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"The Humor of Thomas Murner."

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The Humor of Thomas Murner.

Humor, as everyone knows, comes naturally from the mind, and cannot be cultivated. It reaches into the high as well as the low circles of life. It may be only a mood or state of mind, or it may be a mere fancy or whim. Humor is spontaneous, coming from within a person, and cannot be made. Wit, however, is a form of humor that can be acquired. Dryden says, "Wit is a propriety of words and thoughts adapted to the subject." If this be so, anyone can set himself the task of becoming a master of wit. In the spoken expression, wit has more brevity than does humor, for it shows a sharpness of comprehension, while humor shows a feeling. Real humor comes unconsciously and of itself. "Wit always has a point which is usually directed intentionally against persons and things, so that it easily becomes satire, while humor is free from satiric sharpness."¹ Wit and satire are forms of humor, and a pun is one form of wit. There are

¹Ohorn- "Altdeutscher Humor."

numerous other forms such as bulls, epigrams, paradox, and the nullifying rider.

In Germany the "Volks humor" was not only naive, but also coarse and unrefined. The people accepted humor just as it was; they called things by the usual names, and they did not mind mentioning indecent situations. ² At the same time fantasy played its part in the Volks humor. Today humor has what we call a "good tone," and since the old humor injures this quality, we decry it as coarse, dirty, and immoral. In the earlier days the author and the public possessed a certain simplicity which we lack today, and which would enable us to forget the immoralities we seem to find in their works. But probably these immoralities were not obvious, for they presented their views in a clever and genuine way. This naive way of thinking has been taken from us by advanced culture, refinement of outer conditions of life, changed business relationships, and an increasing demand for pleasure. The earlier German authors

² Ohorn--"Altdeutscher Humor."

wrote in a plain, ingenuous way, the words they used were those in common use, and hence were often coarse, and they presented things as they actually existed, while at the present time writers try to a great extent to conceal existing evils as much as possible.

Our modern idea is far different from that of past times. Today we conceive of something humorous as being laughable, or funny, as we express it. Sully, in his "Essay on Laughter," tells of eight different forms of the humorous. They are, 1. Incongruity, or things new, novel, and strange; 2. Deformities, as the one laughing feels his superiority over the one he laughs at; 3. Moral deformities or vices; 4. Things involving breach of order or rule; 5. Want of knowledge or skill in others; 6. Small misfortunes; 7. Logically incongruous, as an incongruity in ideas, the absurd, or paradoxical; 8. Pretenses, as vanity or hypocrisy.^{3.} Other writers may have different ideas of humor, as for instance, Professor Baine, who says that laughter comes from the degradation of some person having dignity.

^{3.} Sully--"Essay on Laughter."

This is true, of course, but it is not the only cause of laughter, for do we not laugh when deception and nonsense are exposed? Then, when we consider wit, we have numerous definitions. Cowley thought wit implied a general sense of form, together with ingenuity and propriety.⁴ Hobbes' idea of wit, or fancy, was that it meant the observation of similitudes, while Addison says, "Wit is the ingenuity of discovering the resemblance of ideas not so near together, but that surprise and delight are given to the reader." According to Addison, true wit consists in a resemblance of ideas, false wit in a resemblance of words, and mixed wit partly in a resemblance of words and partly in a resemblance of ideas. Dr. Barrow's definition of wit approaches more nearly our own conception, namely, that "wit is a manner of speaking out of the simple and plain way." There are different kinds of wit as well as of humor. Forms of the latter are, the immoral, or that which has an evil effect; the indecent, or that which is unfit to be presented or spoken in polite society; the

⁴.

Cowley--"Ode of Wit."

indelicate, which shows a want of covering things which need to be covered; the common, which implies a want of discrimination between what is polite and impolite; and the refined, which is moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and free from excessive boisterousness and laughter. But humor does not necessarily need to be laughable or pleasure giving. It may include satires, or even social dramas. Satire, while a form of humor, is not humor as we understand it today. Humor is now defined as "that quality of action, speech, or writing, which excites amusement, oddity, jocularly, facetiousness, comicality, fun; or the faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition; jocular imagination or treatment of a subject."⁵ Satire means "The employment of sarcasm, irony, or ridicule; any writing in which vice or folly is held up to ridicule."⁶

It is rather difficult to discover the humor in the earliest German writers, but the Volks humor was

5.

Webster's Dictionary.

6.

Comprehensive Standard Dictionary.

there, as we can find traces of it in many of the works. Even in the sagas and legends it is present, although not so clearly to be seen as in some of the later literature. The German people were very proud of their heroes, and respected them, and for this reason we do not find any satire in the "Nibelungenlied" or the "Gudrunlied," but we do find some humor. In the twelfth and fifteenth centuries we can find more than in the earlier writers. For instance, in the Tierfabel, there is humor and fantasy, and to some extent satire. In the first Tiersage, which were creations similar to those which children formulate in regard to animals, the wolf represented the monk. Satire predominated in the Tierepos of the fifteenth century, "Reineke der Fuchs." "Reineke mocked religion, honor and all virtues, and triumphed by lying and deception, finally being made chancellor of the empire." In the Reformation period, (from fifteen hundred to sixteen hundred and twenty-four), we find a great deal of satirical literature. Sebastian Brant's "Narrenschiff" is a satirical poem in which all the vices and evils of the time were

represented by fools, whom Brant places in a ship bound for Narragonien. Then we have the "Letters of Obscure Men," some of which are written in a decidedly satirical vein. By the side of Brant we can place Johann Fischart, another writer of satire, who ridiculed the follies and crimes of his time. He wrote in a style similar to Brant's, and ridiculed the customs of the period, such as drinking and gambling, also the pride of the nobility and the learned classes. Fischart was also a witty writer, his wit being best seen in his book, "Aller Praktik Grossmutter." But the most humorous writer of the Reformation period was Hans Sachs. In his works we find humor, jest, and mockery, but his purpose is to teach and to improve, as well as to entertain. He directs his fun against the church and the clergy, the common people, and especially against the lawyers. His humor approaches what we understand by modern humor, for he has witty remarks in his works, he places his characters in very humorous situations, and we find in him oddity and new treatment of subjects. Some of his farces are particularly humorous, as "St. Peter mit der

Geiss," and, "Die ungleichen Kinder Eva." Sachs wrote a number of comedies and carnival plays which were also very humorous. Not humor, but satire was at its height, during the Reformation period, and most writers employed it in their works, as Rollenhagen in his "Froschmeuseler," Ulrich von Hutten in some of his poems, and others of minor importance. But greater than any of these writers of satire, in fact the greatest satirist of the Reformation period was Thomas Murner.

