

# The Elixir eBook

## The Elixir by Georg Ebers

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## Title: The Elixir

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## THE ELIXIR.

By Georg Ebers

Every Leipziger knows well the tall gabled house in the Katherinenstrasse which I have in mind. It stands not far from the Market Place, and is particularly dear to the writer of this true story because it has been in the possession of his family for a long time. Many curious things have happened there worthy of being rescued from oblivion, and though my relatives would now like to relieve me of this task, because I have found it necessary to point out to certain ingenuous ones among them the truth which they were endeavoring to conceal, I rejoice that I have sufficient leisure to chronicle for future generations of Ueberhells the wonderful life and doings of their progenitor as I learned them from my grandmother and other good people.

So here, then, begins my story.

Of old, the aforementioned house was known as "The Three Kings," but in no otherwise was it distinguished from its neighbours in the street save through the sign of the Court apothecary on the ground floor; this hung over the arched doorway, and gay with bright colour and gilding represented the three patron Saints of the craft: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar.

This house in the Katherinenstrasse continued to be called “The Three Kings,” although, soon after the death of old Caspar Ueberhell, the sign was removed, and the shop closed. And many things happened to it and the house which ran counter to the usual course of events and the wishes of the worthy burghers.

Gossip there had been in plenty even during the lifetime of the old Court apothecary whose only son Melchior had left his father's house and Leipsic not merely to spend a few years in Prague, or Paris or Italy like any other son of well-to-do parents who wished to perfect himself in his studies, but, as it would seem, for good and all.

Both as school-boy and student Melchior had been one of the most gifted and most brilliant, and many a father, whose son took a wicked delight in wanton and graceless escapades, had with secret envy congratulated old Ueberhell on having such an exceptionally talented, industrious and obedient treasure of a son and heir. But later not one of these men would have exchanged his heedless scrapegrace of a boy for the much bepraised paragon of the Court apothecary, since, after all, a bad son is better than none at all.

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Melchior, in fact, came not home, and that this weighed on the mind of the old man and hastened his death was beyond doubt; for although the stately Court apothecary's rotund countenance remained as round and beaming as the sun for three years after the departure of his boy, it began gradually to lose its plumpness and radiance until at length it was as faded and yellow as the pale half moon, and the cheeks that had once been so full hung down on his ruff like little empty sacks. He also withdrew more and more from the weighing house and the Raths-keller where he had once so loved to pass his evenings in the company of other worthy burghers, and he was heard to speak of himself now and then as a "lonely man." Finally he stayed at home altogether, perhaps because his face and the whites of his eyes had turned as yellow as the saffron in his shop. There he left Schimmel, the dispenser, and the apprentice entirely in charge, so that if any one wished to avoid the Court apothecary that was the surest place. When, in the end, he died at the age of fifty-six, the physicians stated that it was his liver—the seat of sorrow as well as of anger—which had been overtaxed and abused.

It is true that no one ever heard a word of complaint against his son pass his lips, indeed it was certain that to the very last he was well acquainted with his son's whereabouts; for when he was asked for news, he answered at first: "He is finishing his studies in Paris," later: —"He seems to have found in Padua what he is seeking," and towards the end: "I think that he will be returning very soon now from Bologna."

It was also noticeable that instead of taking advantage of such questioning to give vent to his displeasure he would smile contentedly and stroke his chin, once so round, but then so peaked, and those who thought that the Court apothecary would diminish his legacy to his truant son, learned to know better, for the old man bequeathed in an elaborate will, the whole of his valuable possessions to Melchior, leaving only to the widow Vorkel, who had served him faithfully as housekeeper after the death of his wife, and to Schimmel, the dispenser, in the event of the shop being closed, a yearly stipend to be paid to the end of their days. To his beloved daughter-in-law, the estimable daughter of the learned Dr. Vitali, of Bologna, the old man left his deceased wife's jewels, together with the plate and linen of the house, mentioning her in the most affectionate terms.

All of which surprised the legal gentlemen and the relatives and connections and their wives and feminine following not a little, and what put the finishing stroke to the disgust of these good folk, especially to such of them as were mothers, was that this son and heir of an honoured and wealthy house had married a foreigner, a frivolous Italian, and that too without so much as an intimation of his intention.

With the will there was a letter from the dead man to his son and one to the worthy lawyer. In the latter he requested his counsellor to notify his son, Melchior Ueberhell, of his death, and, in case of his son's return home, to see him well and fairly established in the position which belonged to him as the heir of a Leipsic burgher and as Doctor of the University of Padua.

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These letters were sent by the first messenger going south over the Alps, and that they reached Melchior will be seen from the fresh surprises contained in his answer.

He commissioned Anselmus Winckler, an excellent notary, and formerly his most intimate school friend, to close the apothecary shop and to sell privately whatever it contained. But a small quantity of every drug was to be reserved for his own personal use. He also, in his carefully chosen diction begged the honourable notary to allow the Italian architect Olivetti, who would soon present himself, to rebuild the old house of "The Three Kings" throughout, according to the plan which they had agreed upon in Bologna. The side of the house that faced the street would not, be hoped, prove unpleasing, as for the arrangement of the interior, that was to be made in accordance with his own taste and needs, and to please himself alone.

These wishes seemed reasonable enough to the lawyer, and as the Italian architect, who arrived a few weeks later in Leipsic, laid before him a plan showing the facade of a burgher's house finished with a stately gable which rose by five successive steps to its peak crowned by a statue of the armed goddess Minerva with the owl at her feet, no objection could be made to such an addition to the city, although some of the clergy did not hesitate to express their displeasure at the banishment of the Three Saints in favor of a heathen goddess, and at the height of the middle chimney which seemed to have entered the lists against the church towers. However, the rebuilding was put in hand, and, of course, the business had to be wound up and the shop closed before the old front was torn down.

Schimmel, the gray-haired dispenser, married the widow Vorkel, who had kept house for the late Herr Ueberhell. These two might have related many strange occurrences to the cousins and kin had they chosen, but he was a reserved man, and she had been so sworn to silence, and had lived through such an agitating experience before the death of the old man that she repulsed all questioners so sharply that they dared not return to the charge.

The old housekeeper as she watched the deserted father grow indifferent to what he had to eat and drink—though he had once been so quick to appreciate the dishes which she prepared so deftly—and neglectful of the attentions which he had been wont to pay to the outside world, became embittered towards Melchior whom she had carried in her arms and loved like her own child. In former times Herr Ueberhell had been accustomed now and then to invite certain friends to dine with him, and these guests had praised her cooking, but later, and more especially after the death of his cousin and colleague, Blumentrost, who had also been his master, he had asked no one into his well-appointed house.

This retirement of the dignified and hospitable burgher was undoubtedly caused by the absence of his son, but in a very different way to what people supposed; for although the old man longed for his only child, he was very far from resenting his absence;

indeed the widow Vorkel herself knew that it was the father who had dissuaded the son from returning from Italy until he had reached the goal for which he was striving with unwearied energy.



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She also knew that Melchior gave the old man precise information of his progress in every letter, and that when her master turned over the care of the shop to Schimmel, the dispenser, it was only because he had arranged a laboratory for himself on the first floor, where, following the directions received in his son's letters, he worked with his crucibles and retorts, pots and tubes, early and late before the fire. Yet despite this, the housekeeper saw that the longing for his son was gnawing at the old man's heart, and had she been able to write she would have let Melchior know how things stood and begged him to return to Leipsic. "But there ought to be no need to tell him," she would reflect in her leisure moments, "he must know it himself," and for this reason she would force herself as well as she could to be angry with him.

Thus the years passed. Nevertheless, her anger flew to the winds when one day a messenger arrived bringing a little package from Italy and the master called her into the laboratory. Then the old withered love suddenly came to life once more and put forth new leaves and buds, for what she saw was indeed something wonderful; the Court apothecary held out to her in his carefully washed hands a sheet of gray paper on which in red crayon was an exquisite drawing of a beautiful young woman with a lovely child on her lap. Then, having charged her not to speak of it to any one, he confided to her that this beautiful woman was Melchior's young wife, and the little boy their first-born and his grandchild who would carry on the name of Ueberhell. He had given his consent to his son's marriage with the daughter of his master in Bologna and now he—old Caspar Ueberhell—was the happiest of men, and when the doctor returned to him with wife and child and the thing for which he was so earnestly searching, why, he would not envy the emperor on his throne. When the widow Vorkel noticed the tears that were streaming down the old man's sunken cheeks, her eyes too began to overflow, and after that she often crept to the chest where the portrait was kept to gaze on the little one and to press her lips on the same spot whence the grandfather's had already worn away some of the red crayon.

Herr Ueberhell's joy had been so great that now the longing for his son took deeper hold of him, and he lost strength day by day, yet Frau Vorkel could not persuade him to see a physician. He often, however, inhaled deep draughts of a concoction that he had made in the laboratory with his son's letter before him, and as he seemed to derive no benefit from it he would distil it again and mix with it new drugs.

One evening—after having spent the whole day in the laboratory—he retired unusually early, and when Frau Vorkel went into his room to carry him his "nightcap" he forgot his usual amiable and suave manner and growled out at her angrily: "After all these years, can't you prepare my bed for the night without making me burn myself? Must you be inattentive as well as stupid?"

