

Excerpts from *Der Ring*

Heinrich Wittenwiler's massive poem *Der Ring* (the ring) is a somewhat puzzling piece of literature. Most likely produced in Constance around 1408-10, it tells a complex story of love, adventure, and deceit set in a peasant environment exploited for comedy value, but seems to have a genuine didactic purpose, though one often enough achieved by satirically describing the very opposite of desired conduct. In this, it resembles later Grobianic literature. I will limit myself to translating the parts that are relevant to food and table manners, but would advise anyone to read it in its entirety.

After I finished this translation, it was brought to my attention that an English translation by George Fenwick Jones does exist and is available freely. It is at:

<https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/39770>

The story begins with a tournament to which young villagers show up for the muster:

The fourth was known as junkher Troll, a man as strong as a butter cake (*anchenzoll*)...

The sixth was known by the name *Twerg* (dwarf). He was high-born, on a mountain, and his coat of arms showed three flies in a glass.

The seventh was known as Her Eisengrein, the snorter. He bore on his shield nine spoons in a bowl. The eighth was, I believe, called Count Burkhart with the ganglion cyst (*mit dem überpain*). He had made as his arms two beets (*ruoben*) roasted well.

...

The tenth did a good deal of damage, he was called Jächel Grabinsgaden (roughly: the housebreaker), and by his ancient lineage he bore four cow's milk cheeses on a hurdle (as his arms). The name of the eleventh is also known: He was called Rüepli Lekdenspiss (lick-the-roasting-spit). He was the reeve of his village and his arms were eggs.

(lines 118-154)

The tourney devolves into a brawl

At the same time, the heroes readied for the tourney. They ate (*frassen*) half a cow and then sat on their donkeys with maces of straw. Only Neithart's was different, it was made from iron and well covered in straw, which caused much suffering.

...

Thus they rode onto the field after ancient custom, with Gunterfain the piper whose belly was rarely empty of barley and roots...

(1042-1059)

When Triefnas (lit: drip-nose) learned his comrades had come, he gained fresh courage and mocked his opponents: "I am sitting soft and nicely, there is no need to rescue me. Bring me cheese and bread with it, for I am close to starvation!" He was given bread straightaway, and Triefnas tore off a piece and stuffed it down his throat entire. "How good, how healthy!" he exclaimed.

(1122-1131)

Later on, Bertschi Triefnas, the hero of the piece, suffers an accident

Triefnas was up on the roof and Fritz sat by the fire with his children eating roots (*ruoben*). Bertschi wanted to peep and thrust his head through a hole, but because he was heavier than a log, he had to fall into the fire in full view of the children and the father like the terrible devil. Cauldron and hook fell along with Bertschi, to his suffering.

(1488-1499)

He then engages in a dalliance with a peasant maiden whom he subsequently marries:

But lady Mätzel (the damsel of the piece) had had her share, however horny she had been earlier. She complained of pain in her sides, belly, and stomach (*in der seiten... in dem pauch und in dem magen*), liquid came from her mouth, her limbs went rotten and she could barely move. She had to be supported under her arms. She was greatly bored, harsh vinegar was her drink, sorrel and sour apples instead of rice with almond milk (*mandelris*) were her food. She lost her proper complexion, her nipples were swollen and had gone all black. In sum, it went so badly with her that a physician concluded the maiden was with child.

(2185-2202)

Bertschi's friends give him advice on married life:

“You say, if a man wishes to take a wife, he must have money in his pouch. Hear how I sing differently: Tell me, how did Adam do who never gained as penny and lived nine hundred years and more with honour in the Old Testament? What is a bed good for? Do you not see what the Hungarian does who never saw a down pillow and yet sleeps comfortable? If you would have a second garment, look at the Spanish woman whose dress is a linen sheet knotted at the shoulders. With this she herds cows and walks about though she spins and carries a baby in a cradle. Women's adornment, what is that? It is her virtue that suits any woman far better than a body decorated with pearls. Household goods are a fine thing: Do as the mercenary does who finds enough kitchen gear (*Küchingrät*) to serve him for a shilling. When he cannot have wine, he refreshes himself with water like the Prussians who do not know of the vine. And who needs meat: See how the preacher has red cheeks and a chubby face though he eats no oxmeat. You ask for fish? You are not smart. Know that this is lordly fare (*ein herren speis*). He who has no wine and pepper should forgo all fish. Home and farm are a luxury, for hear how the Lombard (i.e. moneylender) does who lives in another's house and enjoys himself with his money day and night three times as much as the one who built the house.

