

A German Version of the Thief-Legend

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A GERMAN VERSION OF THE THIEF-LEGEND.

AMONGST the many medieval legends of the Virgin Mary which have been preserved to us, that of the thief who was saved from the gallows by the intervention of the Virgin seems to have been particularly popular, for there is hardly a collection which does not contain it in some form¹. The Thief-story existed, however, in its main outlines before the cult of the Virgin became so wide-spread as to cause many of the miraculous occurrences, formerly attributed to the intervention of saints or to other causes, to be placed without discrimination to the credit of Our Lady. In the life of St Bernard, for example, we read that that saint, happening to meet a thief who was about to be crucified for his sins, saved him from the physical punishment of the cross in order that he might take up the true cross of religion². There is a more interesting story contained in the *Vitas patrum*, which tells of a robber-chief named Cyriacus, surnamed 'the wolf,' whose life was preserved for ten years as a reward for having saved the lives of some little children; there is no mention of the Virgin, or even of a saint, but the children appear to him frequently in his dreams, saying: 'Noli timere, nos pro te satisfacimus³.' In the collections of Latin legends, however, the story has already assumed a more definite form, and has developed into a legend of a very common type. A thief, generally called Eppo or Ebbo, is sustained for three days on the gallows by the Virgin, who places her hands beneath his feet, as a reward for his having venerated her 'ex corde' during his lifetime. The attempt to cut the thief's throat is also frustrated by the Virgin who wards off the sword with her hand. The thief is released in recognition of the miracle and im-

¹ Some idea may be formed of its popularity by reference to Mussafia's Classification of the Mary-Legends in the *Wiener Sitzungsberichte*, vols. 113, 115, 119. Cp. also Ward's *Catalogue of Romances*, ii, p. 586 f.

² *Vita prima*: Liber vii, Cap. xv: *De latrone a cruci supplicio per S. B. liberato, sed cruci religioso deinceps addicto*.

³ Migne, *Vitas patrum*, vol. 74, p. 202. Cap. clvi: *Vita latronis nuncupati Cyriaci*.

mediately enters a monastery¹. But there is another thief-story, which, although resting on the same foundations, has developed in a different manner. In this the thief is one of three brother-knights who have taken to robbery. They are all three captured and condemned to the gallows. Two of them are hanged, but the third desires confession, and, in spite of all the efforts made to kill him, he is miraculously kept alive until he has received absolution, whereupon, as the story proceeds to relate, 'statim mortuus est.'²

From the contamination of these two legends resulted the simple story of the robber-knight, who, as a reward for his unflinching veneration of the Virgin during his lifetime, is preserved from death until an opportunity has been granted him of confessing and receiving absolution. There can be no doubt that this version of the legend existed in Latin MSS. of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as the story is preserved in this form in at least four different languages, French, Spanish, Dutch and German. In Old French it is found in all three forms. As related by Gautier de Coinci³, the legend follows closely the Latin stories of Eppo the thief; in a MS. of the fifteenth century, described by Tobler (*Trois freres gentils homes estoient*, etc.)⁴, we find the story of the three brother-knights, one of whom is saved in order that he may confess, while an unpublished Anglo-norman poem contained in MS. Royal xx B, xiv (fol. 169) of the British Museum, gives the third version of the thief-story, which has been described as a contamination of the other two. Here we have a knight who is forced to take to robbery because he has squandered all his possessions. Thanks to the 'angeline salutation,' which he has never omitted to perform, he is kept alive by the Virgin with a spear through his heart until he has confessed his sins and received absolution from a priest, whereupon he immediately falls down dead: 'Kant tut out dit ius mort chai.' Amongst the Spanish legends we find the ordinary Eppo-story (although the name is not mentioned), in which the thief was taken down from the gallows, 'e alli fina sos dies a servey e plear de nostre senyor Deus e de la Verge gloriosa mare sua'—the only variation from the Latin source being that there is no attempt here to cut the thief's throat. In the same collec-

¹ This Latin story has been published by Wright for the Percy Society, No. 109, 1842; also by Pfeiffer, *Marienlegenden*, p. 269.

² Lecoy de la Marche, *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues d'Étienne de Bourbon*, p. 103, No. 109 b.

³ Edition by Pocquet. Livre ii: *Du larron qui se commandoit a nostre dame*.