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Never had she heard such a speech as this from her kindly master, and when from fright she tipped the tray which she was carrying and spilled some of the mulled wine over her gown, he cried sharply: "Where are your wits! First you forget to take the red hot warming-pan out of the bed and now you old goose you spill my good drink onto the floor."

He stopped, for Frau Vorkel had set down the tray on the table in order to wipe her eyes with her apron; then he thrust his feet out of the bed—which was entirely contrary to his usual decorous behavior—and demanded with flashing eyes: "Did you hear what I just said?"

The widow, greatly shocked, retreated and answered sobbing: "How could I help hearing, and how can you bring yourself to insult an unprotected widow who has served you long and faithfully. . . ."

"I have done it, I have done it," the old man cried, his eyes glistening with joy and pride as if he had just accomplished an heroic undertaking. "I am sorry I called you a goose, and as for your lack of brains, well you might have a few more, but, and this I can assure you, you are honest and true and understand your business, and if you will only be as good to me as I have always been to you. . . ."

"Oh, Herr. . . ." Widow Vorkel interrupted him, and covered her face with her apron; but he would not let her finish her sentence, so great was his excitement and continued in a hoarse voice: "You must grant what I ask, Vorkel, after all these years, and if you will, you must take that little phial there and inhale its contents, and when you have done so you must let me ask you some questions."

After much persuasion, the housekeeper yielded to the wishes of her master, and while she still held the little bottle from which the ether escaped, to her nose, the Court apothecary questioned her hastily: "Do you think that I have always acted like a man, diligently striving for the good of himself and his house?"

Some strange change seemed to take place in Frau Vorkel; she planted her hands on her hips most disrespectfully—a thing she never did except perhaps when she was scolding the maid or the butcher boy—and laughed loud and scornfully: "My, what a question! You may, perhaps, have a larger stock of useless information than an old woman like me,—though strictly speaking I cannot be called an old woman yet—but despite my being stupid and a 'goose,' I have always been wiser than you, and I know which side one's bread is buttered on. Bless me! And is there anything more idiotic than that you, the father of the best son in the world, should sit here alone, fretting yourself yellow and lean until from a stately looking man you grow to be a scarecrow, when one word from you would bring your only child back again and with him the wife and sweet grandchild, that you might all enjoy life together! If that isn't sheer folly and a sin and a shame. . . ."

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Here she checked herself, for her habitually decorous master stood before her in his night shirt, barefooted, and laughed loud and merrily, clapping himself boisterously on his wasted ribs and on the shrunken thighs that carried his thin body. The precise widow was very much upset, she was also horrified at the insolent answer which,—she knew not how,—had just passed her lips. She endeavored to find some words of excuse but they were not necessary, for the Court apothecary called out, “Magnificent! Glorious! May all the saints be praised, we have found it.” And before the worthy woman knew what he was about the gray-haired invalid had caught her in his arms and kissed her heartily on both cheeks. But the happy excitement had been too much for him and with a low groan he sank down on the edge of the bed and sobbed bitterly.

Frau Vorkel was greatly disturbed for she guessed—and it would seem with reason—that her good master had gone out of his mind. But she presently changed her opinion, for after he had cried unrestrainedly until he was exhausted, Herr Ueberhell gave her a prompt proof of his sanity and returning health. In his kindly and polite manner of former times, he begged her to set out in the kitchen a bottle of the oldest and best Bacharach. There he bade her bring a second glass and invited her to drink, and clink glasses with him because the greatest piece of good luck had happened to him that day that it was in the power of the blessed saints to grant to mortal man. He, the father, had discovered in Leipsic what his son had sought in vain at all the most famous Universities of Italy, and if he should succeed in one remaining step, the fame of the Ueberhells, like that of the Roman Horatii, would reach to the skies.

Then he became more serious and confessed that he was very weak and broken, and that when he had gone to bed earlier in the evening he had felt that his last hour was not far distant. Death itself sometimes floats 'twixt cup and lip, as has been remarked by a heathen philosopher, and if he should be called away before he had seen Melchior again, then must she be his messenger and tell his son that he had found that part of the White Lion, of the white tincture of argentum potabile or potable silver, which his letter had put him on the track of. His son would know what he meant, and to-morrow he would write down the particulars if he should succeed that night in finding again the substance through which he had attained to the greatest wonder that science had achieved since the days of Adam.

He emptied bumper after bumper and clinked glasses at least a dozen times with Frau Vorkel, who was immensely tickled with the unwonted honour.

After that he drew his chair closer to hers that he might better impress upon her what she was to say to Melchior. He began by telling her that she could never understand the full meaning of what had happened but that she must take his word for it, he had discovered an elixir whose effect was most wonderful and would change the whole course of events. From now onwards, lying would be impossible, the reign of truth was at hand and deceit had been routed from its last stronghold.

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As she, however, shrank back from him, still somewhat fearful, he demanded loftily if she ever would have dared to announce to him, her old master, so candidly what she thought of him, as she had done an hour ago, if she had not inhaled the contents of the phial. And Frau Vorkel had to admit that she had been forced by some occult power to utter those disrespectful speeches. She looked with awed wonder, first at her master, then at the little bottle, and suddenly broke out with: "My! My What will be left for the judges to do when everyone can be forced to speak out boldly and disclose his smallest sin. My! My! But then we shall hear pretty tales! From the Burgomaster down, everyone in Leipzig will have to get a new pair of ears, for what one hears will be as outrageous and unseemly as among the savages."

These observations showed the Court apothecary that Frau Vorkel had, despite her want of intelligence, grasped to a certain extent the importance of his discovery; while this pleased him in a way, it also made him uneasy, therefore he made her swear on the crucifix that so long as she lived she would never impart to any living soul, his son excepted, what she had that evening experienced.

Then Herr Ueberhell went back to his search for the unknown element which had given to his son's elixir the power that had been exhibited in such wonderful fashion. But he did not succeed in finding the right ingredient, for as often as he called Frau Vorkel to come and inhale the new mixture, she gave such plausible and politic answers to his dangerous questions that he could be by no means sure of her absolute truthfulness. Then too the operations progressed slowly because that day at noon his finger had been badly cut by the bursting of a glass retort. So presently he ceased work for a while and insisted that Frau Vorkel should take the phial in her own hand and inhale its contents once more, because it pleased him to try the power of the elixir.

With an amused smile he asked her if she used the great quantities of wool, which she so constantly demanded, for no other purpose than to knit socks for him.

The phial trembled in the hand of the housekeeper, and before she could help it her response had passed her lips:

"You have all the socks that you need and it is surely no great crime for me to knit a few pairs to warm the feet of your assistant, that poor, silent worm who stands downstairs the livelong day in the cold shop."

Despite this reply Herr Ueberhell only laughed and continued the inquisition gaily. He next wished to know who was dearer to the heart of the housekeeper, the assistant or her late husband, to which she rejoined "Why should I lament Vorkel? He was a bully, who never could learn how to cut out a coat, and always stole his customers' cloth." At that moment there was an ominous crash on the floor, and a powerful odour filled the laboratory; the phial had slipped from the hands of the frightened woman.

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What happened after that Frau Vorkel even in her old age shuddered to recall. How it could have been possible for the amiable and pious Court apothecary to give utterance to such objurgations and invectives, such sacrilegious curses and anathemas, and how she, a respectable and proper woman, of good Leipsic people, ever could have allowed herself to attack any one, least of all her excellent master, in such abusive language were problems she could never solve.

Yet they must not be censured for their use of Billingsgate, for the strong aroma of the elixir forced them to tear aside the veil which in Leipsic, as elsewhere, clothes the ugly truth as with a pleasing garment, and to lay bare all the rancour that filled their hearts.

Later when she thought about the breaking of the phial, the conviction grew upon her limited intelligence that this accident would perhaps prove in the end to be the best thing that could have happened, not only for her but for all mankind. To her excellent master, at least, the Elixir of Truth proved fatal all too soon; the intense excitement of that night had shaken him so cruelly that before the day dawned the feeble flame of his life had flickered out.

Frau Vorkel found him dead the next morning in his laboratory. He must have gone thither to seek once more for the lost substance after she had helped him to bed. Before he had begun his work he must have wished to encourage himself by a glance at the portrait of his grandchild, for as she opened the door the sheet of paper with the red crayon drawing was wafted from the open chest, beside which her master had fallen, and like a butterfly, fluttered down upon the heart that had ceased to beat several hours before.

Six months after the death of the Court apothecary, Melchior Ueberhell returned home and Frau Vorkel or, as she must now be called, Frau Schimmel, was the only person to whom he wrote to announce the hour of his arrival in Leipsic.

In his letter the young doctor begged her to undertake the responsibility of engaging a man servant and a kitchen maid for him, and of seeing that there was a fire laid on his hearth to welcome him. He also asked "his faithful old friend" to nail up before the furnace of the laboratory on the first floor the brass triangle which the messenger, who brought the letter, would give to her. It was to be hung with the face, bearing the numerals and the figures of animals, towards the outside.

This news threw Frau Schimmel into a great state of excitement and at the appointed hour everything stood ready for the reception of the future occupants of the Ueberhell house.

