circus. However, his thoughts were not with the entertainment of this great festival, but at the castle of his father and with his oppressed countrymen. He resolved to leave the Roman service and to return home. On the occasion of this festival he happened to make the acquaintance of Bertuolf, who was for ever after most devoted to him for the protection he gave him when he was ill-treated without cause by a Roman nobleman.

VIII, IX

HIS RETURN HOME

The news that his father was ailing and was longing for his son's return determined Hermann to quit the Roman service at once. The emperor acceded to his request, and expressed his regret at losing so brave and intelligent a soldier ; at the same time he thought that the young knight might make himself very useful in his native country, by introducing Roman ways and habits among his people. On his way home Hermann met a pedestrian, who was no other than Bertuolf also on the way to his home, which was on the river Weser. Hermann suggested that they should journey together. Bertuolf was pleased to accept his invitation. When they saw the Rhine again Hermann shouted for joy, but he was astonished to find how everything was changed since he had last left the district. On reaching *Castra vetera*, the present town of Xanten, they heard that the new Roman governor Varus was there. Hermann seized the opportunity and paid him his respects. Varus was in his tent outside the Roman camp. Segest was with him at the time, and they had just been talking about Hermann when the latter was announced. Segest warned Varus not to trust the youth, but in vain. Varus received him in a most friendly manner, and could not help admiring his fine appearance as well as his rich store of knowledge and his clear insight into Roman affairs. On taking leave Varus invited him to come and see him again soon.

X, XI

THE PRIESTESS AND HIS HOME-COMING

Having crossed the Rhine the two travellers wended their way along the road which followed the river Lippe and led to Aliso. Towards evening they reached a little hill on the top of which stood a tower. There dwelt the

priestess Velleda. Hermann decided not to pass her tower without seeing her, and begging her to pray to Wodan that he might protect their country and keep its soil free from foreign intruders. On seeing Hermann the wise woman's features at first clouded as she perceived the Roman garb, but when she recognised Hermann her dark eyes shone with delight, and she said: Welcome to the land of your fathers; I knew that my dream would be fulfilled. She led him out under a gigantic oak-tree, and there, muttering mysterious words, placed a wreath on his head. Then she bade him farewell and asked him to think of her dream, which she had related to him, when the great day should come. Hermann was deeply impressed by the priestess's words, and when he joined Bertuolf he was lost in thought. They continued their journey to the forest of Teutoburg, where Bertuolf took his leave and went on to his father's farm, thanking him once more for all he had done for him, and assuring him that he could count on his services at any time. As he approached his father's castle Immo loudly blew his horn. His father was seriously ill, but he felt proud on seeing his son again and a pleased smile passed over his pale face. At his death he once more warned his son that nothing but united action could save their country.

XII, XIII

THE CONSPIRACY

On succeeding to his father's power Hermann determined to keep on intimate terms with the other German princes, and also maintained friendly relations with Varus, who was fond of him, though Segest was never tired of warning him against the youth. Segest's hatred of Hermann had grown considerably on the latter marrying his daughter Thusnelda against his will. One day Bertuolf appeared at Hermann's castle and announced that the Romans during his absence from home had reduced his father's farm to ashes, and that the poor old man had met

M

his death among the ruins. Hermann was furious at this shameful deed, and decided to avenge this and many other wrongs the Romans had done. Bertuolf carried a message to all the German princes in the neighbourhood inviting them to assemble at the next full moon on the elf's meadow situated in a dark forest in the mountains. They were all ready to come. The assembly took place on a stormy night, and after due consultation it was decided that they would all stand together and fight for their ancient freedom and clear the sacred soil of their cantons of those robbers. At Hermann's suggestion it was resolved to entice Varus into the forest of Teutoburg under pretext that a rebellion had broken out. They all agreed to this plan and settled the different positions the various tribes were to occupy in the struggle. They then parted, once more recording their solemn vow to hold firmly together.

XIV, XV

THE BATTLE IN THE FOREST OF TEUTOBURG, AND HERMANN'S DEATH

Varus was once more in his camp on the Lower Rhine. In his tent a sumptuous banquet was being held at which many officers as well as Segest were present. Varus expressed his satisfaction with the progress that was being made in the conquest of Germany, and his guests praised Varus as the man who would make out of Germany a flourishing Roman province. Before the banquet was ended a messenger from Hermann arrived, who brought an important communication for Varus which was written on parchment, and in which a rebellion on the Weser was reported requiring the help of his army if it were not to spread any farther. Segest at once suggested that it was a trap into which Hermann wished to entice the Roman general; but Varus shook his head and decided to start with two legions. In a few days these legions were ready to march. On their way they met with great difficulties

on account of the narrow mountain-paths and the heavy rains which impeded their advance. When at last they had reached the Teutoburg forest heavy rain set in again, and whilst they were advancing through the narrow ravines of the mountains they were suddenly attacked on all sides and utterly routed. Most of the Romans were killed, and Varus plunged his sword into his own body. The few that were left fled back over the Rhine, and the Romans did not dare to invade Germany again for a long time. Hermann's success aroused the envy of some of the German princes, and he was murdered by two men who treacherously plunged their daggers into his back.

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