Thomas Murner was born on the twenty-fourth of December, fourteen hundred and seventy-five, at Ober-ehnheim in Alsace. In fourteen hundred and eighty-one his parents moved to Strassburg, and, since they had destined him for the clergy, Murner entered the order of the barefooted friars in Strassburg, at the age of fifteen years, and when nineteen he received the ordination. In fourteen hundred and ninety-nine Murner continued his theological studies at Freiburg, but his restless spirit could not endure the monotony of remaining in one place for any length of time, and we find him in Cracow, where he matriculated under the

chancellor Valentin von Olkusch. As bachelor of the theological faculty he visited Vienna, Rostock, Prague, and Cologne, and in the beginning of the year fifteen hundred and two he again went to Strassburg. Murner next went to Freiburg, where on the twenty-sixth of March, fifteen hundred and six, he was created licentiate, and on the following day, doctor of theology. But again he did not remain long. His father died in Strassburg in the same year, and Murner went to Cracow, where he became a teacher at the university, and later to Bern as reading master. He became prior at Speier in fifteen hundred and ten, and as such attended the chapter of the order which was held in Strassburg on the third of March, fifteen hundred and ten, and was sent by his superiors in fifteen hundred and eleven to Frankfurt, to look after the affairs of the Franciscans. His talks, in which he interspersed anecdotes and jests in order to make them more interesting for the masses, drew large audiences. As a preacher, Murner gained a reputation by means of his ironical, witty style, and his turn for satiric invective, and in

Frankfurt his reputation soon extended far beyond the city limits. In the "Schelmenzunft," and in the "Narrenbeschwoerung," Murner himself says that he had preached at Frankfurt on single chapters of these works. In July, fifteen hundred and thirteen, he was chosen prior of the Strassburg monastery, and attended the chapter of the order at Noerdlingen. He was not equal to the position, and before he had held it a year, he was relieved by the provincial, George Hofmann. Murner then went to Trier, where on the thirtieth of November, fifteen hundred and fifteen, he announced to the students his exercises on the "Institutionen." While at Strassburg, in August fifteen hundred and fifteen, he had dedicated his translations of the "Aeneis" to the Emperor Maximilian. After his abusive writing, "Murnarus Leviathan," Murner had to flee from Trier, because he had embittered the canons. In the first half of the year fifteen hundred and eighteen, he entered the University of Basel, but the plague was raging there, and when it reached its height in fifteen hundred and nineteen, he left Basel, and again

went to Strassburg. As a parting-gift he left the people of Basel his satirical work, "Die Geuchmat." Later Murner went to Lucerne, then to Zurich and Heidelberg. The position of priest in his native city had been offered him and he accepted it and returned to Oberehnheim, where he died in fifteen hundred and thirty-seven.

At the time of the Reformation, Germany was in a very unsettled condition, politically and socially, as well as religiously. There were struggles continually going on between the Catholics and Protestants, both parties trying to gain the upper hand, and make their belief the religion of the German people. Councils were held for the purpose of adjusting matters, and doing away with many of the corrupt practices of the German clergy. The means they had of obtaining money for the church and themselves were many, for instance, the numerous forms of taxation, giving benefices, or ecclesiastical livings. The clergy performed no service unless paid for it, as for

baptizing a child, saying masses for a soul, or for confession.

The religious and also the social conditions caused many a peasant uprising. The lower classes were subjected to many hardships by the nobility, being forced to do menial service, and to allow their children to work in the master's household. The nobles hunted over the peasants' fields, thus destroying their crops, and withdrew the water from their mills, besides imposing heavy taxes on them. In fifteen hundred and twenty-five the peasants revolted, and when at last they were subjugated, the vengeance of the nobles on them was terrible, their condition becoming utterly wretched.

It was against all these conditions and against the evil practices of the time, that the Reformation writers, who were nearly all satirists, directed their anger. Brant held up to ridicule the evils and vices of the period in his "Ship of Fools." For instance, greed is shown by means of the fool who collects money and household plate, and self-complacency by the fool who sits stirring porridge and looking

into a mirror. Luther formulated his objections to the practices of the time into ninety-five theses, which he nailed to the door of the Wittenberg church. Then in his works, "To the Christian Nobility," and the "Babylonian Captivity," he attacked the fundamental doctrines of the church. Another writer, Johann Fischart, ridiculed customs of the time, such as drinking and gambling, and also satirized the nobility. But Thomas Murner wrote the most biting satire against the clergy, the church, and the practices of the period. He went farther than any other author in holding up to ridicule vices and follies, and in satirizing even his own order of monks, hoping that by so doing he could lead people to see the existing wrongs and to remedy them. It mattered not to him that he gradually lost all his friends by writing against them, for he thought he was rendering his country a service, and that was of more importance to him than all his friends.

Attention was first called to Murner by his attack on Wimpfeling's "Germania," to which he opposed a "Germania nova," in fifteen hundred and two. Wimpfeling

claimed Alsace on historic and linguistic grounds for Germany, while Murner claimed the province for France. A little later he became involved in a battle of words between the Franciscans and Dominicans over the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which he defended in the warmest manner. His enemies called him Murr-narr, or the snarling fool, which name clung to him the rest of his life. But neither in the "Germania nova," nor in his translations of "Vergilu dryzehen Aeneadischen Buecher," in fifteen hundred and fifteen, did Murner avail himself of the opportunity of being satirical, though it was in satire that he excelled.