Doctor Melchior and his family waited in Connewitz for the sun to set that he might enter his native town after it was dark and yet before the city gates were closed; for it was characteristic of his retiring nature to wish to avoid exposing himself and his beautiful

wife and child to the vulgar curiosity of the people. These two had made the journey in a litter carried by mules.

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As it was just the time for the Easter fair and many strangers were arriving in Leipsic the travellers passed through the Peterstrasse, across the market-place and entered their newly built house without attracting any attention.

It was too dark for them to see the statue of Minerva on the peak of the high gable and the sun-dial on its face with the circle of animals, but the lighted windows on the ground-floor and in the first story gave the house a hospitable air.

Frau Schimmel who had long been awaiting their arrival went out to meet them and the new man servant held the lantern so that they could see her curtsies.

“May the holy saints bless your homecoming!” the old lady called out, and Melchior felt himself choke at the host of sweet memories evoked by this greeting—of how his mother used to fold his hands and teach him to pray to the holy patrons of the house, of the sad hour when he had received the news of his father’s death—and to his astonishment he felt the warm tears running down his cheeks, the first he had shed for many years and almost before he knew it himself, he had caught Frau Schimmel to his heart and kissed her tenderly.

Then he turned to his slim young wife, who with the boy was standing behind him, and presented her to the old housekeeper: “The dearest treasure that I won in Italy! I commend her to your love.”

Frau Schimmel raised the beautiful Italian’s hand to her lips and lifted the little boy and hugged him. Melchior in the mean while hurried to the entrance door, there he bowed three times and solemnly lifted aloft his arms toward the evening-star that was just showing itself above the roof of a house across the market-place.

The old housekeeper noticed this, and rejoiced for she thought that Melchior was returning thanks to the holy saints for a safe journey, but she was disillusioned when she heard him open his lips and cry towards heaven an invocation which was neither German nor Latin, for she knew the sound of the latter tongue, having heard it so often at mass, but a combination of strange sounding words more like those that she used to hear her late master muttering over his work in the laboratory, with his son’s letter before him. It was certainly no Christian prayer and her heart sank within her. When the doctor had ended the ceremony which for all she knew might be an invocation of evil spirits, and entered the house with his wife and child, she went up to him and without a moment’s indecision made the sign of the cross on his breast and another on the curly head of the child. Melchior laughed at her but did not rebuff her. Soon the travellers were seated about the neatly laid table in their own house and Frau Schimmel had her reward in seeing Melchior enjoy the home-made dishes. And little Zeno—for that was the name of the Court apothecary’s grandchild—drink the good milk and munch the butter cakes which she had baked to celebrate their arrival. But the young wife hardly tasted anything.



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Did not the food please her? Perhaps she was accustomed in Italy to a different way of cooking? "Other nations, other customs."

But who could feel annoyed with that heavenly creature?

Frau Schimmel was of the opinion that she had never seen any one to equal her, and could not bear to take her eyes off her. Yet the appearance of the wife of her old favorite filled her with forebodings, and suddenly, though she was by no means superstitious or given to presentiments, she seemed to see Frau Bianca—so the young Italian was called—lying on her bier, a light veil over her, and a wreath of lilies-of-the-valley on her raven hair. A sad quiet face!

Frau Schimmel's vision must have been caused by the young wife's excessive paleness. "White as snow, black as ebony" fitted her, as well the beauty of the fairy tale, only "red as blood" was wanting. She was also as tall and slender as the lilies in the little garden that the Court apothecary had owned outside the Petersthor.

After supper Frau Schimmel helped the mother to bathe the little Zeno and to put him to bed, and Melchior also assisted at the performance. As the old lady looked from mother to child a great pity filled her heart for the dear son of her late master who had staked his happiness on a creature so ethereal that the first wind might blow her away; such delicate perfection as that, if her experience did not deceive her, was hardly adapted to the needs of an everyday German husband. But then did Melchior look like such an one? No.

Again she felt a cold shiver go down her back, for Melchior had taken the bath sheet and was holding it in front of him waiting to wrap the child in it as it was taken out of its tub, and it seemed to her as if he had on a shroud and his bloodless emaciated face with his black hair and moustache looked ghostly over the top of it.

It annoyed her that she should have these stupid, sad thoughts on the occasion of such a happy home coming!

She did her best to drive them away and the child helped her, for it, at least, looked lively enough as it sat in the warm water, and kicked, and splashed, and laughed, and cooed, calling to its parents and then to Frau Schimmel. When it tried to pronounce her name, her heart overflowed and she answered absently, for she was saying a silent Paternoster for the health and welfare of this blessed child who somehow seemed even lovelier than Melchior had once been, though in his time she had considered him "the sweetest baby that had ever lived."

When the child was in bed the mother folded its hands and murmured what Frau Schimmel knew to be a prayer, but the father touched, its forehead and the place about



the heart with an essence, speaking at the same time some incomprehensible words. Whatever they meant, they seemed to agree well enough with the incomparable child.

The young wife was tired after her long journey and went early to bed, and when the housekeeper was finally left alone with Melchior, he begged her to tell him how things had gone with his father, after his departure.

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The son of her late master had, then, brought back from Italy his tender and affectionate heart, however stern and anxious his long and colourless face might seem; and when he heard of the old man's longing to see him, and death, his eyes were wet with tears.

He interrupted the course of her narrative but seldom; when she came to his father's last hours, however, and the success of the experiment which had been made on her with the elixir, he plied her with question upon question until he was satisfied as to what he wished to know. Then he suddenly stood still in the middle of the room and lifting his eyes and arms on high cried aloud, like one in an ecstasy:

"Eternal Truth, holy Truth! Thy kingdom come!"

These words went through Frau Schimmel like a knife, and as Melchior stood there looking up at the ceiling as if he expected it to open and disclose to him a sight of Heaven, he seemed so great, and unapproachable, and apart, that she feared him, though in years gone by she had tucked his luncheon into his knapsack before sending him off to school, and tremblingly she yielded to his will as she had done before to his father's and swore again a solemn oath never to reveal what she might see or hear concerning the elixir.

This vow oppressed Frau Schimmel and she breathed more freely when he began to talk about things within the range of her comprehension, about the details of the housekeeping, and the laboratory on the second floor with the big furnace. He must find an assistant who would be silent and discreet and Frau Schimmel knew of one whom she could recommend, for her husband did not enjoy his newly acquired leisure; he had been so used to blowing a furnace and decocting medicines that he could not give up the occupation and consequently she could not roast so much as a pigeon without having his grim and blear-eyed visage peering over her shoulder.

The sensible woman foresaw that idleness would soon render the old bridegroom discontented, and Doctor Melchior, who remembered the silent man and his skilful hands, was very easily persuaded to give him a trial. At the back of the house there was a cheerful suite of rooms where the housekeeper and the apprentices had formerly lived. Melchior now put this apartment at the disposition of the old couple. Frau Schimmel would lend her aid to his wife, for Frau Bianca understood neither German nor the management of a German household, while from Herr Schimmel he anticipated the best particularly as he—the doctor—meant to devote himself at first entirely to the discovery of a remedy for his wife, whose condition filled him with the deepest apprehension.

The new laboratory was presently the scene of the most zealous labours, and Herr Schimmel was delighted with his new position, for no apothecary and chemist had ever before had such a well-fitted furnace and such delicate scales and instruments to work with; and if he did not understand what was the end of so much weighing and fusing

and distilling, or what the remedies were that the doctor was always decanting from the boiling liquids, yet the occupation made the long summer days pass most pleasantly, for he had none of that love of the open air that most Leipcigers bring into the world with them.

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Since his apprenticeship, and a whole lifetime had passed since then, he had left the apothecary shop only twice a year to take a holiday, and on none of these occasions had he ever seen green trees, for his “outings” as he called them, fell, according to his own wish, on the festival of the “Three Kings” in January, and on the twenty-seventh of March which was his saint’s day, his name being Rupert.

Of the eighty holidays that lay behind him—all of which he had spent in going to see a sister who was married to a miller and lived in Gohlis— nine and thirty times it had rained, and forty-one times it had snowed. In consequence of this “a walk in the fresh air” always suggested to his mind, damp clothes, wet feet, ruined shoes, a cold in the head, and an attack of indigestion—the result of his sister’s greasy cooking. His wife, too, preferred the inside of the city walls, “where” as she was so fond of saying, “you know where you are.”

Thus even in summer Herr Schimmel was always on hand to help the doctor, nor had he cause to complain of being over worked, for the master seemed as fond of a walk in the open air as the assistant was averse to one, and when May came and the fruit trees were in blossom, when the delicate green leaves of the beeches burst from the bud, and the oaks shed their dry brown foliage in order to deck themselves out in young green, and the dandelions embroidered the fields with gold and then sprinkled them over with silver tissue, when the cowslips and daisies and violets and their spring companions in purple and yellow appeared, and the larches on the banks of the Pleisse turned green, when the nightingale sang and rejoiced in the woods, then Doctor Melchior Ueberhell rarely spent a sunny afternoon at home.

With his beautiful young wife on his arm he wandered through the lovely Laubwald—that precious possession of the city—and though he had often said while in Italy, where it is dryer and the foliage sparser than in Germany, that there was nothing so beautiful as the abounding brooks and the dense greenery of his native forests, it gave him sincere joy, that spring, to have his opinion confirmed and to see that his dearly loved wife cared as much for the German woods as he did.