Further you say “Where are the servants and maids?”. I believe you are mad. Who cannot maintain a servant should serve himself, that is the custom. How often must one serve another today and do with gaping mouth as the other tells him! Livestock, you say, is useful? Yes, if it didn't eat day and night and did not suffer from illness and the wolf upon the heath. Acres and pastures would be good if God would protect them safely from hail, another man's sickle, and of bird swarms. We all need bread, praised be He who gave it to us! But you do not need much of it if you live by the commands of moderation. By the teachings of the old masters, nobody must suffer want who makes do throughout his life with what his nature demands.”

(2873-2936)

She responded to him rightaway: “He shall allow no light by the bed! He can do well without it when he lies where one should sleep. And when he sees nothing, her uncouth form does not matter. Once you touch it, the skin of all women is alike, no matter how you look at it. It is like with the chickens which have many kinds of feathers, but will show one and the same flesh when they come to the table roasted hot. ...”

(3007-3020)

If my own child cries, I think it is singing so much do I love its voice. Though it is bad for my neighbour who cannot sleep through it. If I have eggs in the home, I will grow them into big chickens who will seem fatter to me than the miller's fattened pig (*des müllners mesteswein*). Nuts and bread on my own table taste better than all the fish the margrave of Ferrara could give me if I were with him. But if you were to say a man could keep house without a woman, I do not think that this will work in the long run. It lacks all foundation. The base (*gruntfest*) is a virtuous woman (*bider weib*) who maintains the household in many ways with her own body, with cooking and with having children (*kindermachen*). If she falls ill and becomes weak, she will recover, and that is a joy.

(3369-3390)

Bertschi answered rightaway: "I can do as much as four men; plough, thresh, and sow, hoe, cut, and mow, all that belongs to (making) bread I know well and do gladly."

(3830-3835)

Straubel answered like a knave: "Nobody likes to ride himself into hell" he said "You know I am a man who can only earn his living from unhealthy, stricken and wounded people! That is why I will not tell you how to stay healthy. My art and my pharmacy would otherwise be ruined."

Bertschi said: "You are a villain who only looks to his pennies. See, here you have three old *haller* (silver coins), now tell me fully what it is like."

Then the physician reconsidered and began his teachings thus: "No medicine was ever as good as this: Guard against too little and too much. Health demands moderation. Especially be keen to have good, clean air, neither too hot nor too cold. If the wind is too harsh, you need many silken, linen or cotton garments that are tightly woven (*dick*) and well made. Air is also good for sleeping people, that is why it is wrong to sleep where no air can reach you. But if you live at ground level and the earth is moist, guard yourself in winter with a bright fire that gives you heat. In summer, open the door so the moisture may escape and air enter. The chamber must also be sufficiently strewn with herbs that must not be mossy or waterlogged."

“The second that is good for health depends on the work that a person does. Thus know, the wise man speaks: A man who does little work must have light foods. But we advise those who move about much and work hard also must eat substantially (*grosseu speis er haben wil*). Know that it is better for you if you walk before eating than if you sit, but do it without tiring yourself out. This frees you from superfluous matter. After eating, you may stand or walk about a little. That is always good until the food has settled.”

“The third thing that nature demands is washing and bathing. You shall remember that we distinguish two kinds of bath: the sweating bath (*swaisspad*) and the water bath (*wasserpadd*). Have a sweating bath prepared when you have superfluous matter between the flesh and skin. The water bath, prepared with noble herbs, lukewarm and not too hot, makes you pretty and chubby (*faiss*). Always keep warm while bathing if you value your body. You shall wash your head at most once a week, thus you are acting correctly, but at least once a month without protest, that is the custom. The feet, I believe, should be washed frequently and very thoroughly with lukewarm water. You should always wash on an empty stomach. Thus you have heard the third.”

“Fourth you shall know that food serves you better when you are hungry than at any other time. But do not fill your stomach entirely full! Leave a little empty space in your stomach so the food can be better digested. If you do not wish to rue your meal, you must chew it well and thoroughly. Many courses will cause you suffering, they sap your strength and vigour. But if you will not forgo them, partake of the second dish right after the first, with no pause. Observe the rule in eating that the coarsest comes first, and take the most tender food last, unless it is soft fruit like cherries, figs, or raisins – these must be served first. After the meal, my rule says, harder fruit is served that press down the food. Those are peaches, good pears, and other foods that have the same effect. Cheese after meat and nuts after fish shall be served to us at every table.”