⁴ A. Tobler, *Eine handschriftliche Sammlung altfranzösischer Legenden (Jahrbuch für roman. und engl. Litteratur, Bd. 7, 8)*.

tion' is to be found the legend of the 'cavaller robador' who is said to have been condemned by the 'Emperador Frederich.' After having hung for three days on the gallows, he is found still living by another knight, whom he informs that he cannot die without confession, because he had never allowed a day to pass without repeating 'tres Pater noster e tres Ave marias a honor de la Trinitat, e V paternoster a honor de les V plaques de Jesucrist, e un paternoster a honor del angel a qui jo son comonat, e altre paternoster a honor del sant cors de Deu.' He begs his friend to send for a priest to whom he may confess, 'e tentost li feeran venir un clergue e confessas, e apres ab gran devocio combrequa; e apres decontinent rete la anima a Jesucrist.' We find these same two legends in the medieval Dutch collections: the Eppo-story (again without the name), which concludes with the following words: 'Doe dat voor den rechter quam, doe dede he den dief of doen vonder galghen ende die dief ghing altehants in een cloester ende diende gode ende sijn lieve troesterinne Maria die maghet ende moeder godes al sijn leven lanc²': and the other version, in which the severest ill-treatment is ineffective in putting an end to the thief's life until he has been granted an opportunity of confession: 'man sleepten hem, men hinc hem, men sloech hem mit scarpes swaerden, men mochte hem in gheenre wÿs doden.' As soon as he has received absolution, 'doe starf hi te hants endi hi voer te hemelrÿc³.'

In German literature the legend appears in similar forms. The Eppo-version, published by Pfeiffer⁴, follows the Latin originals, except that, as in both Spanish and Dutch, the name and the episode of the sword are omitted. Another version, of which the text is here published for the first time, is contained in MS. All. 150 of the Bibliothèque nationale. As in the Anglo-norman and Spanish stories, the robber-knight is forced to take to robbing his friends and neighbours 'umb lybes nar.' Here, too, he is seen on the gallows and questioned by a passing friend, who fetches a priest at his earnest request, and no sooner has he confessed than he falls down dead, nothing remaining of him but a little heap of ashes on the ground⁵. The author of the German poem mentions as his source, the *Vitas patrum*; and it is possible that he had

¹ *Recull de eximptis e miracles, gestes e faules*, etc., ii, No. ccccv (p. 34); No. dcii (p. 213).

² C. G. N. de Vooyo, *Middelnerlandse Marialeghenden (Maatschappij der nederlandschen Letterkunde*, i, xxx).

³ C. G. N. de Vooyo, *Middelnerlandse legenden en exempeln*, p. 106 f.

⁴ *Marienlegenden*, No. 6, p. 47.

⁵ As evidence of the favour which this legend enjoyed in Germany, Professor R. Priebisch tells me that an early thirteenth century fragment of a layman's breviary,

the story of Cyriacus in his mind, but it is more probable that, as was so often the case at that time, he wished to give a worthy source for his own poem and pretended that he had found the subject in the *Vitas patrum*, which was a never failing source of 'exempla' for the preachers and didactic writers of the Middle Ages.

Ms. All. 150 of the Bibliothèque nationale is protected by old wooden covers and contains two MSS. written respectively in 1418 and 1419¹. The first of these consists of the translation by Otto von Diemeringen of Mandeville's Travels in the Orient; the second contains, besides the present poem, (1) an extract from the chronicle of Twinger of Königshofen (fol. 202^r-245^r); (2) a didactic poem called *Des meister Albertus lehre* (fol. 263-268, continued, fol. 345-356); (3) a poem on the fifteen signs before judgment, and the judgment itself (fol. 281-292^r); a poem entitled *Von Jesus dem artzt*. The writer of the second ms. calls himself at the end (fol. 356) 'Corin ein gut geselle,' and, according to another entry (fol. 344^r), the ms. was written at Spires in 1419.

The following rhymes are of importance in determining the home of the author: ryden : vermyden (55); lyn < ligen : heuffelyn (115) (cp. *Zeitschr. f. deut. Altertum*, xlv, p. 401; Rieger, *Das Leben der heiligen Elisabeth*, p. 30); gesat < gesaget : pfat (57) (cp. Heinzel, *Gesch. der niederfränk. Geschäftssprache*, Typus vii; Weinhold, *Mhd. Grammatik*, § 33); instead of verzeit : meit (73-74), we must therefore read either verzat : mat, or as in 15-16, verzaget : maget; lychamen : ämen (111) (cp. *Maria Himmelfahrt*, l. 1843, in the *Zeitschr. f. deut. Altertum*, v) points to lychämen (cp. *Zeitschr. f. deut. Alt.*, xlv, p. 96), but that the short form was used as well is proved by the rhyme lychamen : namen (101). schult : holt (99) (cp. Weinhold, § 74); konigin : sîn (49, 107) (cp. *Zeitschr. f. deut. Alt.*, xlv, p. 78); the infinitives with apocope of -n, gezyde : byde (27); wyse : paradyse (105), where the full forms are only due to the copyist. These rhymes speak for Middle Germany. The poet's home cannot have been far from that of the scribe, namely in Rhenish Franconia; that he, however, did not belong to the 'rein-reimenden' Franconian poets is shown by the rhymes *ā* : *ǣ* in masculine

formerly in the possession of the well-known Pastor Oberlin, now ms. Lat. 9377 of the Bibliothèque nationale, contains well-executed coloured pen-drawings to several Mary-legends (Theophilus, the drowning woman, etc.). One of these represents the Virgin sustaining the right arm of a hanging knight, and on the margin a contemporary hand has written 'Hie ledigot unser frowe einen erhangenen.'