When in their walks they encountered other burghers, all eyes rested on the handsome pair, for if Melchior were thin, his figure was tall and his features good, and there was a strange charm in his big, dark, eyes that seemed to find more in the woods than was visible to others, moreover the black clothes of his profession sat as well upon him as did his wife’s white dresses and kerchiefs of costly stuffs upon her. These she was fond of relieving by a bit of light blue, her favourite colour. The slim young Italian, with her bowed head and beautiful pale face framed in its black hair, seemed like an elf who had gone out in her light dress to dance the May dance in the moonlight and had decked herself with forget-me-not and gentian.

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Whoever saw her felt glad, for it seemed to him as if he had met with a piece of good fortune, but no one sought to make her acquaintance, although the doctor had not omitted to take her, soon after their arrival, to call upon his relatives and the dignitaries of the city. People had asked them at first to dine, but as Melchior always refused because of his wife's delicate health, they did not press the matter; for no one could talk with her as she understood no German, while all who heard her light cough felt that the doctor was right to guard his fragile treasure so carefully.

When the few matrons who visited her called upon her, instead of finding her in the kitchen or the cellar, they found her lying upon the sofa with a book or her guitar in her hands, or perhaps playing with her little boy, and the amiable ones among them explained it by her pale face and delicate air, but the severer ones said that such idleness was the Italian custom and they pitied the doctor.

What the feminine relatives of the doctor chiefly resented was the fact that the young couple seemed to get on so perfectly well without them. Happiness indeed shone in their eyes, and the silent doctor seemed to find his tongue when he walked in the woods and fields with his beloved wife. The notary Anselmus Winckler was also loud in his praises of both of them. He was the only person who ever joined them in their walks through the woods, and as he had been for several years Melchior's companion at school in Bologna, and had there learned to speak the sweet Italian tongue, he could talk with Frau Blanca like one of her own countrymen. He was a convivial person, and when he was in the tavern, or dining with a friend, he would expatiate on how learned the doctor was in all the secrets of nature and how well Dr. Vitali, Frau Bianca's father, had known how to cultivate her appreciation of the good and the beautiful. To hear her questions and her husband's tender and wise replies was a pleasure unspeakable.

If the weather were fine the doctor would sometimes go out in the mornings also, and then he liked best to take his young wife to the Ueberhell garden outside the Petersthor, and show her what rare herbs and fruit-trees his father and grandfather had planted, and Frau Bianca amused herself by gathering the flowers, or helping her child to pick the ripe cherries and early pears.

In Bologna she had found it difficult to entice her husband away from his work, indeed her own father, his master, had held him back, and now she rejoiced that in the new home he was willing to give her so many hours of his time, moreover—he had confessed it to her—instead of the elixir, which she had been taught from childhood to regard as the worthiest object of research, he was seeking for a medicine that should cure her.

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Autumn came, and the starlings assembled on the Thomaskirche, the storks in the village, and the swallows on the roof of the neighbour's house to prepare for their flight towards the south; heavy storms tore the leaves from the trees, one dull rainy day followed another, and when at last the mountain-ash berries and the barberries were shining in all their brightest scarlet, the rosy flush that had been coaxed into the young wife's cheeks during the long, dry, happy summer changed to a crimson spot, her eyes acquired a strained, longing, mournful expression, and after she had had an attack of coughing she would sink together as if the autumn winds had broken her as they had the stems of the mallow which were hanging from the trellis in the little garden outside.

Then a day came when the Court physician Olearius found his way into "The Three Kings." It was in the middle of December and straw was strewn in the street in front of the Ueberhell house. Those who had held aloof from the young couple in their happy hours now drew near in their misfortune. It seemed as if the young Italian had suddenly become the idol of the inhabitants of Leipsic, so many were the inquiries about her condition, so numerous the friendly offers of service, the kindly gifts of hot-house flowers and rare wines. Just as the Christmas bells rang out along the streets of the city the joyful tidings "Christ is born" a sharp cry rang through the rooms of The Three Holy Kings and Melchior knelt beside his blighted flower that now was whiter even than the lily, for the last shimmer of red had faded forever from her wan cheeks, and he wrung his hands in utter despair.

The funeral train that followed the young Italian, who had appeared among them like a fleeting vision of Paradise, would have done honour to the wife of the Chief Justice.

Every one who was respectable and aristocratic in Leipsic followed her, as well as many humbler folk on whom Bianca's glance had rested but once. People were now so open-hearted, and seemed to wish to give to the dead what they had withheld from the living. Hot tears were shed, for though not one of all the mourners had ever really known Bianca, they felt that they had lost something beautiful.

The only member of the family of Ueberhell who did not make part of the funeral train was the chief mourner, the bereaved Doctor Melchior himself.

Alone and tearless he paced the chamber that Bianca had occupied. He denied himself to all who wished to see him or to comfort him, he even refused to admit the notary Winckler.

That the flower of his life was crushed, and that he carried a death-wound in his heart was all that he felt or thought.

Frau Schimmel began at last to fear that he too would die. If the vision that showed her Frau Bianca on her death-bed had come true, why should not the other one concerning the doctor? He ate and drank less than a Carthusian on a fast-day, he offended all the

good people who had shown his wife such honour, he went neither to mass nor to his work in the laboratory, and consequently her husband, too, was idle and threatened to become unbearable once more.

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How would it all end?

The burghers exhibited great indulgence towards him. He had received a terrible blow, and one must forgive him for not having followed the coffin, particularly, as nothing else was wanting that was necessary to an imposing and expensive funeral: Frau Schimmel had taken care of that, having arranged it on her own responsibility. When the great healer, Time, had comforted him, then would he draw near to them again, most of his friends thought, yes even nearer than before, now that he had lost his invalid wife who had hindered him from joining their gay circles.

We are so willing to be lenient to the unfortunate, for a Greater than we has visited them with sorrow such as man could not inflict.

But it ended otherwise than his friends anticipated. The Three Kings lay there like a deserted house, and although the tall chimney on the roof began to belch forth streams of smoke by night, as well as by day, hardly four weeks after the death of Bianca, it was commonly supposed that the place was unoccupied. Commonly supposed: for once in a while the knocker was heard when Herr Winckler called, happy childish laughter floated out from the open window, or Frau Schimmel was seen with her basket on her arm going to market.

But no one ever met the doctor, neither at mass nor in the street, and yet he did not always remain at home.

In summer at sunrise he went to the churchyard, and from there into the woods; in winter, when the first stars appeared, he wrapped himself in his black cloak and went to Bianca's grave, and thence to one of the neighbouring villages, but he never entered anywhere, and only the sexton who admitted him to the graveyard, and the gate watchman, who opened the burgher's wicket to him, ever exchanged greetings with him.

At home he wandered around no longer, idle and fasting, but ate his meals regularly, and threw himself into his work with such passionate energy, that even the industrious Schimmel found it too much, and Frau Schimmel grew anxious. The latter, too, knew what the doctor hoped to accomplish by his hard work, for she had spied upon him, but she must not be blamed as it had been with the most praiseworthy intention.

Four weeks after Bianca's death, and after he had shed many hot and heart-felt tears, Melchior turned for the first time to his work again.

It happened late in the evening, and before he went into the laboratory he uttered such strange words over the sleeping child that Frau Schimmel, who was watching beside it, was frightened, especially as Schimmel had not been called to aid the doctor, and what might happen to the distraught man, if he were left to work alone, passed in gloomy



visions before the old lady. So she concealed herself behind the bellows that were attached to the furnace, and there she was witness of events that sent cold shivers down her back whenever she thought of them.

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In his best holiday costume of black velvet puffed with silk he entered the laboratory, holding himself very erect. The high, arched room was only dimly lighted by a hanging-lamp, but when Frau Schimmel heard his steps she shrank together till, as she fancied, she must have become smaller and less easily discoverable. What she feared was that he might start the furnace and she should be obliged to reveal herself because of the heat.

But to her great relief he walked straight into the middle of the laboratory and stopped directly under the lamp, which was suspended from the point where the ribs of the vaulting intersected. There he waved a fresh laurel branch towards every side of the room and called out the same words and names that he had murmured by the bed-side of his son, only louder and more imperiously.

To the listener it was perfectly clear that this was an invocation of spirits, and her knees trembled under her, and her teeth chattered so audibly that she feared he must hear her. Though she closed her eyes tightly in order not to see the hellish brood that was about to pervade that Christian house, fearing that she might be strangled by them or go mad; yet the unholy creatures must have entered the laboratory obedient to their master's call for she distinctly heard him greet one of them solemnly.

As she did not smell any sulphur fumes nor see any dancing flames when she peeped out from under her half-closed lids, she gathered sufficient courage to look about her. But she saw nothing save the doctor on his knees talking into the corner of the laboratory, where there was nothing but the broom with which she had swept the stone floor that morning, and the shabby old brown peruke that Herr Schimmel was in the habit of putting on in the winter when he crossed the court-yard.

These apparitions she knew so intimately that she began to be reassured, and her confidence once restored she reflected that either the spirits must have held her unworthy of a sight of them and have been visible only to the master, or else that the doctor had gone completely out of his mind. Of her own sanity she had no doubts for her mind was made of sterner stuff and would therefore be less easily affected.