The fifth is that one must drink to quench thirst. Know that I mean proper thirst that affects the healthy after eating only, not before, through the heat in the esophagus. And what manner of drinking should there be? Moderate, not too extensive, white and clear or rosé in summer, and not too heavy. In winter, you may drink a glass of strong red wine. And if it is sweet and well-tasting, it is pleasing to your stomach. Also believe that a new, clear, and fine wine is much better than the old. But if your stomach is too cold, drink some *hohen wein* (Mediterranean luxury wines) in the morning, that will help. But I beseech you, if you wish to be healthy, above all avoid adulterated wine (*gmachten wein*).”

“The sixth is what we all need: It is sleep, which nature has ordained for us to rest. But if you have just filled yourself with food, do not succumb to sleep like a beast, even though the desire overcomes you. You must oppose it with pleasant activity, with sitting, walking, or standing, until sleep overcomes you a second time. Then it is healthy to sleep in complete quiet until you eye is without sleepiness. Then seek to rise and go to stool, and relieve yourself of your water. You shall also cough and clear your throat, wash quickly, and throw out all dirtiness (*unflat*). Comb your head, scratch your limbs, and clean your ears. But if it pleases you to sleep in daytime, especially in summer, lie down without worry where it (the air) is freshest and it is dark, without shoes and under a blanket. You shall also know that the head must be covered better while sleeping than while waking. First, you shall only lie down on your right-hand side. Nobody praises sleeping on your back, when the head hangs down in the straw. Those whose stomachs have become cold may lie on their bellies.”

“The seventh thing that serves your health is a joyful heart. That is why everyone must guard against dismay (*ungemüet*) and anger (*zorn*) that burns the blood. Dismay dries and anger consumes, and both harden flesh and bone. But a little anger can be quite good if it freshens the blood. Fire also serves this purpose, for it gives us joy and aids our lives. But do not turn towards it, because it harms your eyes. And if you become too warm from it, it will rob you of your vigour.”

“Finally, know one thing from me: What a man loves to sing from the joy of his heart, that is his song. What he joyfully drinks is his drink. What he likes to eat is his food. That is why the wise man tells us: Voluptuousness and custom thwart our abilities and our proper living. They twist nature to the point that a nobleman may become a peasant and a peasant a nobleman if he knows how to act accordingly.”

(4204-4401)

But you should little trust anyone in big things if you haven't eaten a quarter pound (*vierding*) of salt, well measured, with him.

(4724-4727)

Übelgsmach (evil taste/smell) answered promptly: “If he wants that, I advise him to go to court himself (*hof* can mean both a farm and a noble household). There he will learn good conduct from many examples. You learn to squawk with the chickens and swinishly smack your lips (*seuwisch smatzgen*) with the pigs. But it is said often and much: If you would be a courtier, imagine a peasant and do the opposite of whatever he does in his boorish manner. Thus you become courtly and decorous. And thus I can only advise Bertschi: If he wishes to study courtly conduct, he can learn it at his wedding if it takes place.

(4855-4870)

Now said Härtel Saichinkruog (strain-into-the-mug): Very well, so be it. I will teach you as best I myself understand it how to honourably keep house. First of all, you shall try to carry a second house built of silver with you so you can buy, as you unavoidably will, hay, fodder, straw, wine, grain, wood, millet and kraut, that is the custom, beans, peas, barley, *smaltz* (all kinds of solid fat), lentils, dried meat, salt, household goods and bedding, cheese, fruit, and many other things, each in its time. That will always prove useful. And only ever buy the best if you do not want to regret your purchase.

Feasting and invitations every day - that brings honour once and damage twice. Do not spend your estate with guests on musicians, and jewelry if you wish to keep your belongings and good name, that is my teaching. But expenditures on knighthood are very honourable, you must know, and especially have pity on your poor friend (i.e. the speaker).

Do not build houses at any price unless you are forced to. A built house, a book filled with writing, a woman one has slept with, cloth that has been cut, and pots full of old stuff (*hefen alter plunder*) are valued so little it is a wonder. A dripping roof can be repaired; Small damage is better than large. Honourable clothing, not too elaborate, is praiseworthy if it is clean, not beshitten (*beschissen*), well mended and not torn, and suitable for the season. The latest fashion is worn by (*reit*, literally: rides on) fools only.

You shall be glad to hear chickens crying and geese singing, because you gain from them. Your dog shall be a strong male who loyally guards what is yours. Spending money on training your children is also good, and also do not stint on their dowry (*haimsteur*). If you give to the poor, this (merit)

will follow you to your grave, but see your profit is much greater than your daily expenses. Something can always happen that eats up the savings of a long time quickly.

