

come and fetch him; swore that his only wish was to be executed and damned and threatened to seize the first priest he could by the throat if he must, to get his hands on Nicolo in hell. When this was reported to the Pope he ordered that he be executed without absolution; he went without a priest and in silence, in the Piazza del Popolo, he was strung up.

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Pope & Gov't.

SAINT CECILIA OR THE POWER OF MUSIC

(A Legend)

Around the end of the sixteenth century, when the image-breakers were raging in the Netherlands, three brothers, young men studying in Wittenberg, and a fourth, a predicant in Antwerp, met in Aachen. They were there to claim an inheritance left them by an old uncle, whom none of them had known; and having nobody in the place who might have accommodated them they put up at an inn. Some days later, days which they spent listening to the predicant's account of the remarkable scenes occurring in the Netherlands, it happened that the convent of Saint Cecilia,* situated at that time outside the walls, was to celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi in a grand way; and the four brothers, fired up by youth and fervour and the Dutch example, resolved that the city of Aachen too should be given the spectacle of a bout of image-breaking. The predicant,* who had led such enterprises more than once already, gathered together, on the evening before, a number of young students and sons of tradespeople, all adherents of the new doctrine, and they passed the night at the inn, eating and drinking and cursing the papists; and when daylight had risen over the towers of the city they armed themselves with axes and with all manner of implements of destruction, to begin their violent work. Gleefully they agreed on a signal at which the smashing of the windows bright with stories from the bible would commence; and sure that among the townsfolk there would be much support they proceeded, in the determination to leave not one stone standing on another, into the church as the bells began to ring. The Abbess, warned at daybreak by a friend of the danger the convent was in, sent in vain on several occasions to the imperial officer commanding in the town for soldiers to protect the building. The officer, himself an enemy of the papists and as such, covertly at least, well disposed towards the new doctrine, suited his own position by assuring her that she was imagining things, that not the faintest semblance of any danger

threatened her convent; and refused her the guard. Meanwhile the hour had come at which the ceremonies were to begin, and the nuns, with prayers, in fear and in a pitiable anticipation of the things that were said to be going to occur, prepared themselves for mass. Their only protector was the advocate of the place, a man of seventy, who took up his stance at the church door with a few armed stablemen. In the convents it is, as is well known, the nuns themselves who, skilled in the playing of every sort of instrument, perform their own music; and often with a precision, an understanding and a sensibility which, perhaps because of the femaleness of this mysterious art, one misses in orchestras of men. Now it so happened, to make their predicament doubly distressing, that the director of music, Sister Antonia, who was the usual conductor of the orchestra, had a few days earlier fallen gravely ill of a nervous fever;* with the result that the convent, besides the four blasphemous brothers, already noticed in their cloaks against the pillars of the church, had also over the performance of a fitting music a very keen anxiety. The Abbess, who on the evening of the previous day had ordered that they perform an ancient mass, by an unknown Italian master, with which the choir and orchestra had often, because of an especial holiness and splendour in its composition, already been notably successful, sent down again, insisting on her wishes more than ever, to Sister Antonia, to ask after her health; but the nun who did this errand returned with the news that the sister was lying there quite unconscious and that it was wholly unthinkable that she should direct the intended music. Meanwhile in the church, into which more than a hundred miscreants of all ages and classes, armed with axes and crowbars, had found their way, alarming scenes had already taken place. Some of the stablemen, standing at the doors, had been subjected to very indecent teasing and against the nuns, who were to be seen from time to time, singly, at their religious duties, in the nave or the aisles, things of a most insolent and shameless nature had been uttered; so that the advocate came to the sacristy and begged the Abbess on his knees to halt the ceremony and seek the protection of the commandant in town. But the Abbess was not to be moved, and insisted that the Feast in the deity's honour must be celebrated. She reminded the advocate that it was his duty to protect, with his life if necessary, the mass and the solemn proceedings that were to be held in the church; and, the hour striking precisely then, she ordered the nuns who were around her in fear and trembling to take an oratorio, no matter which nor of what worth it might be, and by performing it to make a start at once.