Whether Doctor Melchior were holding converse with the broom, or the peruke, or a spectre whom he, and no one else could see Frau Schimmel could not tell, but she had then recovered herself sufficiently to be able to listen attentively.

She crossed herself several times for the sake of greater safety, and what she heard from the doctor's own mouth remained a secret between her and Schimmel.

Not a word did she lose till Melchior went into the library next the laboratory, and then she thought it expedient to leave her hiding-place and hurry to her room.

Schimmel had long been in bed, and his snoring greeted her as she entered, but she wakened him to tell him breathlessly what she had just seen and heard.

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After she had explained her anxiety about the doctor and its consequences, she continued that the apparition which the doctor had invoked was the Spirit of Truth. Whether it had been obedient to the call she could not say, but, at any rate it had been no demon of hell—God be praised—bringing a reek of the pit, and besides Satan was the Prince of Lies and would consider himself insulted if he were called the Spirit of Truth, moreover the spirit who had appeared to the doctor had behaved in the most exemplary manner.

The master, too, had confessed with true Christian humility and self reproach that he had sinned against the Spirit of Truth, to whom none the less he had dedicated his body and soul, inasmuch as, influenced by his great love for his wife, he had devoted himself to finding a remedy which would cure her, and had thus become a traitor to the object of his life.

After this he had sprung up and held aloft his hand with the forefinger extended and sworn to the spirit that nothing here after would seduce him from the pursuit of the elixir which was to render Truth triumphant in the world.

Fran Schimmel described how the doctor's eyes had glowed at these words, and how he had looked as if an invisible hand had written "Truth" in large letters upon his forehead. He would be as certain to reach his goal as she would be to pray the holy saints for a peaceful death.

After a long silence and much consideration the only thing that Herr Schimmel found to say in answer to these important revelations was: "It is all the same to me," to which his dear wife, with like brevity, and sincere disgust replied: "You fool!"

The next morning the doctor began work afresh and with redoubled zeal.

Every drug that had been reserved from the laboratory of the late Court apothecary was brought, mixed with the elixir and fused; and he tried each new mixture on himself, for Frau Schimmel was not to be persuaded to smell any more elixirs.

She, however, was more studious than ever of the necessities of the household, and of the material comfort of the doctor and his child, and when she noticed that her master began to cough as his dead wife had done, she entreated him to take better care of himself, and not to leave his son an orphan she also instigated Herr Winckler to beg him to consider his own welfare and that of the child.

There was yet another thing that made her unhappy.

Her whole heart was wrapped up in little Zeno, and when he was dressed in his best on feast-days a prettier and nobler looking child than he was not to be seen.



But the doctor did not seem to have much affection for him; yet in the evenings when the little one was in bed he went through the same performance that had been customary during the lifetime of its mother, and once in a while he would lift the child out of the cradle and press it to his heart so passionately that the boy, in a fright would struggle to get away from him and would cry for Frau Schimmel. Finally the child became so afraid of its father that it would not go near him and this the old housekeeper could bear no longer, so she took her courage in her hands and spoke to her master about it.

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She began by saying she had not forgotten that, according to his dead father the saints had endowed her with a very limited intelligence, but that she knew enough to be certain that it could be neither wise, nor right for a man who had been blessed with such a fine son, to be indifferent to his treasure and indeed to estrange it.

The extraordinary man looked at her with his sad eyes and answered thoughtfully: "I demand nothing from the boy because I have no other idea than to give him all I have and am. For his benefit I am seeking something higher than the world has yet known, and I shall find it."

The lofty words silenced Frau Schimmel, but she thought to herself: "With my few brains I am yet wiser than you. A heartfelt, willing kiss from your child would make you happier than all the learning that you make so much fuss about, and a caress or a spank from you—each at the proper time—would do little Zeno more good than all the world-improving discoveries in search of which you embitter your days and nights."

One beautiful afternoon in June on her return from the graveyard, whither she regularly took the boy, and where she herself carefully tended the white roses on Bianca's grave, she found the doctor stretched on the sofa, instead of being in the laboratory as usual, and as he sighed heavily when she entered, she asked him respectfully what it was that oppressed him.

At first he shook his head as if he wished to be left alone, but when she, in spite of this, remained and he noticed that her gray eyes were full of tears, he suddenly remembered that by the side of his mother's coffin, and more recently at Bianca's death-bed they had wept together, then his full heart overflowed, and gasping and shaken by his cough he burst forth with: "It will soon be over—I feel it within me, and yet I am no nearer to the goal. All the elements of nature I have called to my aid—all the spirits 'twixt Heaven and Earth over whom necromancy has any power have I made subject to my will and have commanded them to help me—to what end? There stands the elixir and is hardly more valuable than the small beer with which the servant down-stairs quenches his thirst, indeed it is less useful for who derives any benefit from it? I shall quit this world an unhappy man who has wasted his life and talents in untold efforts from his school-days until now—and yet, if the spirit would only reveal to me the missing substance which should give to this liquid in my hand the power that it once possessed, gladly would I sacrifice twenty lives! Oh! you faithful old soul, you can never understand it, I know. But this world, where lying and deceit flourish, would be changed into a Paradise, and it would be an Ueberhell whom mankind would have to thank for the great blessing. And now—now!"

Here he buried his face in his hands like one in despair. Frau Schimmel regarded the sorrowful man with deep sympathy, and as it was in her nature to try and comfort those who wept rather than to join in their lamentations, she cast about her for something that would console him.

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She had not far to seek, for there in the bay-window was perched little Zeno, carefully picking the green leaves off a rose bough that he had been told to gather from his mother's grave to take home to his father. The whole stem was now bare but the white blossom at the end was untouched, and still beautiful.

She beckoned to the boy, and in a low voice bade him rouse his father and give him the rose from the churchyard; little Zeno obeyed and walked straight towards Melchior; opposite the sofa his courage failed him for a moment, but he took heart again and laying his little hand on the prematurely gray hair of the disheartened sage said, with all the sweet charm peculiar to a child when it speaks to comfort one who is its natural guardian and support:

"Father, little Zeno brings you a rose. It comes from the churchyard. Mamma sent it to you with her love."

The doctor, deeply touched, sat up suddenly, grasped the child's hand that held out the rose to him and tried to draw the boy towards him in order to embrace him. But Zeno, instead of answering the loving words addressed to him, struggled and cried out sharply, for the strong pressure of his father's hand had driven a big thorn into his finger, and the blood from the wound was running down onto his light blue dress.

The doctor was distracted. He had hurt the one creature for whose future greatness he had sacrificed his waning strength.

There flowed the blood of his son who had come as messenger from his wife. On her he had lavished the one great love of his life and the white rose that she had sent him lay at his feet!

As his gaze fell upon the flower that she had loved better than all others, and then rested upon the crying child, a great tenderness filled his soul and for the first time he felt deep remorse that he had not dedicated his whole life to his love. To devote the remainder of his time on earth, which he felt would be but short, to the child who stood there crying, seemed to him at that moment his holiest duty; yet the passion of the investigator within him could not be subdued, for as he looked about in search of a cloth to stanch the blood that flowed from the boy's finger his eyes fell upon the bottle of elixir on the table, and then on the rose at his feet and the thought flashed across him that Bianca who had sent him the rose might have indicated to him by the hand of their offspring the substance which he needed to achieve the object of his life.

Of every element found in water or in air, in the earth or fire, he had added a portion to the elixir, save only the blood of a child.

Breathless he caught the hand of his son and held it over the phial, speaking coaxingly to him while drop after drop of the red life blood trickled into the elixir.

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Then he put the child in Frau Schimmel's arms and hurried into the laboratory as fast as his tired feet could carry him. There he blew the bellows so violently that the housekeeper looked at him with silent indignation. When all was prepared he poured the liquid into a crucible, set it among the glowing and sparkling coals and murmured strange words and spells over the seething fluid until it boiled up and the hissing bubbles ran over the rim of the crucible. Then he stood the hot vessel in cold water, pronounced one more incantation over it, held it before a mirror—the symbol of the Spirit of Truth and the emblem which she is always represented as carrying in her right hand—and poured the liquid back into the phial. Beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, his eyes gleamed with excitement, and he breathed heavily as he approached his son to try the power of the new elixir on him.

But something most unexpected happened: Frau Schimmel, usually so timid, pressed the boy's face against her breast and, her good gray eyes flashing with her angry determination to resist, cried out "Do with your elixir what you will, only leave me the child in peace! Little Zeno speaks the truth without any of your mixtures. A child's mind is a holy thing, so his mother who is now an angel would tell you, and I—I will not permit you to misuse it, in order to try your arts upon it!"

And stranger yet! The doctor accepted this rebuff and did not even reprove the old lady for her disrespectful opposition, he only answered, with calm certainty: "Neither the child nor any one else is needed to make the experiment."

He inhaled the contents of the phial himself, in long breaths, staring for some time thoughtfully at the floor and then at the arches of the ceiling. His chest rose and fell heavily, and he wiped the perspiration now and then from his damp brow. Frau Schimmel watched him anxiously, and she could not say whether he looked more like a madman or a saint as he finally lifted his arms towards heaven and cried: "I have found it, Father, Bianca!—I have found it!"