I will forthrightly tell you how to secure gain and avert damage: Be the master in your own house. If your wife wears the pants, she will be your hail and your curse before God and His commandments. And you will be mocked for it. Thus watch her closely (*sitz ir auf dem nak*, lit: sit on her neck) and hold her like a fox in a net. Make her carefully preserve what is given into her hands. Also see to it that kitchen, table, and bed are well kept and clean from the start if she wishes to grow old with you. Order her to clean, sew, spin, milk and suckle (*säugen* - probably breastfeed infants) if you wish to amount to something. Rarely allow her to be idle. And you must understand the same applies to your daughters from the start. If they do not know how, see that they learn it soon, day and night, as speedily as four people. For what your wife can do for you is also good for another man (i.e. their future husband).

Do not give the travellers' staff to your son, and Saint Bernard says. Quickly teach him a craft as you can, or trading, but above all reading and writing if you want to secure him a position. But if he does not properly achieve anything with you, send him away; That is his *steuer* (dower).

If you have servants in your care, do not suffer pride (*übermuot*) from them. Also trust no flatterer (*gleichsner*). Note, a servant should be obedient, loyal, able to work long, chaste and patient, not too rich, smart and speedy without complaint. But they must also have an honourable master who rewards them enough – coarse food as is their due – and does not withhold their wages overnight because he can. Thus pay and feed them well, and see that they earn their keep. If you would have certain gain, rise early with them and see to your livestock yourself if you do not want to lose it. Do you know what I know? Your own eye makes your cattle fat. But if you are lazy in your own affairs, so will be your servants and, which is worse, they will incline to evil thought.

When you leave your house,. Be aware of what you have to do, and when you return, check what has been taken from it. And if your grain has not increased, know that you have lost that day.

If you have good neighbours, be glad. Be useful to them as much as you can and your house will flourish for a long time. If you would sell wine and grain, approach them first and sell it cheaper than you would to strangers. I will also add: Sell as dearly as you can to your enemies. That is your gain. You are avenged and no blood has flowed – the best revenge.

If you would sell part of your land or – when something is for sale – add to it, guard against a co-owner who is more influential than you or one whose reputation is not spotless if you want to be without worry. But especially I will advise you: It is better to suffer hunger than to sell your estate. Yet it is better, this is widely agreed on, to sell part of your property than to give all of it in surety to a usurer.

Do not gladly borrow unless you know from whom. And if you know them, borrow even less gladly. Those who put their trust in borrowing will perish in great shame. Thus you can see that you should be happy to repay.

Therefore, if you are wise, make your will while you are healthy so you pay your debts before the clergy has access to your estate, and also do not forget your servants as the sick often do. Leave to your wife what is her due. And tell her kindly, if God calls you to himself, to conduct herself honourably for the sake of your children and, if she can, remain without a husband in pious memory and for a better (after-)life. But you shall not force her with an oath, with money, or by other means, for a legitimate husband is better for a woman than a lord or a servant as a lover. Also more readily support the daughter and the small child than your grown sons who can maintain themselves.

Finally: If your sons would become merchants, advise them to divide the heritage among them. This way they make a better profit. If they would be artisans, let them do as they please. But if they wish to be idle, tell them to stay together without dividing the estate. Each separate head wants its hat and each single house its fire. I will say no more.”

(5016-5200)

The wedding feast makes the first major centrepiece of the poem:

They came on donkeys and on sleighs, each in his good doublet (*wambesch*), with red hosen and a hat, with broad swords and other things. Some came on foot with wooden staves. The girls were all dressed in pretty white shifts, their wreaths shone with flowers and their shoes were whole, aside from the holes.

They paraded around the village of Lappenhäusen that night as well as they could, making noise with drums. Those who could not lodge in a house took the sky for a roof and the street for a feather bed. Behold, they passed up and down all night with shouting so that nobody could sleep, neither in

the hay nor in the straw. This continued until dawn. They permitted nobody to carry a candle, and the bridegroom suffered damage that way because he skinned his donkey instead of the cow by mistake and carried the meat into the kitchen. This would never have been known if he had found his donkey in the place where (instead) he saw the skin lying the next morning to his great dismay.

(5347-5379)

By now, people should have danced, but the feet could not carry them for hunger. That is why four who would serve at the table went away and said they wanted a soup as was the custom. This was done straight away.

One of them was so gluttonous that he almost died of scalding his throat. He jumped up immediately and banged his fist on the table so that the soup and the bread fell to the ground. Each of them said: “Before I starve, I will pick up the broth from the dirt. And if it were even shittier (*noch bass beschissen*) – no bite will be left lying.” In truth, this happened! They enjoyed it.