The nuns, in the organ gallery, were preparing to do so; the score of a

work they had often performed was being distributed; violins, oboes and contrabasses were being checked and tuned; when suddenly Sister Antonia, fit and well, a little pale in the face, appeared at the top of the steps. She was carrying the score of that ancient Italian mass, on whose performance the Abbess had been so insistent, under her arm. To the nuns' astonished question where had she come from and how was it she had recovered so suddenly, she replied: 'No matter, friends, no matter'; distributed the score she was carrying and sat down herself, with a burning enthusiasm, at the organ to take over the direction of the wonderful work. Thereupon it was as if the comfort of heaven miraculously entered the hearts of those pious women; at once they stood in their places with their instruments; the anxiety they felt itself contributed to a conducting of their souls, as though on wings, through every heaven of harmony; the oratorio was performed with all possible musical splendour; not a breath stirred during the whole rendition in any of the pews or aisles; especially during the *salve regina* and even more so during the *gloria in excelsis* it was as if all those congregated in the church were dead; with the result that despite the four godforsaken brothers and their supporters not even the dust on the paving stones was wafted away, and the convent survived until the end of the Thirty Years War when, by an article in the Treaty of Westphalia,* it suffered dissolution after all.

Six years later, long after this event had been forgotten, the mother of the four young men arrived from The Hague and instituted, on the unhappy grounds that her sons had completely disappeared, judicial enquiries with the authorities in Aachen as to what road they might have taken from there. The last anyone in the Netherlands, where in fact they belonged, had heard of them was, she reported, a letter written before that period of six years, on the evening before a feast of Corpus Christi, by the predicant to his friend, a schoolteacher in Antwerp, in which, with great good humour, or rather unbridledness, he gave, on four closely written sides, prior notice of a planned action against the convent of Saint Cecilia, which the mother, however, was not prepared to be more particular about. After various unsuccessful efforts to discover the whereabouts of the persons whom the distressed woman was seeking it finally came to mind that for a period of years roughly matching that in the statement four young people, whose country and origins were unknown, had been inmates of the city's madhouse, founded, at the solicitous instigation of the Emperor, only recently. But since they were suffering from the abnormal development of a religious idea, and their behaviour, as the court dimly remembered having heard,

was of an exceedingly morbid and melancholic kind, this was so unlike the brothers' character, which unhappily their mother knew all too well, that she could not give much credence to the suggestion, especially since it almost seemed to be the case that the persons concerned were Catholics. None the less, being strangely affected by various items in the description of them, she did one day, accompanied by a servant of the court, make her way to the madhouse and asked the overseers to be so kind as to give her access to and a chance to observe the four unhappy and deranged individuals in their custody. But beyond all words was the poor woman's horror when at the first glance as she came through the door she recognized her sons. They were sitting in long black gowns around a table on which stood a crucifix and they seemed, leaning forward in silence with folded hands, to be adoring it. When the woman, bereft of all her strength and sinking into a chair, asked what the men were doing the overseers answered: quite simply, they were engaged in the glorification of the Saviour, believing themselves, so they said, better able than others to perceive in him the true Son of the one and only God. The overseers added that the youths had lived this ghostly life for six years now; that they slept very little and took very little food; that not a sound passed their lips; except that at the hour of midnight they would rise from their seats and then, with voices that threatened to shatter the windows of the house, intone the *gloria in excelsis*. The overseers concluded by assuring her that with all this the young men were physically in perfect health; that there was undeniably a certain albeit very solemn and ceremonious cheerfulness in their bearing; that they, if anyone called them mad, would shrug their shoulders pityingly; and that they had more than once declared: that if the good citizens of Aachen knew what they knew they would lay aside their affairs and would, as the brothers did, gather around the crucifix of the Lord and sing the *gloria*.

The woman, not able to bear the grisly spectacle of these unfortunates and soon, unsteady in her limbs, asking to be taken home, went on the morning of the following day, for some enlightenment as to the cause of this monstrous occurrence, to one Veit Gotthelf, a cloth merchant well known in the town; for this man was mentioned in the predicant's letter and had been, as that letter revealed, a more than willing party to the projected destruction of the convent of Saint Cecilia on the day of the Feast of Corpus Christi. Veit Gotthelf, the cloth merchant, who had in the intervening time married, fathered several children and taken over his own father's considerable trade, received the woman with great kindness; and when he learned what her business with him was he