Murner was influenced in his earliest satires, "Die Narrenbeschwoerung," and "Die Schelmenzunft" by Sebastian Brant and Geiler von Kaisersberg. Geiler, an Alsatian preacher, had turned Brant's satire, "The Ship of Fools," to account in the pulpit, and Murner followed his example and delivered homilies on fools, and later worked the matter into verse and published the "Muster of Fools" and "The Guild of Rogues" in fifteen hundred and twelve. Robertson says, "The

similarity of these poems to Brant's "Narrenschiff" is not to be overlooked; and Murner's method is, in its general lines, identical with Brant's. But while the latter never forgot that he was a scholar, Murner struck the coarsest popular note; Brant had some sense of literary dignity; Murner had none. On the other hand, Murner's verses came more spontaneously; his thrusts never missed their mark, and left wounds behind them that rankled.⁷ In his "Narrenbeschwörung," he opposes folly and vice. He censures the clergy as well as the lawyers, doctors, princes, and the nobility, with great bitterness. In this work he is the conjuror, who has learned how to drive out the multifarious fools that are found in the bodies of men. The idea of the whole book is contained in this sentence: "A fool, detained in the bath-tub, is conjured by a monk, and the demons escape in the form of little fools."⁸ Murner didn't spare the estates of the realm as Brant had done, on account of their authority or power, but all had to

⁷ Robertson--"History of German Literature."

⁸ Chap. III, Page 177.

Balke--Intro. to "Beschwörung."

take their turn, the robber-knights, the princes, even the Emperor and the Pope, although Murner had great respect for the Emperor. But he was most violent against the clergy, whom he attacked in the most biting manner for their avarice, their ignorance, gluttony, indolence, frivolity and luxuriousness. The form of the *Beschwoerung* is not carried out. Murner goes from one subject to another, and the different parts of the work are only bound together by the general idea, which is to depict the corruptness of the customs or practices of the time.

In the "*Schelmzunft*," Murner represents himself as the chosen scribe of the guild, whose duty it is to describe the membership faithfully, and to show each rogue his proper place in the society. So all who have misused the word "*Schelmerei*" in order to deceive the world, pass by the scribe. The "*Schelmzunft*" is directed against the life or practices of the clergy, and it particularly censures their love of the chase. "*Der Teufel ist Abt geworden*," Murner cries out, "sind

das geistlich praelatische Gebaerden, wenn die Bischoefe Jaeger werden und die Hunde die Mette singen?" This work is really an imitation of his own "Narrenbeschwoerung." Murner ventures here to raise his voice in protest against the conditions of the church. He ridicules the use of the Latin language in the divine service; in another place he finds fault with the rudeness of the clergy of his time, the bringing of the most absurd things, yes, even town gossip to the pulpit. He says:

"Der prediger het ein bose zung;
 Der mir fuerhalten sol die gschrift,
 Was leib und sele und ere antrift,
 So sagt er mir ein fassnachtand.
 Und all nuw mer im deutschen land." ⁹ and

further on in the same section:

"Ich wolt mein evangelium leren,
 So muss ich disen trippel hoeren,
 Wie si einander richtent uss
 Als hippen buben vor dem huss,
 Je einer heisst den andren liegen,
⁹
 Murner's Werke-Vol. I, Page 12, 11.116-120.

Fur gottlich worter thunt si kriegen
 Uf der Canzel, an gotts statt."¹⁰

He devotes one whole division to the high clergy who forget their office and think only of worldly pleasures. For the most part his satire is directed against the follies, rudeness, and vice in every day life, against the bullies, the boasters, liars, swaggerers, against the disorderly students, the lazy servants, the slanderers, and evil gossipers. In his section on the Eisenfresser Murner says:

"Wen si redlich kriegsleut weren,
 Du hortest si nit also schweren.
 Ir kriegen ist als wider gott,
 Und uss den heiligen treiben spott,
 Martren, fluchen, schweren, schelten,
 Du suchst si aber beten selten."^{11.}

In Murner's next work, "Die Geuchmat," he expends all his bitterness upon the "fool of love;" he ridicules the servant and lover of women, that is,

¹⁰
 Murner's Werke-Vol. I, Page 12 11.116-120.

¹¹
 Murner's Werke, Vol.I, Page 16, 11.253-258.

"Die Gaeuche." Thomas says, "In the 'Meadow of Fools' Murner apoligises for his jocosity, on the general ground that jest is good in the intervals of serious striving. Dame Chastity appears and complains that there is no longer a place for her on earth; she has returned to Mary in heaven, and Dame Venus has the world to herself. Then follows a muster of the fools who have been beguiled by woman's frivolity and sensuality.¹²"

Among the fools are Solomon, Alexander, Aristotle, Paris, David, Samson, and Virgil, who had all bowed to Venus' power and become fools. Venus lets a chancellor read statutes to the assembled fools, and by means of these statutes the place of each fool is determined. According to the sixth article each fool should be obedient to his wife, whether she tells him to cry, laugh, dance, sleep, etc. The other articles are similar in their commands to the fools, and after the statutes are read, each fool takes an oath to remain true to the articles and not to believe the vices for which the women are reproached. In the

¹²

Thomas- "German Literature"- Chap.III, Page 151.

following divisions, the means are specified by which the women would be able to capture the fools. Here the author shows the life and activities of the fools and so presents the customs of his time. The fools are lured in the following manner:

"Das houpt, die hendt, die fuess, die bruest
 Und alles, das an wyben ist,
 Die kleyder, mentel, roeck und schuh,
 Eren hembder, beltz darzu,
 Es guckt und locket alles sammen,
 Und wellens dennoch han kein namen.
 Ettlichen lockendt sy mit pfiffen,
 Dem andren guckend sy mit griffen,
 Dem drytten mit eym facillet,
 Den andren sy gelocket het
 Mit wyssen schuhen, whssen beynen,
 Dem mit lachen, dem mit weynen,
 Dem mit ringlin, kreutzen, meyen." 13.

Venus, a little later, again comes forth and imparts
 "doctrine and admonition to all of the feminine sex."

13.

Balke-Intro. to Works.