Then each took a sack and spread it out on the grass. Behold, what a lovely tablecloth! It was washed at least once a year for certain. Pitchers served for cups and glasses, so big they could hardly be lifted. They would have had salt and saltcellars if they had thought of them. There were no knives and no cut bread. They brought loaves of barley and of oats – they called for these – and also laid out rye bread. Thus was the table set.

By now, the wedding gifts had been handed over. Women and men went to the table like sows to the trough. Nobody but Fro Els and Farindkuo (“thrust-into-the-cow”) washed their hands. They had been in such a hurry that they had fallen into the dirt. They needed water, and it was brought to them immediately. Farindkuo pushed in front of Elsen (I think he felt the wait was too long) and ordered that he should be given water immediately. The servant poured it carefully from above on his sleeves, not into the middle of the basin, holding up his head and thrusting out his legs stiffly. The basin was a wide sieve that had been bought for the wedding.

The maiden Elsen was unhappy and she also went where the water was poured. Her sleeves were also wet, nobody served her with a towel that should be spread between the clothes and the basin, smoothly in courtly fashion, whenever anyone would wash their hands.

The servants' fingernails were also long and pointy like icicles. That is why nobody dared to approach and place their thumbs on top of the sieve to lift it. Thus it was left standing on the ground.

Farindkuo had no towel to dry himself, so he used his breeches (*pruoch*) as his towel. It was wide open. He came on noisily and sat down above everyone else (i.e. at the head of the table).

Fro Els washed her hands for so long, until the second course was served. Oh, when she saw this she regretted it. She had no breeches and did not want to ruin her shift by drying her hands, and to rub them in the air took too long and seemed pointless to her. Thus she came to the table wet and sat on her arse rightaway (*auf dem ars gesass*). Her feet were not idle: they pushed over pitchers and shifted the tablecloth.

“So, you sow, so, you sow, so!” (*so sau so sau so du so*) said her Ochsenchropf then, “I do not like your fun, it harms us in the stomach.” If he had drunk more, this would have ended in blows, but the matter was settled and the tablecloth spread out again.

Els called for the first course to be brought to her. One of the company became her server and brought her in his bare hands apples, pears, nuts, and cheese. His name was Spiegelmäs (mirror tit, as in the bird). He laid down the cheese in one piece. She was happy and ate (*frass*) it with its rind – why should she have removed it? He bit open the nuts for her with his teeth so that the blood ran out. He began peeling the apples at the stem and the pears at the bottom. A boor who follows his practice! Then he looked into the pitcher and saw there was not enough wine (*mosts*) in it. That is why he took a heavy serving vessel and shook it to see whether there was anything left in that. The wine sloshed around, which pleased him. He poured it into the pitcher and filled it (understand me how full) so that it ran over on all sides.

But this was nothing compared to what I still have to tell you. Else, not wanting to insult her host, grasped the pitcher with both hands and thrust in her mouth and nose, so much did she enjoy the wine. When she found a morsel of food in it, she picked it out with her bare hands and drank so strongly and long that she was all out of breath in the end. But right after she had caught her breath again, she started again, looking over the rim (of her vessel) like a wild bear. She let her head drop and drank so that her eyes watered and her ears drooped from drinking. But there was still liquid left. That is why she painfully twisted herself to tilt her head backwards with the pitcher – she thought this was good manners. She leaned her back against a tree and cried out as though

dreaming: “Woe me, woe! The pitcher is dry and empty! Pour me some more, and bring me the second course, I want it!”

Spiegelmais did not tarry long, poured cider (*öpfelgtrank*) into the pitcher after his manner, and went to fetch her food. He brought her the roast donkey which she thought noble venison (*willprät edel*). She drew a loaf of bread against her chest and cut it straight through the middle. Behold, those were some honest slices! She laid them in a proud heap like a stack of firewood. None dared take away the knife from her, so they tore the meat destined for her into pieces. All was hers, and she swallowed (*schland*) the roast and gnawed the bones. She chewed and gnawed so hard a tooth broke in her mouth. What would be left for the dogs? They were discontent with her gnawing, and one jumped up and took a bone from her mouth, but she kept eating and eating until she had caught up with the other guests.

They, too, had enjoyed themselves until nothing was left and now they called out “Bring us more! We are hungrier than we were!”. Though fro Els had drunk well, none had yet had the chance to get drunk (*vol*).