¹ A detailed description of the ms. containing the poem has been sent by Professor Priebisch to the *Archiv der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*.

endings: gesat : pfat (57), man : getan (59); he also does not shrink from $\bar{o} : \ddot{o}$, as got : not (65), noch : zoch (71), and $\bar{e} : \ddot{e}$, in verzeret : leret (9).

With regard to the metre, the rule of four lifts and masculine rhymes, three lifts and feminine rhymes (in the proportion of twelve of the former to five of the latter) is observed, the only exception being lines 17, 18, which have four lifts notwithstanding the feminine rhyme. As no conclusion can be drawn from the rhymes, with regard to apocope and syncope, it is necessary to allow for dips of two syllables in lines 1, 17, 26, 30, 36, 42, 48, 50, 55, 88, 121. 'Auftakt' of two syllables occurs in lines 16, 34, 35, 36, 38, 44, 55, 60, 94, 95, 131; 'beschwerte Hebung' in lines 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 25, 29, 70, 75, 84, 86, 92, 93, 97, 104, 112, 117, 124, 125; but in nine of these cases the 'beschwerte Betonung' falls on words (erbere, nachgat, sprechwort, unwert, bosheit, hellisch, bichtere, licham, dynstman) where the omission of the dip was allowed, even after syllable-counting had superseded the method of accentuation in the rhyme-pairs (cp. Jänicke, *Beiträge zur Kritik und Erklärung des Seifried Helbling*, in *Zeitschr. f. deut. Altertum*, xvi, p. 402; and Kraus, *Zur Kritik des Meier Helmbrecht*, in the same journal, xlvii, p. 305). In three of the remaining cases (25, 70, 125), the dip is wanting immediately after the second lift, and thus a kind of caesura is formed. It is possible that lines 92, 93 are heavily accentuated by the author intentionally with a view to producing a certain rhetorical effect suitable to the announcement of the priest. In line 3 'vitas patrum' must be read with 'versetzter Betonung'; 'Māria' in lines 31 and 74 must be scanned Māriā, in 107 and 124, Mārja.

As the poem is so short and it is not possible to differentiate between the dialectic peculiarities of author and copyist, the orthography of the MS. has been retained. Additions, however, which are obviously due to the copyist, are enclosed in round brackets, emendations of my own in square brackets. I am also responsible for the punctuation.

JESSIE CROSLAND.

Du solt eren die syben gezyt! [fol. 322 b]
 In eyne buche geschriben lyt—
 Daz ist vitas patrum genant,
 Daz vil luten ist bekant—
 5 Daz zu eyne male were
 Ein rytter erbere.

1 solt] MS. sol.

5 Daz] MS. man saget daz.

- Da er daz sin hatte verdan,
 Da müste ez an ein rauben gan.
 Daz sprechwort uns leret :
- 10 Wer daz sin verzeret
 Daz er numme enhat,
 Ander (lude) gut er nachgat*,
 Den sinen ist er unwert!
 Er ist ein dor[e der] des gert.
- 15 Der ritter, als ich han gesaget,
 Hatte sich verdobet und verjaget.
 Er gedachte : 'du must dich fristen
 Diner nachgebüre kisten :
 Sie sint so vol von gude.'
- 20 In dem bosen mude,
 So stal er alles daz er fant. [323 a]
 Da(r) begunde er altzü hand
 Morden und[e] rauben,
 Doch hatte er cristen glauben.
- 25 War er quam in daz lant,
 Daz yme die glocken daten bekant
 Die rechten syben gezyde(n),
 Nit langer wolt er byde(n),
 Wie so er were in bosheit,
- 30 Ein paternoster waz yme bereit
 Und ein avemaria :
 Die zwene formet er yesa
 Zü allen syben stüden
 Gotdes heiligen funff wüden,
- 35 Daz er numer müste ersterben,
 Er ensolte da myde herwerben
 Den lycham und daz [frone] brot
 Daz die sele spyset vor den dot.
 Vorbas endet er numer güt,
- 40 Aber quam in sinen müt,
 Er muste steln umb lybes nar.
 Dez die lute wurden gewar.