locked the door and, having obliged her to sit down, he spoke as follows: 'My dear lady, I was six years ago a close associate of your sons. So long as it is not your intention to involve me in any proceedings on that count, then I do candidly and without reserve admit to you that we did indeed have the intention referred to in the letter. What caused our action, planned with great exactness, with a truly fiendish cleverness, to fail, is beyond my comprehension. Heaven itself seems to have taken the godly women's house into its own holy protection. For I must tell you that your sons, by way of leading into their more drastic interventions, had in their wantonness done things to disrupt the service once or twice already; more than a hundred miscreants from within our, in those days, errant city were there with axes and wreaths of pitch and only waiting for the signal, which the predicant was to give, to raze the church to the ground. However, at the onset of the music your sons suddenly in one simultaneous movement and in a manner very striking to us removed their hats; then, seeming deeply and inexpressibly moved, they bowed their faces into their hands and the predicant, after a momentous pause, suddenly turned and in a loud and terrible voice called to us all that we should likewise bare our heads. In vain did some companions with whispers and by boldly nudging at him with their elbows urge him to give the signal for the image-breaking to begin; the predicant, instead of answering, fell with his arms crossed on his breast to his knees and in a murmur, together with his brothers, pressing his forehead fervently into the dust, repeated one after another all the prayers which shortly before he had been ridiculing. Confused in their deepest hearts by this spectacle, the mob of pitiable fanatics, robbed of their ring-leaders, stood there undecided and inactive until the oratorio, coming down upon them with wonderful fullness from the gallery, was concluded; and since on the orders of the commandant at precisely that moment several arrests were made and certain malefactors who had indulged in disorderly acts were taken up by the watch and led away, all the wretched gang could do was remove themselves from the house of God with all possible speed under the protection of the congregation then dispersing. That evening, having several times enquired in vain at the inn after your sons, who had not returned, I went out terribly disquieted with a few friends to the convent again and asked the doorkeepers, who had given assistance to the imperial watch, if they knew where they were. My dear lady, how shall I describe to you my horror when I saw those four men still, as they had been, lying with clasped hands, kissing the floor with breast and brow, as though they were turned to stone, in passionate fervour stretched out flat before the

altar! In vain did the advocate, arriving at that very moment, tug at their sleeves, shake them, and urge them to leave the church in which by now it was quite dark and no other human being present; like dreamers, half getting to their feet, they never heeded him, until he had his men lift them by the arms and lead them out through the great door and there, finally, although with sighs and frequently, in a heartrending way, turning to look back at the great church which shone behind us splendidly in the sunlight, they followed us into town. Gently, kindly, we asked again and again, the friends and I, as we returned, what in the world, what terrible thing capable of thus reversing their innermost being, had happened to them; they pressed our hands, gazing at us with affection; cast down their eyes in a deep thought and from time to time, oh with an expression that still breaks my heart, wiped away tears. Coming back to their rooms then, they plaited themselves a cross, rich in significance and pleasing to look upon, out of birch twigs and set it down, pressed into a small mound of wax, between two lamps with which the maid appeared, on the big table in the middle of the room, and whilst their friends, whose number was growing by the minute, stood aside wringing their hands and in scattered groups, speechless with grief, were spectators of their silent ghostly doings, they, as if their senses were closed to any other phenomena, went down on their knees around the table and, clasping their hands, prepared to worship. They wanted neither the food brought them by the maid as they had ordered it that morning for the feasting of their friends, nor later, at nightfall, the beds which, as they seemed tired, she put up for them in an adjoining room; and the friends, so as not to excite the indignation of the landlord, whom this performance disconcerted, were obliged to seat themselves at a copiously laden table on one side and to consume the dishes prepared for a numerous company, salting them as they did so with their bitter tears. Then suddenly midnight struck; your four sons, attending for a moment to the muffled sound of the bell, suddenly, all with one movement, rose from their seats; and as we, laying down our napkins, looked across at them in an anxious apprehension of what after this strange and disconcerting start might now ensue, they began, in terrifying and hideous voices, to intone the *gloria in excelsis*. Leopards and wolves sound much the same, I should say, when in the icy wintertime they bellow at the firmament; the pillars of the house, believe me, shuddered and the windows, smitten by the invisible breath of their lungs, rattled and, as though being pelted with handfuls of gravel, threatened to shatter. At this grisly occurrence we lost all composure, our hair stood on end, we fled; we dispersed, leaving hats