A little later in the work Murner gives more characteristics of fools, and then he suddenly drops the fools' cap and becomes a severe preacher of penitence:

"Darumb das ist myn hoechster radt:

Wer geuchery getriben hat,
 Das er by zyten dar von standt,
 Ee das er gott fall in seyn hand.
 Lichtlich bezalt er, wyl er lebt,
 Doch wenn er vor gotts urteil schwebt,
 So gadt es nit so lichtlich zu:
 Fuer ein ganz nympt man ein ku.
 Bezalt die kleine buss auf erden,
 Ee das ir hoher gestraffet werden.
 Lasst den gouch im winkel ston.
 Welt ir ynss ewig leben gon
 Und uech nit groesslich straffen lon.
 Dann Christus sagt, es kum ein zyt,
 Das der, der ietz begraben lyt,
 Werd gottes stym einma~~l~~ erhoeren,
 Und wyder zu dem leben koeren.
 Der frumb jn urstend des leben,

Das gott den frummen dort will geben;
 So wurdt der boess in urteil kummen
 Und gar kein deyl han mit den frummen
 Er wurdt ouch mangeln gottes genad,
 Das er uf erd gegucket hat;
 Darumb betracht durch gott das end,
 Das uech nit gottes urteil schend."^{14.}

This would have made a good closing point for the whole
 work, but Murner had to fall back into his satiric tone
 again, and as chancellor he announced the privileges
 of the guild. In the rhymed "conclusion of the Geuch-
 mat," Murner again becomes serious and says:

"Wer do gloubt, das sey ein hell,
 So nen man suenden, wie man well,
 Geuchery oder narren thandt;
 Ir yeder syne straff drumb fandt."^{15.}

Murner then apologises for having again had recourse
 to ridicule. In spite of all he was reproached for
 having written of worldly and not spiritual things, since

¹⁴ Balke-Intro. to works.

¹⁵ Balke-Intro to Works.

he was a monk. At the end of the work Murner asserts once more that if he has censured women, he has only meant to strike the evil ones, and he dedicates the book to the people of Basel.

In the closest connection with Murner's "Geuchmat" stood his "Die Muelle von Schwyndelsheym und Gredt Muellerin Jarzeit." Here, just as in the "Geuchmat," Murner becomes coarse and vulgar, and his subject, the fool, is the favorite target for satire in the age of the Reformation. In Alsace there was a saying that whoever was boorish must go to Schwingelsheim or Schwindratzheim, near Brumat, in order to be baptized there by the miller. Murner changes Schwingelsheim to Schwyndelsheim, and leads the miller before us just as he gives expression to his surprise that everything runs past his mill. There is a special reason for all passing by, which is, the celebration of the anniversary of the death of Gret Muellerin. Everybody brings rich offerings to her. All whom the miller strikes with his Dippelsack, enter the guild of fools and lead fools' lives. Murner then gives an example of one of the foolish fashions of his

time:

"Sie tragend ietzund hemder an,
 Die niemans genug betzalen kan:
 Es ist mit lutrem golt durchzogen
 Und oben umb den halse gebogen;
 Strafft mich frelich, ists erlogen,
 Das allein das macherlon
 Me dann zwoelf gulden hat gethon." ^{16.}

The poem concludes with an apology which gives the miller's lament over his donkey, which has run away from him, and which he finds highly honored everywhere. He finds him among the merchants, in the council, with the princes, with the Dominicans as their prior, and with the Barfuesser also as prior. Murner says:

"Sie handt im uf gesetzt ein kron
 Und gulden stuck im an gethon,
 So handt die fuersten im gegeben,
 Das er mag fuerstlich fieren leben,
 Und ist ein esel doch dor neben.
 Die burger hands in gesetzt in radt,
 16
 Balke-Intro. to Works.

Der keiser in geadlet hat,
 Und fieret ietz adelichen stadt.
 Zunftmeister, scheffen, oberkeit
 Handt sie meym esel zu geseyt." ¹⁷ and so forth.

These early works show how Murner attacked in a bitter way the worldly life of the clergy and the monks, exposing their weaknesses and immoralities to the people by means of violent satire, in which he expressed his anger against the religious, social, and moral decline. Murner denounced the evils and vices of the clergy, and showed that what he demanded was reform within the church, although he did not wish for reform that attacked the doctrines of the church, and he did not want Germany to be severed from allegiance to Rome. In speaking of these early works Robertson remarks, "These poems are hardly readable today, but, in judging them, allowance must be made for the virile age in which they were written. There is never a smile behind the mask of this misogynous monk; no class of society, not even his own order, escapes the bitterness of his gall. In fact,

¹⁷
 Balke- Intro. to Works.

as a satirist of monkish corruption, Murner was of more assistance to the cause of the Reformation than even Brant had been. But he was of too negative a nature to see good in anything that savored of reform; he wholly mistrusted any change that went beyond the removal of abuses within the church, and his own sympathies were too deeply rooted in the old regime for him to look with favor on the new. Above all, he resented interference on the part of the laity. In the earliest stages of the Reformation he was at one with the Reformers, but they soon seemed to him to outstep reasonable limits; he made almost pathetic appeals to them to leave, if not the saints, at least the Virgin, untouched; he championed the Catholic hierarchy as one might imagine a knight of the fifteenth century championing the sinking world of chivalry. But before long he saw that such appeals were of little avail, and he took up his old weapon again." ¹⁸

There now followed a number of controversial writings, the majority of them being in a way answers to writings by Luther. One was a translation of Luther's

¹⁸

Robertson-"History of German Lit."-Chap.III, Page 178.

"Babylonian Captivity." In a real and decisive way Murner sought to refute Luther's teachings with words from the Holy Scriptures. Later followed "An dem adel tuetscher nation," in which the tone is more violent and sarcastic. In the conclusion he turns to the nobility and asks them to fight for, and defend the faith, and not to believe in Luther's religion, which, although it contains much truth, so mixes truth with falsehood that it cannot be understood by a simple Christian. All these controversial writings are anonymous, but it is easy to guess the author.

The folksong was used a great deal by writers at this time, and Murner also followed others in this by writing, "Ain new Lied von dem undergang des christlichen Glaubens." It begins:

"Nun hoert! ich will euch singen
 In bruder Veiten ton
 Von ungehoerten Dingen
 Die laider iez fuergon:
 Wie dass mit falschen listen
 Dis christenhait zergat;

Wan das die fuersten wisten,
 Sie taten zu der tat.