Now the cabbage (*chraut*) was ready, covered in bacon (*speck*) and fried lardons (*greuben*). It was served together with fish. The servants behaved in a courtly fashion, holding the bowls in front of their bellies, resting their fingers some on them, some in them, some spilling half, and serving the food to the guests as though strewing grass to a calf in the manger or anywhere. The gentlemen thanked them for it. Lastersak (lit. sack of vices) was very hungry. He looked around like a bull and called for a spoon. The others shouted “one for us, too!”. Some found spoons, others did not. They took their hands for ladles and ate as mannerly as the others.

Behold, such a brawl arose around the cabbage (*chraut*) and the sauce that you have never seen such chasing and rushing in our lifetime. You could see more than ten spoons stab like spears into each bowl. They especially sought out the lardons, going after them with their oars. Then Twerg (lit. Dwarf) at one point threw so much bacon into his mouth that his beard was suddenly all dripping with fat (*smaltzich*). Count Purkhardt did damage to all: He held a hand full of cabbage and moved it towards his mouth, calling to God for the weather to remain fine until the harvest was brought in. But how Chnotz took his revenge: He stirred about the bowl until his spoon broke. So he went in with both hands and grabbed cabbage on both sides, a big handful of food. “Be it fair weather or foul” he said at that point, “You must go into my gullet!”

Gerri picked up the bowl and took a mighty gulp. She said “God grant you die of stench! (*müesst derstinken*). You have eaten (*frass*) it up, so I shall drink it!” and sat down again so that a great part of splashed out again. Oh, how she coughed! The others came to her rightaway and drank it up – I don’t know how – so that the tablecloth stayed dry. But what else there was, leaves, grass, breadcrumbs, crusts and bones, they left lying everywhere. Some also lingered in a courtly manner, bent over their bowls so their path was short, for their loads were heavy. And they had yet another reason for doing so: Should anything fall off their spoons or out of their mouths, it would fall right back into the bowl. Their mouths (*mäuler*) were wide open the entire time. Then they also did this: Whenever their fingers became wet, they waved them about over the cabbage quite deftly and wiped the remainder off on their boots and their garments. They had to do this because they had no napkins (*hanttuoch*) before them. They they immediately reached out again. They were also pleased by another thing: Whenever a diner dropped something to the ground, be it chewed or not, it had to be picked up and placed before all of them again, except if it had landed on his clothes. Then he was free to keep the morsels as he pleased.

Thus it went quickly, with much smacking (*smatzgen*) and eating, until the bowls were empty and as clean as if they had been washed. But they were still hungry. They had not had the time to shout out before, but now each began: “Triefnas, I will dishonour your wife and your sister-in-law if you do not bring us wine, mead, and beer with it immediately! Otherwise it’s over with our friendship!” But this was the fault of the servers who only stared open-mouthed at the eaters (*fresser*) from afar or up close and none of them could see what was needed at the table.

The bridegroom saw this and wanted to show his authority. He grabbed a server by the beard so that he cried out. The other three came and grabbed Bertschi by his, and hit him so he fell down. Then they pulled down his breeches (*pruochen*) and poured water into his arse and on his nether parts (*in den ars und auch enzwer*). They grabbed him by the legs and slapped his arse against a tree with a loud bang. He received countless such blows. The others were well pleased and thought it was the best solution. Then Bertschi stood up again and said: “You know well I could not defend myself properly; Three will always overcome one.” Thus, no more came of it.

All the wine (*most*) that was in the house was brought out and served. They drank and guzzled (*suffend*) so that their eyes watered. Penz Trinkviel (lit.: drink-much) emptied the first, second, and third pitcher against the will of his companions, though the last only halfway. Behold, he gasped for air and wiped his sweat on the tablecloth. Decorously, he laid down his hands and elbows on the table – he was finished. At the same time, the maiden (*Junchfraw*) Feina drank from a pitcher with

such refinement and slurping she was overcome with a cough. The remainder ran into her bosom and she went after it with her tongue. She craved its sourness (*seuri*). The others also drank so hard that the belts on some of them burst. Yet this did not happen to those that were smart. They had loosened their belts beforehand and kept drinking their health (*drunkend da pei fürsich an*) until they fit properly again.

Then they started on the fish that were on the table. Straub (a server) wanted to try them first (*chredenzet haben*), but he saw such grasping and chasing over the platter that he chose instead to grab a piece for himself. He was lucky it was the largest, and how quickly it was gone! Who would have waited for their neighbour to be served first at this hour? There was no time for that, I should think. The servers would have cut the fish apart for them, but they (the guests) could not wait for it. The dish seemed too tempting. Reuschindhell (lit. rush-into-hell) grasped a particularly slimy head piece that seemed good to him nonetheless. He thought to himself: “If you are gnawing the head, that already means you are too late, but if you leave it be, you have no enjoyment at all and have come in vain.” Thus he drew it through his mouth three times and laid it in front of himself again, as complete as it had been. He was luckier the next time: He caught a middle piece, and how quickly that was gone!