and coats behind, into the surrounding streets which very soon, instead of with us, were filled with more than a hundred people frightened out of their sleep. The crowd, bursting open the outside door, pressed forward up the stairs into the dining room to seek out the source of that vile and horrendous bellowing which, as from the lips of sinners everlastingly damned, drove up from the deepest depths of the flames of hell to reach God's ears, piteously begging mercy. Finally, at the stroke of one, having heeded neither the anger of the innkeeper nor the deeply troubled cries of the people surrounding them, they closed their mouths; they wiped their foreheads with a cloth, for the sweat was falling in great drops on chin and breast; spread out their cloaks and lay down, to rest for a while from such a work of torment, on the tiled floor. The innkeeper, letting them have their way, as soon as he saw them sleeping made the sign of the cross over them; and glad to be free of the misery for the moment, with the promise that the morning would bring a change for the better he persuaded the throng still present and muttering among themselves, to leave the room. But alas, at the first crowing of the cock those unhappy men rose up and began again, in the presence of the cross on the table, the same barren and ghostly monastic life that only exhaustion had momentarily obliged them to break off. From the innkeeper, whose heart was melted by the pitiable sight of them, they would accept neither exhortation nor any help; they begged him to give a polite refusal to all their friends whose habit it had been to gather regularly in their company on the morning of every day; they wanted nothing of him except bread and water and, if possible, some straw for the night; with the result that the innkeeper, who in the past had made a good deal of money out of their cheerful spirits, now saw himself obliged to report the whole business to the authorities and to beg them to rid his house of these four people, in whom the devil himself must surely be at work. Whereupon, on the orders of the magistrates, they were examined by doctors and, being found mad, were, as you know, given rooms in the madhouse which, through the mercy of the late emperor, for the benefit of unfortunates of this kind, had been established within the walls of our city.' All this was said by the cloth merchant, Veit Gotthelf, and other things too which, believing that for an insight into the inner workings of the matter we have already said enough, we here suppress; and he again requested that, should there be any legal enquiries into this event, the woman would in no way implicate him in them.

Three days later when the mother, shaken in her innermost heart by this account, had, on the arm of a friend, gone out to the convent in the

melancholy intention of, on a walk, the weather being fine, seeing with her own eyes the terrible place itself where God as though with invisible lightnings had destroyed her sons, the women found the great church, because building work was going on just then, blocked at the entrance with planks and through openings in the boards when, with difficulty, they lifted themselves up, all they could see of the inside was the wonderfully luminous rose window at the far end. On a light and intricate scaffolding many hundreds of workmen, singing cheerfully, were busy raising the towers a good third higher and covering their roofs and spires, until then only slated, with a strong bright copper that shone in the rays of the sun. Stormclouds meanwhile, deep black with gilded edges, stood in the sky behind the work of building; the thunderstorm had already spent itself over the region of Aachen and having once or twice more flung its by now feeble lightning in the direction of the church it sank, dissolving into vapour, muttering discontentedly, down in the east. It happened that as the women, from the steps of the convent's extensive living quarters and sunk in a variety of reflections, were contemplating this double spectacle, a nun, passing by, happened to learn who the woman standing there in the doorway was; with the result that the Abbess, who had heard of a letter she was carrying on the subject of the Feast of Corpus Christi, sent the sister down at once and asked the woman from the Netherlands to come up. She then, although for a moment shocked, nevertheless prepared herself, with all proper reverence, to obey the order which had been transmitted to her; and whilst her friend, following the nun's invitation, stepped aside into an antechamber hard by the main entrance, for the Dutch woman, who had to climb a flight of stairs, the double doors of the ornate upper room itself were opened. There she found the Abbess, a noble woman, still and queenly in her appearance, sitting in a chair and resting her feet on a stool that stood on dragon's claws; and at her side, on a lectern, lay a musical score. The Abbess, having ordered that the visitor be given a chair, explained to her that she had already heard of her arrival in the city, through the mayor; and having then, in a kindly way, asked after the condition of her unhappy sons and having urged her, regarding the fate that had befallen them, since nothing could alter it, to be as composed as possible, she expressed a wish to see the letter which the predicant had written to his friend, the schoolteacher in Antwerp. The woman, who had enough experience of the world to realize what might ensue from doing this, was for a moment thrown into uncertainty; but since it was impossible, seeing the Abbess's venerable face, not to trust her unconditionally and quite improper to suppose that