Der hirt, der ist geschlagen,
 Die schaeplin sein zerstruet,
 Der bapst, der ist verjagen,
 Kain kron er me auf drait,
 Und ist mit kainen worten
 Von Christo ie erstift;
 An hundert tausent orten.
 Ist gossen auss das gift."^{19.}

This poem is written in an earnest tone, and in it Murner seeks a cure for the religious wrongs through a revolution. He sees the terror of the Bundschuh, the indications of a devastating religious war. But Murner had ridiculed too long and too often, and now, when he was in earnest, no one would take him seriously. They satirized him from all sides, and sought in this way to destroy his prestige. He was called Murr-narr,

19

Balke, Intro. to Works.

Kater narr, Murmauw, and many other names which were really puns upon his own name.

In fifteen hundred and twenty-nine Johann Eberlin's work, "Die fuenfzehn Bundtsgenossen," appeared, in which he asked nothing less than a complete emancipation of Germany from Rome. Murner now wrote his best, most malicious, most important satire, "Von dem grossen Lutherischen Narren wie in doctor Murner beschworen hat," which appeared in fifteen hundred and twenty-two. In this work Murner was again master of his art, the writing of satire. Murner attacked the abuses within the church, and represented his fight against the Reformation as a battle of the church with its enemies. This was the best satire that had been written for some time, and no work of the following period can be compared with it, so Kurz thinks. Murner used as a motto for this work the Latin words, "Sicut fecerunt mihi, sic feci eis." Murner, who appears in the work as a monk with the head of a cat, (Murr-narr, Kater Murr), plays the role of fool and fool-exorciser, and lashes his enemies unmercifully. The "great Lutheran

fool" is not Luther himself, but a personification of the followers of Luther.

Murner conjures up the "great Lutheran fool," who is greatly swollen on account of the large number of little fools contained within him. The great fool warns the conjurer against these little fools, but the conjurer pays no attention, and conjures forth a number of the little fools. From the head come the learned fools who explain the Bible according to popular opinion. In his pockets sit the little fools who are covetous of the church possessions, and rail against the Pope with false accusations. From the abdomen come the fifteen confederates. The first confederate warns the "christian Emperer Charles" not to let himself be led astray by evil Christians. Each confederate has some special complaint, for instance, the fifth confederate gives an admonition to the upper classes of the German nation, that they reform the pulpit, and the sixth tells how to reform the begging-monks. The fifteenth confederate gives a warning to all christian-believing people, that they guard themselves against new and harmful teachings. Then .

the foot-soldier comes from France, and he too complains because Luther, the leader, has not named any place for meeting, and gives him no pay when he wants to enlist. He says:

"Das hab ich in Franckreich vernumen,
 Darumb bin ich zu rettung kumen
 Mit grosser eil meim vaterland;
 So ist es nur ein muenches tant.
 Er riefft unss allen hefftig zsamen
 Und gibt der legerstat kein namen;
 Wan ich mich dan gern stellen wolt,
 So gibt der lusig muench kein solt.
 Ich bin vergebens her gerant."^{20.}

Then come the three troopers, the first of whom preaches that whoever will not be a Lutheran should have his name changed ridiculously and contemptuously. He says:

"Erstlich wil ich euch wissen lon,
 Dan es mich zum ersten dunckt gut,
 Wer wider unsere meinung thut,
^{20.}

Murner's Werke-Vol. II, Page 86, ll.1721-1729.

Das wir dem selben also weren,
 Sein namen im spotlich verkeren." 21.

The second trooper asserts that only the Lutherans teach the gospel and the truth, and that the rest of the world is occupied with lies. In this division Murmer becomes quite humorous. He says if anyone asks where a certain teaching is, say it is in the Bible whether it is or not, and then he says the Turks and Pagans are allowed to lie, and if we couldn't lie the whole christian faith would go to pieces, therefore everyone should have the privilege of lying and then Lutheranism would endure. The following passage gives this:

"wan sie dan fragen, wa es stat,
 So sagt, es stand im weissen blat.
 Gon, suchtz in aller tueffel namen!
 Wer luthers ist, muss sich nit schamen,
 Zu riemen sich der heiligen geschriff.
 Und was die narrenkap betrifft,
 Wer wolt doch disen bunt annemen,
 21.

Murner's Werke- Vol. II, Page 90, 11.1844-1848

Wan er zu liegen sich muest schemen?
 Die christlich freiheit tregtz uff ir,
 Zu liegen sei erlaubet dir.
 Ists den tuercken und den heiden
 Erlaubt zu liegen inen beiden,
 Und wer unss armen cristen geroten,
 Ein eristisch luegin gar verboten,
 So wuerd der christlich glaub abgon
 Und niemans me sich teuffen lon.
 Darumb das unsere sacrament
 Beleiben biss der welt zu end,
 So sei zu liegen erlaubet iederman;
 So wuerd die luthery bestan." ²²

The third trooper advises that abusive writings
 be sent out against all who will not become Lutherans.
 The camp followers come next, and they say that who-
 ever will be Lutheran must go about with them with
 lies and rascality.

Luther is now chosen as a leader. His foot-
 soldiers carry a banner with the word "Evangelium"
^{22.}

Murner's Werke-Vol. II, Page 94, ll. 1941-1960.

on it, but their gospel is:

"wie man stiftung wuerffet umb

Und die kloster gar zerbricht,

Dan wir der messen dorffen nicht," ²³ ----

and the cavalry have "Freiheit" on their banner, and
their freedom is:

"Das wir iletzund in freiheit stan

Und dorffen weder beichten, betten,

Dergleich nit me zu kirchen tretten,

Dapffer feiern, wenig fasten,

Am morgen in dem betlin rasten,

Kein messen horen, noch frue uffston!" ²⁴ ----

while the camp followers have a banner bearing the word
"Warheit," and their truth is:

"Wir liegen uss der heiligen geschriff

Und kuennen zilen, das man trifft,

Und sich des niemans hie kan widern,

Und kuennen unsere luegen fideren,

Schlieffen, gletten, und balbieren,

23.

Murner's Werke- Vol. II, Page 104, ll.2177-2179.

24.

Murner's Werke, Vol.II,Page 106, ll.2211-2216.

Die grosten luegen wol glosieren,
 Das niemans solichs mercken kan,
 Darumb wir alzeit war woln han." ^{25.}

Then follow complaints of the common Christians, to the effect that the three banners of Gospel, truth, and freedom, have been stolen by the Lutherans.