Frau Schimmel left him alone and put the child to bed. When she returned to the laboratory and found the doctor in the same place where she had left him, she said modestly: "Here I am and if it pleases the Herr Doctor to try the elixir on so humble a person as myself, I am at his service. Only one favour would I ask: would the Herr Doctor be so kind as not to ask questions about Schimmel and myself or any member of the honoured Ueberhell family."

But the doctor hesitated awhile before accepting this offer, for he had not forgotten the defiant words with which she had withheld his child from him only a short time before, and moreover the trial which he had made on himself had assured him of the success of his discovery; having inhaled the essence it had seemed to him as if the burden of oppression had been suddenly lifted from his mind. And when he turned to the introspection of himself, and questioned his own heart, he found so many spots and



defects on what he had hitherto considered faultless, that he was confirmed in the belief that he had seen the true reflection of his own personality for the first time.

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Yes, he might well be certain of his success!

And yet the joy of the discovery was clouded. How often had he dreamed of the manifold effects that would be produced by the elixir! At such moments the hope had sprung up within him that it would possess the power to enlighten him concerning his own nature and existence; would enable him to pierce the veil that hides the mystery of the future from mortal eyes; that it would reveal to the mind of man the true nature of things, and solve the problem of life.

Yet all the questions directed to that end, which he asked himself, remained unanswered, and for this reason he was desirous of seeing whether the essence might not perhaps enable others to grasp the real nature of that which until then had been unfathomable by man.

Consequently he could not resist the temptation, of letting Frau Schimmel inhale the elixir. Then he asked her why every one who was born was destined to die, and disappear?

To which she only answered: "Such things you must ask of the good God, who has so willed it."

When he wished further to know how, and of what ingredients the human blood was made, the old lady laughed, and replied lightly that it was red, and more than that she had not learned from the "Schoolmaster with the Children," from which she had acquired all that she knew.

Then the doctor cried: "And so my hard-earned discovery is of less value than I hoped!"

But these words had scarcely escaped him before he smiled to himself, for it was the elixir that had forced him to this outbreak, otherwise he would never have confessed to any one, be he who be might, that his wonderful discovery was in any way incomplete.

Being satisfied with his experiences for that day he no longer hindered the old lady from going to rest.

On his own bed he lay and pondered over the limitations of his discovery.

To reveal the truth, wholly and absolutely, was not within the power of the elixir, nor unfortunately did it possess the efficacy to lead one to a perfect knowledge of oneself; on the other hand it was capable of forcing any one who used it to be absolutely honest in his dealings with his neighbours, and that surely was no small gain. Indeed it was enough to place him among the most famous discoverers in all ages, and to inscribe his name beside those of the noblest benefactors of man in the whole round world.

Sleepless, yet filled with triumphant joy, like a general who has won a glorious victory, he watched through the night. When Frau Schimmel came to the house on the following morning she found him with the little Zeno between his knees.

Her suspicion was immediately aroused that the father had misused the child in order to try the effect of the elixir upon it, and she stood at the door and listened.

But the little bottle tightly corked peered from the doctor's breast-pocket and, instead of questioning Zeno, he was talking to him earnestly:

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"Your mother," he was saying, "was more precious to me than life or aught else, and you, my little one, are dear to me, too, chiefly because it was she who gave you to me, but who knows if I might not have sacrificed you if the success of the work, to which I have devoted so many years, had depended upon it. Now I have reached the goal, and I tell you, my boy, there are only two joys here below so great as to give a foretaste of the bliss that awaits us in Paradise: one is the sweet rapture of true love, and the other, the transport of the inventor when his experiment is successful. I have known both."

During this speech, which the doctor had made under the influence of the elixir, the boy stared at his father with open mouth, undecided whether to be afraid, or to consider it all a jest and laugh.

Frau Schimmel made an end of his doubt, for she could not bring herself to stand by patiently and have the child confused by such extraordinary sentiments. She interrupted the doctor: "Little Zeno finds his pleasure in very different ways, don't you, my lamb? You would rather have your father send you to market with Frau Schimmel who buys cherries for you, wouldn't you? Cherries are better for children than 'true love,' and all the other nonsense that men worry themselves about."

The doctor only laughed and said "One day he will learn for himself what his father meant, and if you wish to buy him cherries, you good old soul, take him along with you and pick out the finest. You might also go to the Nuremberg shop and let him choose the most beautiful horse, and whatever else among the toys that he wishes for, no matter how expensive it may be; for I owe it in part to my boy that I have attained my object, and I must hurt him a bit more. But don't be afraid! He will hardly feel it."

What did that remarkable man have in mind? Certainly, no good!

As Frau Schimmel felt that she stood in the place of a mother to her darling, she demanded respectfully what the doctor meant to do to the child.

He answered in some embarrassment, and without looking at the old lady; "It is because I have need of a larger quantity of the elixir. If I were to bleed another child—and bleeding is good for every one, big or little—they would accuse me of practising the black arts and perhaps, after their fashion of making a mountain out of a molehill, would denounce me as an infanticide. Therefore the boy must spare a few more drops of his blood, and he will do so gladly if he receives something pretty as a reward. I am very skilful and can draw the blood without hurting him."

When, however, Frau Schimmel clasped her hands, and Zeno, whimpering, hid his face in her skirts, the doctor hastened to add: "There, there, I am not going to do it at once, and perhaps it is just as well that I should experiment with my own blood first. So take the boy out and buy him the finest plaything you can find, and leave a message at Herr

Winckler's; he is to come to-day to The Three Kings, for I have something very important to communicate to him."

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The old lady was very glad to get the child beyond the reach of his father. His happiness was as incomprehensible to her, as his design on the blood of his child was dreadful, and she led the boy forth quickly. The doctor, however, went into the laboratory with wavering steps, and in the next half hour prepared more of the elixir into which he mixed some of his own blood.

The effect was the same as if he had used the blood of his child.

This delighted him so much that he fairly beamed with pleasure. But even then he gave himself no rest. He took the elixir which he had made the day before into the library, and there he wrote and wrote.

At noon he allowed a morsel of food to be brought to him, and ate it seated at his desk. When he had finished he continued his work with his pen, sealing-wax and seal, until the notary, Herr Winckler, called towards evening.

For the first time in the course of their long friendship he fell on the notary's neck, and told him with wet eyes, and broken voice that he had reached the happiest hour of his life, for the great work to which he had already dedicated himself while yet in Padua and Bologna, was completed, and that only the preceding evening he had achieved the most marvellous discovery of all times.

One of whose effects would be that a new epoch would dawn for the profession to which Herr Winckler belonged—that of the law.

Here his friend interrupted him to inquire what this discovery might be, but Melchior had the force to keep his secret, and only handed over to him the phial of the elixir, which he had previously packed carefully in a jewel casket of Bianca's, of Italian workmanship, and then wrapped in parchment, and tied, and fastened, with many seals.

He also entrusted his school companion with the letters which he had written, saying that his days were numbered, and giving him many instructions. Finally he made the notary swear to be a faithful guardian and second father to Zeno if he should be taken away.

At midnight the friends parted, deeply moved, and Herr Winckler told his wife that he had never seen any man, let alone the solemn Melchior, so bubbling over and beaming with happiness, and if one could judge by the radiance of his glance, and the fire of his youthful enthusiasm, his friend had many more good years to live.

But what had pleased him in the appearance of the doctor was, alas! only the expiring flicker of the burnt-out candle.

The intense excitement of the last few days had exhausted the sick man, and before dawn Frau Schimmel was roused by his bell. When she entered his room she found

him sitting up in bed with burning cheeks and coughing violently. He called for something to drink, saying that he was dying of thirst.

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When he was refreshed by a glass of wine mixed with water, which in Italy had grown to be his favourite drink, he said to the old housekeeper that he would not need to use his son's blood, as his own was equally efficacious. He also asked her if perchance his father had wounded his hand before he had discovered the elixir, and when Frau Schimmel stated that he had, for she remembered the broken glass retort which had cut the Court apothecary's finger the day before his death, he smiled and said: "Now the wonderful fact of his discovery is explained. A drop of the paternal blood must have found its way into the mixture. Thus one riddle after another is solved, and soon the last mystery that remains will become clear to me."

Then he added that having brought Truth into the world he was glad to depart to that region where it was always day, where there were no deceits and no uncertainties, and where the star of his life that had set would arise for him once more.

He murmured Bianca's name and closed his eyes, while a happy smile lit up his worn, thin face. His breast rose and fell with his irregular breathing, shaken now and then by his cough and feverish shivering, and often he cried out like one inspired: "Infinite labour, measureless reward! All, all fulfilled!"

Frau Schimmel realised that the end had come. After he had received the sacrament, the old lady laid his hand upon the curly head of his son. Melchior gazed fondly into the sweet face of his child, and quietly closed his eyes.

The priest who administered extreme unction to him was fond of telling the story of this last sacrament, for he had never seen any dying man exhibit greater confidence and faith.

Frau Schimmel cried herself nearly blind.

On the third day after the death of Doctor Melchior Ueberhell, his mortal remains were carried to rest with great ceremony, and buried in the place that he himself had chosen during his lifetime.

Between his wife and his mother, rose the little mound that marked his resting-place, and later many who visited the churchyard used to stop beside the graves of Bianca and Melchior, perhaps because of the creeping roses which had been planted beneath the cross of his beloved, and which spread so luxuriantly that they soon covered the husband's grave as well as the wife's, and in the month of June decked them both with a wondrous wealth of blossom.