her intention might be to make any public use of the contents, she did not deliberate much longer, but took the letter out of her bosom and gave it to her, fervently kissing that majestic lady's hand. The mother then, whilst the Abbess was reading the letter, glanced at the score which lay carelessly opened on the music stand; and since through Veit Gotthelf's account it had occurred to her that surely the power of the music itself had, on that terrifying day, destroyed and confused the minds of her poor sons, she turned to the sister standing behind her chair and asked timidly: whether this was the musical work which six years ago on the morning of that remarkable Feast of Corpus Christi had been performed in the church. When the young sister answered: yes, she remembered hearing of it and that since then, when not needed, its usual place was in the room of the most reverend Abbess herself, the mother, deeply troubled, rose and, agitated by a variety of thoughts, stood in front of the lectern. She gazed at the strange and magical signs with which, as it seemed, some terrible spirit was mysteriously marking out its own domain, and seemed to feel the earth gape under her when she saw that the score was open, precisely, at the *gloria in excelsis*. It was as if the whole horror of the mysteries of composition which had undone her sons was gathering with a rushing noise about her head; she felt as if by the mere sight of the score she was losing her wits and having then quickly, with a movement of infinite humility and obedience to divine omnipotence, pressed the page to her lips, she resumed her seat. Meanwhile the Abbess had read the letter to the end and, folding it, she said: 'God Himself, on that wondrous day, protected the convent against the sinful pride of your grievously errant sons. What means He employed in doing so may be of no interest to you, as a Protestant; also, you would scarcely comprehend what I could say to you on that subject. For the fact of the matter is this: nobody knows who it was who, in all the urgency of that terrible hour, when the image-breakers were about to fall on us, calmly sitting at the organ directed the work that you see opened there. By a document drawn up the following morning in the presence of our advocate and several other men and deposited in the archives it is attested that Sister Antonia, the only person capable of conducting the work, throughout the whole time of its performance lay in the corner of her cell sick, unconscious, absolutely incapable of moving her limbs; a sister who, being a blood relative, had been charged with her bodily care, did not, throughout the whole morning whilst the Feast of Corpus Christi was being celebrated in the church, move from her bedside. Indeed, Sister Antonia would without any doubt herself have testified to the fact that it was not she who, in so strange and

disconcerting a way, appeared in the organ gallery, had the utter loss of her senses not prevented her from being asked and had she not that very evening, as a result of the nervous fever she lay ill of and which earlier had not seemed to threaten her life, died. Moreover, the Archbishop of Trier, to whom the event was reported, has uttered the only explanation of it; namely, that it was Saint Cecilia herself who performed that at once terrible and glorious miracle; and I have now had from the Pope a missive which confirms this.' And with that she gave back to the woman, promising to make no use of it, the letter which she had only asked to see in order to have more detailed information on what she knew already; and having then enquired whether there was any hope that her sons might recover and whether she could perhaps, with money or some other support, contribute anything towards that end, to which the woman, kissing her skirt and weeping, answered no, she raised a hand in a gesture of kindly farewell and dismissed her.

Here this legend ends. The woman, whose presence in Aachen was entirely useless, went back, leaving a small sum of money with the authorities for the benefit of her poor sons, to The Hague and there, a year later, much affected by what had happened, she returned to the bosom of the Catholic Church; her sons, however, died, at a great age, a cheerful and contented death, having once more, after their habit, sung the *gloria in excelsis*.

THE DUEL

Duke Wilhelm von Breysach who, since his secret union with a countess, Katharina von Heersbruck by name, of the house of Alt-Hünningen, who seemed below him, had lived in enmity with his half-brother Count Jakob Rotbart, was returning home towards the end of the fourteenth century, on the evening before the feast of St Remigius,* from a meeting in Worms with the German Emperor who had, at his request, agreed to legitimize, since none of the children of his marriage had survived, his natural son, Count Philip von Hünningen, born to his wife before their marriage. Looking to the future more cheerfully than at any time throughout his reign he had already reached the park which lay behind his castle: when suddenly, by an arrow loosed from out of the darkness of the trees, his body, hard under the breastbone, was transfixed. Friedrich von Trota, his chamberlain, deeply shocked by this occurrence, conveyed him with the help of some other knights into the castle where in the arms of his distressed wife he barely had the strength to read out the imperial act of legitimation to a meeting of vassals hastily convened by that lady; and when, not without strong opposition, since by law the throne went to his half-brother Jakob Rotbart, the vassals had done his last bidding and, on condition the Emperor would allow it, had recognized Count Philip as heir to the throne, his mother however, since he was a minor, as guardian and regent: Duke Wilhelm laid himself down and died.

The Duchess now without more ado, merely sending a deputation to her brother-in-law Count Jakob Rotbart, to inform him, ascended the throne; and what by several knights of the court, who reckoned to have seen through the latter's secretive nature, had been foretold did indeed, at least to all appearances, come about: shrewdly weighing up the situation Jakob Rotbart swallowed the wrong his brother had done him; at least, he refrained from taking any steps to thwart the Duke's last