Murner now conjures up some more of the little fools found in the "grosse Narr." Under the captaincy of Luther these fools make an assault upon churches and monasteries, and destroy them, gaining as booty offerings that had been brought to the saints. They next make an assault on the castles, but here the only booty they capture is a swine. Their third attack is upon a fortress where Murner is defending the faith. Luther holds intercourse with Murner and demands that he give up the castle, which Murner refuses to do. Luther is made to say of Murner:

"Kuennen wir in nit bezwingen,
 So wuert unss nimmerme gelingen;

²⁵
 Murner's Werke-Vol.II, Page 108, ll.2257-2264.

Er hindert unss in allen dingen.
 Der tueffel hat in lassen werden
 Geboren eben uff der erden
 Zu diser zeit und disem bunt,
 Ach, leg er tulent meil in grunt!

26

Luther returns to his confederates and tells them Murner refuses to give in, but that he will offer Murner his daughter in marriage. (Luther's daughter is a personification of the movements of Zwingli and Calvin.) Luther returns to Murner and tells him that if he will become a Lutheran he will give him his daughter's hand. Murner seems pleased with this offer, and asks Luther to explain Lutheranism to him, which Luther does. When Murner agrees to become a Lutheran, he says he will court Luther's daughter. Murner begins this courtship by serenading her, singing a song which has the refrain, "Sparnoessli," a common insulting word, running through it. The wedding feast is held, then the guests dance. Luther wishes Murner to dance, but Murner says that when he

26

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 145, ll,3326-3332.

has danced at other times, the priests have become angered and reproved him for it. He speaks of having danced the "kochersperger" and "dran ran ran," which would probably be similar to the turkey-trot or grizzly-bear of today. Luther advises Murner not to mind what the priests say because he says all orders are created by the devil. So Murner dances. He says that since everyone is going to hell anyway, it is better to go dancing and leaping than praying upon one's knees.

His words are:

"Es ist so gut ind hell gesprungen,
 Als mit ruetschen drein getrungen." ^{27.}

That evening Murner learns that Luther's daughter is suffering from a loathesome disease, and he turns her out of his house. Luther, who is mortally insulted by this affront, dies without taking the sacraments, and Murner throws his body on a refuse-heap and makes cat-music over it. The "great Lutheran fool" has become so weakened by the extraction of the little fools from his body, that he too dies; that is, the

²⁷

Murner's Werke-Vol.II, Page 176, ll.4240-4241.

Reformation. The "great fool" is buried, and above his grave there is a war over his estate, namely, the fools-cap. Murner himself finally wins, and gains possession of the cap. Murner makes the remark that heaven is the place where all fools go, in these words:

"Darumb ein ieder freiden hab,
 Sein vettern tragen helff zu grab,
 Und sprech mit groser innigkeit;
 Nun geb dir got die ewig freit
 Und wol dir auch den himel gehen,
 Darin die grosten narren leben."^{28.}

The decision as to who shall receive the fools-cap is given in this way, and forms the conclusion to the whole work:

"So ich nun solche kuntschafft hab,
 Die mir den erbfa1 spricht nit ab,
 So erfordert das die billicheit,
 Das man mir die kappen geit,
 Doch setz ich das zu iederman,
 Wer die narrenkap sol han;

28

Murner's Werke-Vol.11,Page 195,11,4715-4720.

Ich hab mein bestes darzu gethan.

Got geb recht, was ein ieder kan!

29

This laughing mood becomes the author best; he himself realizes that his nature is inclined throughout to laughter.

"Von dem grossen Lutherischen Narren" is the most biting of all Murner's satires, and is also the wittiest work. There are many puns to be found in it, this being one of them:

"So ist der babst ein entencrist;

Dan die genss im tuetschen land

Den babst ie nit erwolet hand."

30.

Another pun is to be found in the line,

"Der gross und schentlich priapus" --- the

31

word priapus being a play upon the word primatus, or Primas. Murner in this work appears as an opponent of the Reformation, and he attacks the movement with great violence. Robertson says, "If it had lain in the power of any man to make the Reformation ridiculous, that man was Murner." Parts of the work, however, are

29.

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 198 ll.4789-4796.

30

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 160 ll.3764-3766.

31 Murner's Werke-Vol. II, Page 161,l.3772.

so vulgar and coarse as to be unfit for reading by the modern student, although they probably were considered proper at the time of the appearance of the work. Murner makes use of some of the very vilest of language and descends often to grossness and unscrupulousness such as a modern writer would never think of.

Murner wished for reform within the church but could not brook the thought of a separation of Germany from Rome. He was a learned and loyal Catholic, and thought he could best serve the cause of his church by writing a satire in which he would hold up to ridicule all the vices and follies of the church, and especially of the clergy, against whom he was very bitter. In one division he says of them:

"Ir red, on alle widerwer,
 Sei nichtz dan ewangelisch ler,
 Ir ler sei uss der heiligen geschrifft;
 Wie wol sie under disem gifft
 Suchen, das ein mort betrifft,
 Und sunst uff erden nichtz herfuer ziehen,
 Alle andere leren Christi fliehen,

Allein die bosen reden fieren,

Damit man sol den buntschu schmieren

Und ein fridsam Christlich gemein

Damit uffruerig mecht allein." 32.

It seems to me that Murner is here ridiculing some of the practices of the clergy, as in the next division he speaks against some of the conditions which existed among them in these words:

"Ir ewangelium weisst das uss:

Die geistlicheit von huss zu huss

Sol alle zeit im bettel gon,

Das Christus selbs auch hat gethan.

Man sol dem babst zwo kronen zucken,

Allein mit einer lassen schmucken,-

O starcke biss, hungerige mucken!-

Und gantzlich abthun allen bracht,

Den unsere bischoff haben erdacht,

Ir zinss und gut in nemen al,

Damit sie fueren reichen schal,

Darzu ab thun alle Cardinal.

32.

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 36,11 609-618.

Dem babst auch nemen als da neben,
 Was Constantinus im hat geben;
 Schlosser, stet und auch die bandt
 Sol haben nit der geistlich standt." ^{33.}

This passage is similar to one in Luther's "An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation," wherein he wishes the same changes, that is, doing away with all the splendor of the courts of the bishops, and especially of the court of the Pope, decreasing the number of cardinals, and so forth. One might almost think Murner had taken this passage from Luther.