By now, brave Varindwand (lit: break-into-the-wall) had grasped the head. He thought it did not please his brother, and how quickly he swallowed it up! And thus he could not live, for the fish bones (*grät*) thrust through his neck! Then spoke Galgenswanch (lit: swing-on-the-gallows): “Dear God, receive our thanks!” Thus Farindwand’s soul passed away to the land of Cockaigne (*gen Schläuraffen land*), that was well suited to him. His body was thrown into the river Necker. What harm was that to his companions? If you would eat your fill, guard against having too many fellow diners. But if you would fight successfully, you must have a good number of friends. Thus also thought Uotz vom Hag (lit. from the woods). He wanted to take an eater (*fresser*) out of the game and said: “Her Guggoch (lit. Sir Cuckoo) is a man who can himself make poems about Dietrich von Bern. We would much rather hear those than sit here eating those dead fish.”

Guggoch was flattered and began telling his tale: “Some heroes sat in a hall, and they ate prodigiously every time...” et cetera, to the end. But his audience were quick and ate up all the fish before the singer noticed. When his song was over, Guggoch wanted to start eating, looked around, and found nothing. He scratched his head and shouted out: “I am a child (i.e. a fool) and you, Uotz, a right knave! This trick shows it.” While he had sung joyfully earlier, now he mourned tearfully, but to all the others, it was a great joke.

Triefnas (lit. drip-nose) saw the immoderate eating and drinking and hung his head. The expense dismayed him and he remembered the old adage: He who would avoid harm must have a small wedding. Thus his joy was gone. But he had also studied medicine (*ärztney auch gehört*) and held forth like an experienced physician (*vil maisterleich*): “Hear me, you gentlemen rich and poor!” he called out, “Eating is not good for your health, and drinking is harmful, too! Arise, then, and eat no more!”

Then Chnotz blew out his big nose into his hands and threw it into the bridegroom’s face (*unterd augen*, lit. below the eyes). “If you lick this up, I will believe you!” he said to Bertschi. This pleased the others, and they said to the bridegroom “We think you are talking nonsense (*redist aus dem trom*, lit. speak from a dream). Bring out sausages and ham if you would make us healthy, or we will go straight home and eat as it is healthy for us. If you would let us starve here, you are a knave (*chnecht*), you have no idea how much of one! A proper physician understands that a joyful head is always found atop a full belly (*auf vollem pauch stest fröleichs haubt*).”

Arnold added to this speech: “Your words would be true and good if you spoke them at my table. Now give us something to top off the fish!”

Bertschi said: “It is all lost everywhere anyway.” He filled a nutshell with wine (*most*), that was properly poured. “Kochunsauber (lit. cook-dirtily), bring out the wine” he called to his servants, “And tell him to fry up four eggs! We must stave off starvation!” And behold, this was quickly done.

By now, the gentlemen had begun shouting: “Bring us wine! The fish want to swim!” But it availed them nothing. All the perry (*piermost*) and cider (*öpfeltranch*) and all the sloe water (*schlechenwasser*), too, had already been served. But they were brought a bucket of sour milk, and they gladly drank that. Rüepli raised the bucket to his mouth at that time and turned away to face the wall, which suited him well. He took such a mighty draught that it displeased the bride and she began to scold him: “I think you have fallen asleep in the bucket, or have you drowned in the milk?” she said. That made Rüepli laugh, and what did the milk do? It went right up into his brain and out of the nose again, back into the bucket. He offered the drink to the others and the bucket passed from one to the other. But Lärenchopf (lit. empty-the-glass) spoiled it. He did not find enough milk and threw the bucket against the wall.

Now the fried eggs were done and were served to the companions. Now was the time to grasp firmly, and they truly did so. They acted according to their old custom and fought for the eggs (no different from wild bears) with hands and feet. Nobody could stop them. He who came first did best for himself; He took everything, and that was that. Chrimbolten got one egg, Scheubinsak (lit. put-in-the-bag) got two, and Chnotz and Troll had caught the fourth. Thus the spoils were divided. Count Purkhart with the ganglion cyst (*mit dem überpän*) said: “We are not pleased by this game, I and my companions. The worst sharers are those who will allow one person to get drunk while another dies of thirst.” Thus he reached out straightaway and took an egg from Scheubinsak, but he did it so firmly and clumsily that the soft part ran through his hands. He thrust the fingers into his mouth and licked it off, that did him good.