In the letter which the doctor handed to Herr Winckler, the guardian of his son, shortly before his death, he desired the notary, or his successor, to give to his son Zeno, on the morning of his twenty-fifth birthday, the sealed package containing the phial, together with the accompanying manuscript.



In a second letter on which was written: "To be opened in case my son Zeno should die before reaching his twenty-fifth birth day," he informed the notary of the power that dwelt within the phial, and charged him to employ it for the benefit of mankind.

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Both letters—the one to Zeno and the other to the notary—contained precise directions for the making of the elixir, and also the recommendation that it should be sent to all universities and faculties, as well as to the spiritual and temporal authorities of his beloved fatherlands, Saxony and Germany, that it might become the common property of the whole world.

To Frau Schimmel the doctor entrusted the worldly welfare of little Zeno, and to the notary the responsibility of his education, and both of these people not only fulfilled their duties, but gave the child a large share of their love, so that the orphan thrived both in mind and body.

That he was neither wiser nor duller, stronger nor weaker than his school companions pleased Frau Schimmel, for as she loved to say: “Those people over whom one exclaims when one meets them, either because of their exceptional goodness or badness, are destined to be unhappy in this world.”

The old lady also took great pleasure in dressing the boy very finely, and as he would one day be rich, she had no fear for his future, save that on his twenty-fifth birthday he was to receive his father’s elixir, concerning which, loyal to her oath, she maintained silence towards everyone.

But even this anxiety was, she thought, to be removed when one day there was an alarm of fire, and she learned that a conflagration had broken out in the oil cellar of the Winckler house, and that the notary’s quarters had been entirely destroyed by the flames.

But she rejoiced too soon, for only Doctor Melchior’s letters to his son and to the notary were burned, and the strange old lady could hardly bring herself to forgive the brave and conscientious guardian of her favourite, because at great personal risk he had saved the casket containing the phial.

Of Zeno there is very little to tell, except that from a child he grew to be a fine youth, with the great dark eyes of his mother, and that he cared much about his elegant clothes, and was devoted to his noble horse.

In his twenty-third year he became a doctor of ancient and modern jurisprudence, in his twenty-fourth he gained admission to the famous Leipsic “Schoppen” court of justice, and now the venerable Frau Schimmel as well as his guardian, the notary, whose housekeeper had died in the meanwhile, were strongly urging him to choose a helpmate for life.

As the wishes of his guardians coincided with his own in this particular, he hastened to fulfil them, and his choice fell upon the daughter of an officer of high rank, who had been noticeable at the Rathhaus balls on account of the elegance of her costume.

Frau Schimmel was apprehensive, for according to her ideas, an honourable young woman of good burgher family was better suited to the heir of The Three Kings; yet in reality she considered nothing too good or too beautiful for Zeno, and after she had learned from the officer's servants that their mistress was of a cheerful disposition, and was able with her own skilful hands to dress herself well on very small means, and to keep up an appearance of elegance in her father's house which swarmed with children, she came to the conclusion that Zeno's choice was a wise one.

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She therefore gave her consent to his wooing, and at the end of three months the wedding took place with great magnificence, to the sound of drums and trumpets. The young husband went about as if he were borne on wings.

Surely there was no bride in all Saxony so lovely and so beautiful, and when she refused flatly to have Frau Schimmel invited to the wedding feast, he excused her, thinking that her refusal was the result of her aristocratic surroundings and training. The question did not give rise to any open quarrel, for Frau Schimmel of her own accord announced that it was enough for her to pray for the happiness of the young couple in church.

For four weeks after the wedding-day, Zeno continued to wonder that such exquisite bliss could fall to the lot of any mortal in this world, which so many people regarded as a vale of sorrow, and when his passionate dark eyes were reflected in the cooler blue ones of his wife, and she returned his caresses sweetly but without laying aside her distinctive and reserved manner, which he laid to the account of maidenly bashfulness, he felt that no one could be more blessed, and that he was the most enviable of men. So the time passed, and his twenty-fifth birthday was approaching. The young Frau Ueberhell awaited with even greater curiosity than her husband, the disclosure of the contents of the sealed package which Herr Winckler had in charge for his ward.

On the morning of the birthday Frau Rosalie dismissed the housekeeper, whom she kept at a distance, and herself admitted the notary when she saw him approach The Three Kings, which by her wish had been richly decorated with stucco and gilding, and furnished with stable room for Zeno's horse and her two ponies.

The old gentleman brought with him the parcel, as the young couple expected and after saying that unfortunately the written instructions, which Doctor Melchior had given him at the same time with the box, had fallen a victim to the flames, he broke the seals that had fastened the package for so many years, and Rosalie clapped her hands when the beautiful casket of carved ivory mounted in gold came to view.

It was opened with great care, and Zeno took from it a paper which lay on a rose-coloured silk pad and on which Doctor Melchior had written in large Roman characters: "To my son Zeno Ueberhell. To be used according to the directions found in the letter accompanying the casket, afterwards to be given to his eldest son on his twenty-fifth birthday, and thus always to be handed down from first-born to first-born, to the last one, which, please Heaven, will be to the end of Time, in order that the phial, destined to change the aspect of human life, and lead it to its true salvation, may remain forever a priceless heirloom in the Ueberhell family. By means of the accompanying prescription every experienced chemist will be able to make the elixir in any desired quantity. My blessing rest upon you, my son, and upon every Ueberhell who, on his twenty-fifth birthday—that is having reached maturity—shall receive this little bottle and regard it as the most precious of all his possessions."

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This inscription Melchior's son read with trembling voice, and he was so deeply moved by the solemnity of his father's words that he did not perceive his young wife lift the cushion from the casket, examine the phial with curiosity, and then, having removed the glass stopper with difficulty, hold the bottle to her dainty little nose.

But she closed the phial as quickly as she had opened for she experienced so strange a sensation, her blood beat through her veins so oddly, that, impelled by some inner force, and regardless of the presence of Herr Winckler, and the tact which she usually displayed, she cried out: "So that, then, is your inheritance! A bit of coloured glass which one could buy in the street for a trifle, and a few brown drops of some stuff which no one knows the use of, now that the directions are burned."

As Zeno, surprised at these shrill notes which he now heard for the first time, in his wife's voice, tried to pacify her, saying that no doubt the liquid possessed marvellous properties, and that they could not blame his sainted father because an unlucky accident had destroyed his elucidation of them, and sought to draw her to him, she pushed him away roughly, and answered with angry scorn: "Sainted, you call the old man! As if I didn't know that he was a master of all sorts of hellish arts and black magic! A fig for such saintship!"

They were bitter words, and, like one who has been wandering in sunshine and suddenly finds himself overwhelmed by blackest night, Zeno felt himself deprived of strength, the floor seemed to rise, and his knees trembled.

He grasped the phial, hoping to recover himself by aid of the pungent odour that escaped from it, and even as he inhaled the contents, light seemed once more to flood the darkness, and very erect, and with a dignity of which he had not hitherto thought himself capable, he listened to Rosalie's further words.

He grew very pale, and it was with difficulty that he restrained himself, but he did not interrupt her as, forced by the power of the elixir, she went on to declare, that she had accepted his offer of marriage merely because he was sufficiently presentable, notwithstanding his humble origin, to enable her to walk or ride with him about the city without feeling humiliated; that she had hoped and expected to find great wealth by means of which as his wife, she could lead the life that she enjoyed, and be able also to help her father to bring up her younger brothers and sisters in a fashion befitting their rank; that on the contrary she had found him only rich enough to secure her own comfortable existence, and for this she had chained herself to a turtle dove whose eternal cooing was beginning to weary her beyond endurance; that now her last hope of the riches, which one had a right to expect in the house of a magician, had vanished, and that if it were not for the gossip of the townsfolk, she would return to her father's house.

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With this statement Rosalie stopped and looked around her, frightened by her own frankness, which she now recognized as unwise and fatal to the last degree.

The unlooked-for and dignified reserve of her injured husband, together with his ghastly paleness disturbed her, and her inquietude grew to painful anxiety as he maintained silence. At length he said "I have learned to love you truly and passionately, my wife, and now you show me how you have returned the affection which my heart bestowed upon you. You are right when you accuse me of having laid too much stress upon vain trifles. For that very fault I have been most severely punished, for had I wooed you in woollen, instead of in velvet, I should never have had the misfortune to be bound to a woman like you. Nor was it love that led me to you, but the miserable ambition to bring a nobleman's daughter into my burgher home. So we both deceived each other, and now if you wish to return whence I took you—you may leave my home unhindered."

The young wife buried her face in her hands and answered: "No, no, life is too miserable and poverty-stricken at home and I have suffered too much in the long struggle to keep up appearances. And then what would people say? No, no,—I will do everything that I can to please you."

"Very well, you may stay," he replied gloomily.

Frau Schimmel, who had been in the room for some time, turned to the notary and said: "The Court apothecary used to say that I was stupid, but thirty years ago I foretold what has happened here today."

She then implored Zeno to throw the elixir into the Pleisse, but for the first time he exhibited a will of his own. He put the phial and the document in his father's writing into his breast pocket, and tucking the gray-haired notary under his arm, he left the room.