Further on in the work Murner speaks in an ironical way of fasting, which he thinks should be done away with as being altogether unnecessary. This section gives us another glimpse of the conditions of the period by giving a very vivid description of one of the many customs which were practiced by the people.

"Die fasten muss sein ab gethon,

Ein yssner ochs stuerb daruon.

Solt dan ein fleischig mensch nit sterben

³³

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 39,11.715-730.

Von langem fasten auch verderben?
 Fasten vil beschwerden mit im treit
 Und thut ser we der cristenheit.
 So sein auch vil schwanger buren,
 Die ietz uff ostereyer huren:
 Solt man in den fasten gebieten,
 So mochten sie es doch nit uss brieten."³⁴

The last four lines contain bitter satire, for Murner says, "If one should command the peasant to fast, and he was crouching upon Easter eggs, he couldn't hatch them out," so would probably die of hunger. Murner wants to know why the Pope should be consulted. The wolf doesn't go tell the Pope when he has eaten a sheep or a hen, and why should a wolf have more freedom than mankind? Murner says, "Das kan ich warlich nit verstan."

Murner also complains satirically of the futility of saying masses for the dead. He says if a soul is already in heaven, the saying of masses will not do any good for it has found happiness, and if a soul is

³⁴

Murner's Werke-Vol.II, Page 49, ll. 926-935.

in hell, no number of masses will free it therefrom.
 He wishes to know who has said that God can hear them,
 when he is perhaps a thousand miles away, and so he thinks
 they should do away with the saying of masses for the
 dead, and praying to God. To quote Murner:

"Es muest ein schlechter tueffel sein,

Dem euwer gebet ein seel nem hin.

Sein sie in dem himelreich damit,

Was dorffen sie dan euwer bit?

In der hellen gilt es nit.

Wer hat die cristen das gelort

Das got euwer gebet da oben hort?

Es ist hinuff wol tusent meilen,

Wie kan er horen euwer heilen?

Meinen ir, das er solche oren hab,

Die sich erstrecken bis herab?

So weren kein esel in dem land,

Die groser, lenger oren hand.

Warumb heht er euwer bit?"³⁵

³⁵

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 54,11.1058-1071.

In another satirical passage Murner advises the priests to preach what the people would gladly hear, and does not want them to talk about hell, the devil, and purgatory. He says:

"Man sol nichtz uff der cantzlen leren,
 Dan was man gern wil horen,
 Wie man der reichen gelt und gut
 Bald teilen wol mit freiem mut.
 Hel ab, tuefel ab und fegfeueer ab,
 Das sich der arm man frow darab,
 So er in kirchen gat mit leid,
 Das er wider heruss gang mit freid."³⁶

As to books being written in Latin, Murner thinks it is wrong. According to the eighth confederate, they should be written in German, for then ridicule could be used to better effect, as there were words in the German which could not be expressed in Latin, and which were very fitting for the purpose of ridicule. Then if they were written in German they would be available to more people, for those who could not read

³⁶

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 57,11.1132-1139.

Latin could read their own language.

The following is another ironical passage. Murner does not think it right to have so many saints to worship, but believes it would be better to have some of the gold and silver images made into money to be used by the people. Some of the days set apart for certain saints, were not well placed, for instance, one which should come in winter was placed in summer to avoid the cold days. Murner tells this in the following:

"Etlich heiligen tag ich findt,
 Die auch nit wol gesetzt sindt
 Mit namen, die im winter kumen;
 Die haben wir in sumer genumen,
 Das wir nit in der grossen kelten
 Miesten ir in frost entgelten.
 Die nothelffer wil ich mit verwerffen,
 Der wir in noten wol bedorffen;
 Ich mein, die man hat machen lon
 Mit golt und silber zu kirchen ston;
 Sie thun unss cristen wol beistant,
 Ja wan wir sie vermuentzet hant.

Derselben dorffen wir alle gar

Im seckel bass, dan uff dem altar.

Sie sein gar gut in eren zu halten,

Wan glueck und unfalt wolten spalten,

Da wir ein griff nach in theten,

Uff das wir muentz und guldin hetten."³⁷

Murner warns against the new teachings that arise in these words:

"Vil nuerver ler sein effgestanden

In den stetten und uff den landen,

Darumb ich her zu euch bin kumen,

Da ich doch warnt alle frumen

Und euch ernstlich wolt verbieten,

Das ir euch vor denselben hieten."³⁸

"Bleiben steiff uff euwerm ewangelium,

Was nit darin stat, geben nichtz darumb.

Ir sollen kein geschrifften halten mer

37

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 81,11.1621-1638

38

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 82,11.1651-1656.

Dan nur ewangelische ler.
 Was nit darin geschriben stat,
 Das selbig als kein glauben hat.
 Ich warn euch hie mit hoher bit,
 Brieff und sigel glauben nit,
 Was in der kaufluet buecher ist,
 Demselben allem an wahrheit brist;
 Lassen solcho fuer alle tueffel stan!
 Allein die geschrifften lobesan,
 Die unss die ewangelisten schrieben,
 Die sollen in ir krafft bleihem,
 Doch nur allein an solchem ort,
 Damit wir stifften einen mort."³⁹

This last part is ironical, and I understand it to refer to the teachings of Luther, which were gaining ground rapidly at this time, about fifteen hundred and twenty-two. Murner was greatly opposed to Lutheranism, being a loyal Catholic, consequently he spoke against the new teachings and ideas which were arising, and warned people to remain true to the old gospel. He was

³⁹ Murner's Werks-Vol.II, Page 84, ll 1685-1700;

very severe towards Luther and all who looked with favor upon Luther's teachings, so he took every opportunity for ridiculing them and as a result we have one entire section in "der grosse Narr" upon this subject.

Another custom which Murner criticized ironically, was the paying of sums of money to the clergy for whatever they did, whether it was baptizing a child, or saying a mass. The clergy would do nothing without being paid for their services. Murner says all such demands should be abolished, as well as toll on the Rhein, the giving of money in place of service as attendant, and so forth. Quoting Murner once more!