Then spoke Jänsel: “Give me some, too!” “Be quiet”, he said, “you are a fool (*gauch*).” The long nails on his thumb helped him scoop out the egg. Scheubinsak held on to the other one. He split it quickly and thrust a large slice of bread through the middle of it, back and forth. Thus the yolk and the white ran off uselessly, except that the cats got hold of it and smoothed their tongues with it. “No matter”, the man said then, “someone who fortune will not smile on must lose a king’s treasure and an emperor’s power overnight.”

Chrimbold had watched carefully and grasped his egg entirely, threw it straight into his mouth and would have choked to death if his gullet had not been so wide the egg dropped down into the stomach whole. Then he said: “How good, how good! Now my share is safe from you.”

Chnotz and Troll were two fellows that none dared stand against. They took comfort in that knowledge and they were also quite clever. They grasped their egg together and opened it carefully. Eating mannerly, they gently dipped their bread slices in the egg, moistened them slightly, and threw them into the gates of their mouth. They did not swallow the slices entire, but dipped what remained of them into the egg again, and once more moved them to the mouth’s gate. They continued doing this until no bread was left on the table. All the others watched them like wolves watch a cow. There was one part of the egg left yet, but they held it fast, they would not part with it (*es was nicht vail*). They wanted two more loaves of bread, but none was found anywhere in the house. Then what was left for the poor? Truly, I cannot say. They scolded the host and gave the egg to the servants so they would remember to bring them something to drink.

There was no more milk, so they had to serve them water. First, they served it mannerly, then their output increased because thirst had tormented everyone up to this point. They served drink without

all restraint, and they became full and free of suffering. And thus everyone began to sing or tell stories, and whatever the master began, singing or storytelling, the servant understood to interrupt with propriety. None wanted to hear the other, all wanted to be heard and shouted “Hear what I say!”

The chaos continued until the final course was served to them. This was cherries, grapes, figs, damsons, and nothing more. They had already completely devoured the first course, and the last one, too, was cleared off entirely at this point. But the bride did as she was expected and did not eat voraciously like the servants. She bit seven bites off a single cherry. That was proper conduct!

Now Bertschi Triefnas saw that no salt was in front of them. He brought them an apron full and said “This goes well with the damsons.”

At the same time, a flea jumped between Lady Hüdel’s legs and bit her so she cried out. She wanted to bend down to squeeze it to death, but behold, the skin became too short for her and it went awry – she let out a fart! (*liess einn furtz*). To cover her shame, she began scratching with her feet so people should think the feet had done it, but Henritze saw through her ploy and said: “That is not the same kind (of sound). I will sing you a pretty poem: Scratching is not the same as farting.”

Hüdel was hurt by the mockery. She let out a large fart as before, and three more, four altogether. Then she called out to the scribe “See here, you false peasant! Do these sound right?” Thus was the writer repaid. Count Purkhart also had to suffer for the odour – or perhaps his egg had been rotten. At any rate, the food rose up to his mouth and he had to spew through his beard onto the table.

Old Lord Gumpost (lit: compost, a pickled vegetable dish) had drunk water, milk, and wine. His belly distended and rumbled like the sea. The fish swam about in it and tormented him so much that he had to rise from the table. He said: “I will go hurl (*smeissen gen*). I will be back, wait here.” The others all (I know not how) rose and followed Gumpost. They also needed to vomit (*zaichen*).

Lady Laichdenmann (betray-the-husband) stayed behind. She had pissed in her shirt and was all wet because she had forgot her sponge at home. But in the end, she also rose because she did not want to be alone.

When the gentlemen returned, they would have sat down again. But the tablecloth had been taken away. They did not cease to mourn the fact. But they had sat down without a blessing (*an den*

segn), why should they now have said the prayer of gratitude (*danke geben*)? The servants washed their hands, and thus ended the meal.

(5532-6186)

The feast continues with a dance and some wild partying. Then, the newlyweds are sent off to bed.

When the first time was over, everyone knew all about it because the bedstead was old and rickety and had sung the finest song ever. Now the bridegroom seemed to almost burn up with thirst, so he called out: "Water here, yo, water here!" He was brought a soup of Venice, made with tragacanth (*tragedi*), and malmsey (*malvasei*) with it. This was their best custom, and so they ate and drank until they had recovered their strength.

(7050-7063)

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