* After line 12 in the MS. follow two lines which are an evident interpolation :
 So er dan numē enhat So enhulfet dan nit alle verdat. 22 Da begunde etc.]
 MS. Dar altzu hant Begunde er morden und rauben. 32 zwene] MS. zwey.
 42 die lute wurden] MS. wurden die lute.

- Sie begünden in fangen
 Und an einen galgen hangen. [323 b]
- 45 Der rytter vor dem galgen sprach :
 ‘Och, daz ez ye geschach,
 Daz klagen ich got durch sinen dot.
 Gedenke min armen mannes not
 Maria, here konigin.
- 50 Min(e) sele dir müsse befolhen sin.’
 Daz ding nit langer wart gespart,
 Der rytter schiere erhanget wart.
 Alda so hing er lange stünt.
 Do wart eyne andren ritter künd,
- 55 Daz er nit enmochte vermyden,
 Er enmüste ryden
 Vor dem galgen hin ein pfat.
 Syme gesellen hatte er gesat,
 Wie des lybes ein fromer man
- 60 Von dem leben also were getan,
 Und daz ez schade were :
 Er were ein ryttere.
 So sie also myteinander ryden,
 Gros ruffen wart da nit vermyden :
- 65 ‘Komet her, durch den richen got
 Zü myner bitterlichen not.’ [324 a]
 Die zwen[e] da gewanten,
 Zü dem galgen sie ranten,
 (Sie sprachen :) ‘Bist du gehure das tu kunt?’
- 70 Da sprach der dyep da zu stünt :
 ‘Ich bin gehuer und leben noch,
 Syt daz man mich an den galgen zoch.
 Min lip were zü hant verzeit,
 Dan Maria die reine meit,
- 75 Die treyt und[e] hebet mich,
 Daz sagen ich uch sicherlich,
 Alles durch ein clein(es) gebet
 Daz ich degelichen det
 Zu allen syben stünden.
- 80 Daz han ich nü befunden ;

48 min] MS. mich. 49 here] MS. herre. 50 dir müsse] MS. müsse dir.
 57 ein] MS. einen.

- Daz sie mich trostet und ir kint.
 Ich waz gar an wytzen blint.
 Der helffe zwyfelt ich an ir.
 Durch got nu g[e]leubet mir
 85 Und lesset mir myn(e) swere,
 Bit eyne bichtere.
 Die zwene schiere quamen,
 Da sie einen pryster vernamen,
 Dem daten sie daz wunder kunt. [324 b]
 90 Der pryster zu der selben stündt
 Detd einen aplas luden,
 Und künte den luden
 Allen besünder
 Daz bezeichnenliche wünder.
 95 Gotdes lycham sie namen
 Und zu dem galgen quamen.
 Der dyeb [der] wart her abe getan,
 Off synen knychen bleib er stan,
 Dem pryster bichte er sine schült.
 100 Der pryster sprach: 'got ist uch holt.'
 Der dyeb sprach: 'herre in gotdes namen
 Gebent mir gotdes lychamen,
 Daz ich damyde sy bewart
 Vor der hellischen vart,
 105 Daz er mich müsse wyse(n)
 Zü dem vronen paradyse(n).
 Dez hilff mir Maria konigin,
 Und wollest min geleyde sin.
 Vor der leyde[n] fynde scharn
 110 Wollest du mich, maget, bewarn.'
 Die lude sprachen (alle) amen.
 Den fronen lychamen
 In sine sele er enphing.
 Zü hant also daz verging,
 115 Da sach man an der stelle lyn
 Ein cleines esschen heuffelyn.
 Des tyebes lip waz verwesen,
 Er enhorde nit me lesen.

104 vor der] MS. vo die. 115 stelle] MS. stald. 116 esschen] MS. schesen.
 118 lesen] MS. gerne lesen.

- Und sagen ich uch besünder
 120 Daz also gros[e] wunder,
 Wie Maria die here konigin
 Kan der sündler troster sin.
 Wer zwyfelt nu daran,
 Sit Maria yren dynstman
 125 Also wol hatte getrost
 Daz er off der hellen rost,
 Oder ye queme (dan) in daz fegefuer
 Von der reinen maget duer.
 Nu merckent alle gottes kind
 130 Wie mylt(e) got und sin(e) mutter sind.
 Daz der dyep sie eret syben stünd
 Tegeliches, des wart yme künd,
 Ane alle myssewende,
 Die hymelsche freyde an ende,
 135 Ane leit und ane not.
 Dez hylff uns (auch) Crist durch dinen dot.

AMEN.

132 des] MS. daz.