"Die zol, die muesen ab am rein
 Und al beschwerden von dem wein,
 So wuert es leichtlich darzu kumen,
 Ein Mass wuert umb ein haller genumen,
 Scharzgelt, betgelt, stueer und wacht,
 Fronen, zinsen, als verlacht,
 Und sol kein buer kein guelt me geben
 Den pfaffen, herren; merken eben;
 Dan cristus hat unss al gefreit,

Das niemand guelt dem andern geit."^{40.}

"Sol ich mein kind nur teuffen lon,
 So ist es umb das gelt gethon.
 Beicht ich dan, so heischt man gelt;
 Die messen mir auch nit gefelt,
 Firmen, salben, was das ist,
 Ist alles uff den seckel gerist.
 Nichtz anders, dan der pfaffen list.
 Wan die sacrament nit weren,
 So dorfften sie kein gelt begeren.
 Sant Anthoni heische ein suw;
 Gib du mir und mangel du.
 Es ist als nichtz der heiligen bit,
 Sie helffen doch on gelt unss nit.
 Das fegfeueer wollen wir verwerfen,
 So weiss ich, das wir nim bedorffen
 Fuer unserer elter selen bitten;
 Sie hon doch nichtz darin erlitten."⁴¹

^{40.}

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 137,11.3091-3100.

⁴¹

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 139,11.3159-3175.

Towards the end of the work there is a rather long-drawn out, and yet humorous play upon Murner's name, which is as follows:

"Darumb, ir katzen, kumpt her springen,
 Wir wöllen hie ein leibfal singen,
 Das allen katzen rum wuert bringen.
 Wan ich anfah, so singt mir noch,
 Und lügen, singen nit zu hoch;
 Halten guten melodey,
 Das es nit werd ein katzen geschrey.
 Kumpt ir, katzen, schwartz und grauw,
 Und singen mauw und aber mauw.
 Mauw, mauw singen har
 Der murmauw und der murnar,
 Meuwe, meuwe der tenor,
 Mauw und mauw der bass fuerwor.
 Wan ich nit eine katze wer,
 wie kuent ich also mauwen her?
 Ich kan ietzunder erst erkennen,
 Warumb sie mich den murmauw nennen,
 Das ich kan also mauwen schon,

Mein schweher hie besingen lon,
 Mit katzen im das leibfal begon."⁴²

"Von dem grossen Lutherischen Narren" is accepted by all critics as Murner's best work, but they all admit that sections of it are written in the most unrefined language possible. It is necessary to omit certain parts of it today when reading it. But the work as a whole is very successful as a satire, showing the practices of the clergy, the conditions of the time, and giving a very clear idea of Murner's opinions. After reading it, we can plainly see that he was trying to defend his own religion, Catholicism, against the new Lutheranism, and that, although he wished for many changes within the church, yet he did not want the fundamental doctrines to be changed. He was very much against the new form of religion and warned the Christian people against accepting it. In the course of his tirade against the corruption of the clergy he made some violent attacks upon men of his time, giving them fictitious names, and since we have no way of discovering

⁴²

Murner's Werke-Vol.II,Page 186,11 4479-4498,

to whom he was referring, we lose the force of much of his satire. However, it is always pretty clear when he means Luther, and this is the most important thing for us, because it was Luther against whom Murner directed this satire. To this end he made Luther the captain of the fools in their attacks upon the monasteries, castles, and fortresses, even leading them to an attack upon (Murner) himself.

Murner imitates Eberlin in part of this work by bringing in the fifteen confederates, as Eberlin had written a work called "Die fuenfzehn Bundtsgenossen," and from this work Murner got the idea of having the confederates contained within the "great fool." He conjures up the "great fool" and then the little fools, himself playing the part of fool-exorciser, the same as he did in his own "Narrenbeschwoerung." There are passages where the similarity of the two works is quite plainly seen.

In speaking of "der grosse Lutherische Narr" Balke says, "Uniform in idea, of almost dramatic suspense in structure, skilled in language, full of wit and

sarcasm, which rises to biting derision, Murner presents in this poem not only his best work, but the most ingenious and most intellectual accusation against the Reformation, with which no other satire of the period can compare."

This is a fine criticism of the work, for it is indeed a great satire, and is, as Balke says, full of witty remarks combined with the very bitterest of sarcasm. We can hardly understand today just why Murner should be so terribly bitter against his brother clergymen, but the conditions of the times have changed so greatly, and our ideas have advanced so far in the last few centuries, that it is almost impossible for us to put ourselves into Murner's place and see things as he did. Of course we can read and study the history of the period and gain an accurate idea of the conditions, but how different that is to being there at the time and being under the influence of those conditions! What would our ideas have been then, and what are they now? We should not judge Murner too harshly for what he has written, because we cannot put ourselves in his position and feel as he did. He probably had cause for writing

as he did, and I have no doubt that he had. It is very evident that he considered it his duty to expose the gross depravity and corruption of the clergy, also to ridicule certain practices in the church, in the hope that they might be bettered. And in warning against Lutheranism he hoped to strengthen the Catholic faith. If there were any chance of accomplishing an end such as this, who would not have written just as Murner did? He felt that he was fully justified in holding up to ridicule the clergy, and in expending his energy in satirizing all the evil practices in their lives, and as far as we can judge him, he was right.

The poem progresses epically, in that it is similar to an epic in celebrating the achievements of a hero, in this case Luther. To be sure, "der grosse Narr" is not a pure epic, but it has something in common with one. It is a lengthy work, the verse is often dignified, and to a certain extent it celebrates the deeds of a hero. However, I should not call Murner's work a real epic, for its purpose is not to celebrate the worthy deeds of a hero, but to satirize the clergy

and the church, and to express opposition to the Reformation. It is also an allegory, for Murner personifies the followers of Luther as the "great fool," the movements of Zwingli and Calvin as Luther's daughter, and the little fools all represent different elements of Lutheranism. Although it contains some very vile passages, "Der grosse Narr" is the best work of Murner to read in order to get a clear conception of his style and to thoroughly understand his satire. Scorn and sarcasm seem to have been rooted deeply within Murner's nature. He satirized all alike, friend and foe, and so everyone turned against him, until at the time of his death, which occurred in Oberehnheim in the year fifteen hundred and thirty-seven, his friends had become his enemies, and he remained alone, the greatest satirist of the Reformation period.