Frau Schimmel followed his example. Having reached the ground-floor she stopped and, shaking her gray head, murmured: "Doctor Melchior was such a wise man, I wonder he did not order that each of his successors should make the girl of his choice inhale the elixir before he proposed to her. The life I led with Vorkel, and with my second husband Schimmel, who lies beside the first in the churchyard, was hardly perfect, but Zeno's existence will be hell upon earth."

But this time Frau Schimmel was a little wide of the mark in her prophesy. The two young people, for a time, treated each other distantly and coldly, but Fran Rosalie learned to regard her husband with a timid respect that sat well upon her. As for him he was transformed into a stern man since he had inhaled the elixir, and his severe dress seemed but an outward sign of his earnestness. Before the year was out a boy was given to them, and when Rosalie saw him take the little one in his arms and kiss it, she called him to her bedside and whispered: "Forgive me."

He made a sign of pardon, and stooping, kissed her white face, that was still the dearest in the world to him. Then he went to his own room and inhaled the elixir whose properties and effect he had long before learned from Frau Schimmel. He called aloud, as if speaking to another person: "If she be good to the child, I will no longer make her feel how she hurt me, though I can never forget it."

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But it was not granted to him to show by his actions that he had forgiven her, for during the night fever supervened, and before morning she died.

Her hot hand had lain in his, just before her heart ceased to beat, and had pressed it, as if in farewell.

Frau Schimmel followed her darling's unfortunate wife shortly afterwards. Her death was a peaceful and happy one, for Zeno held her withered hand, and talked to her of the days when she had dressed him in his beautiful light-blue frocks. He closed her eyes himself, and followed her coffin to the churchyard.

Only Herr Winckler remained to the widower, who lived alone with his son in The Three Kings, and like a father, more than a friend, aided him in his researches concerning the elixir.

They discovered that it produced its effect only on those who were connected with the Ueberhell family. This was a great disappointment to Zeno, for he set a high value upon truth, and had heard from his father's friend what great blessings for mankind the dead man had anticipated from his discovery. All his hopes of using it in his profession to make hardened sinners confess their misdeeds, were therefore, vain. For this purpose it was certainly useless and Zeno and Herr Winckler concluded that the reason why its effect was so limited was because it owed its power to the blood of a child of the Ueberhell race.

That its potency extended to those who married into the Ueberhell house was proved by its effect upon Frau Rosalie. As it had also once vanquished Frau Schimmel, they argued that the Court apothecary must have used other blood beside his own, for he certainly had never been connected with his housekeeper by marriage. What had been intended to benefit the whole world, exercised its influence only in one direction, and on the members of one small family; this grieved the old notary when he recalled the happy and triumphant death-bed of his friend.

The elixir had undoubtedly changed Melchior's son to an incredible extent; from an easily-led, pleasure-loving youth, Zeno became a self-contained man—almost a recluse—and he won for himself the reputation of being one of the severest judges on the Leipsic bench.

High and low doffed their hats to him with respect, but he was not popular.

After he had worked at the Rathhaus long after hours, he would go home alone, and no one sought him out to pass an hour in his company, for everyone feared the rough and brutal frankness of his speech. The gregarious and friendly notary used to wince when he heard his adopted son spoken of as "the hard Ueberhell," or "the sinner's scourge,"



and he tried his best to make him more human, and to draw him within his circle of friends.

When death overtook Herr Winckler, from whose mouth Zeno used to hear many bitter tirades against the elixir, and Melchior's son found himself entirely alone, and making always more enemies by his irrepressible instinct to speak out what he thought to be the truth, he would sometimes ask himself if it were not better to destroy the elixir, which had brought him nothing but misery, and thus to spare his son and succeeding generations.

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But the stern upholder of the law did not feel that he had the right to disobey the instructions of his father. And so the elixir descended to his son, and was given to him on his twenty-fifth birthday by his guardian, for Zeno died before his only child reached that age.

What happened to this second Melchior Ueberhell whose unfortunate history....Here the story broke off. The son of one of my friends had found it in an old chest, when he was playing in the attic of The Three Kings. It was written in a discoloured blank-book, which had escaped the devastations of the mice and insects, because it had lain under a pile of aromatic herbs and drugs that had probably belonged to the shop of the Court apothecary.

Between the last page and the cover of the blank-book, which was confided to me, I found a continuation by a later Ueberhell.

This appendix could hardly have been written earlier than towards the end of the last century, to judge by the paper, the stiff, old-fashioned handwriting and, more surely still, by the fact that the writer mentions vaccination as a new discovery. Inoculation was first tried in 1796, and three years later an institution was opened in London where a Leipsic professor of medicine gave lectures.

This communication is signed: "Doctor Ernst Ueberhell, Professor of Medicine." And runs as follows:

Several centuries have passed since the time of the ancestor to whom we owe the wonderful history of the elixir as written in this book, and preserved from generation to generation in our family.

Many Ueberhells have closed their eyes forever, since then, and even the graves of Dr. Melchior and his beautiful wife Bianca have disappeared, owing to the removal of the burying-ground.

On the other hand the portrait in red crayon of Frau Bianca and the little Zeno is still carefully preserved as a most precious heirloom, and was the picture that inspired my sainted father with the desire to become an artist.

Our forebear Dr. Melchior devoted the best of his energies to the benefit, as he thought, of his race, perhaps indeed of all mankind, and yet his efforts were unavailing, for to my sorrow must I acknowledge that much of the enmity felt towards our family, and the disrepute into which our good old name fell, was caused by the elixir. The majority of Ueberhells were accused of presumption and arrogance, of opiniativeness and pugnacity. Many had made themselves disagreeable to their neighbours by their caustic criticisms and ill-natured complaints, at the same time bringing misfortune upon themselves by a most curious exhibition of their own faults.

The whole race degenerated so rapidly through their unbridled license and lack of consideration for others, that they ceased to be received by the members of the better circles, and there came to be an offensive saying that in Leipsic there were men, women, and Ueberhells.

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This dislike and animosity were visited upon one generation after another until finally it affected the worldly prosperity of the family. Even The Three Kings in the Katharinenstrasse which, by the way, had long ceased to be known by that name, was lost to us, and so remained for many years until my sainted father recovered it again, and that the Ueberhells did not fall into even greater distress was due largely to the timidity, nay absolute terror, with which they inspired many people.

From several of my relatives—and they without exception made use of the elixir when they received it on their twenty fifth birthday—I have heard many particulars concerning the experience, but there was only one who ever said that he had been happier and more contented because of it, and that was my sainted father, the painter, Johannes Ueberhell.

He lost his father very early, and was brought up and educated in poverty and distress by his good mother who remained a widow. It was she who sold the last of the jewels and plate that had come down to her from earlier and more prosperous days, in order to make it possible for Johannes to go to Dresden and study under a good master.

He was a virtuous youth, with a simple heart, and a disposition so gay that the unfortunate forgot their sorrow whenever he appeared.

Even as a child—so I have heard my grandmother say—he was so cheerful and contented despite their bitter poverty, that he made up a little prayer for himself in which he used to thank God for having created him.

This man, then, grew up to be truehearted and sincere without the elixir, but he made use of it, none the less, when it came into his possession, and it proved a great blessing to him. As a light-hearted and modest youth—so diffident that he was timid in his intercourse with older persons—he wandered over the Alps, with only fifty thalers in his pocket and a small knapsack on his back, to Rome where he was received into the studio of one of the most distinguished painters, as apprentice. This latter very soon became jealous of the great talent exhibited by my father and a competition occurring, exerted all his influence to keep the prizes from the German competitors and have them awarded to Italian artists of much less merit.

My father, unable to overcome his fatal shyness by any effort of will, had not the courage to withstand this unfairness until he was called home by his mother for his twenty-fifth birthday, and made use of the elixir.

This not only gave him the resolution, but forced him to proclaim the truth aloud, and to call injustice by its right name.

Owing to his accusations there was a thorough investigation of the affair, a new judge was appointed who awarded the first prize at once to Johannes Ueberhell, the said

prize consisting of a magnificent commission. Having thus achieved an opportunity of proving his worth, he rose quickly to eminence in his profession, and came to be a famous master while he was still a young man.

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In later life also he owed nothing but good to the elixir, for his soul was as pure as crystal, and his thoughts of others were so kindly that he could safely speak out everything that was in his mind.

His eyes perceived only the beautiful in the universe; and the beautiful and the true were one with him; so that he made others see and hear nothing save what was lovely and ennobling. Whenever any debasing or evil influence approached him he would trample upon it with all the fierceness of a true Ueberhell; but such conflicts seldom occurred, for his nature was so exalted that it carried him unconscious through the depravity and pollution of this world.

Yes, my father was a happy man, and I cannot deny that the elixir had much to do with his good fortune, for it forced him to reveal his innermost thoughts and to show people frankly what was passing in his mind, thus opening up to them a sunny, pure, and beautiful world which their dull eyes would never have discovered for themselves.

Therefore the best sought him out and made friends with him, and the more he prospered the wiser and better he grew.

One would imagine that the man to whom the elixir had been so beneficial would set a greater value upon it than others, and would be more careful to preserve it for his children and grandchildren. Not so.

After I had finished my studies at the High School and matriculated at the medical schools of the Leipsic University, my father sent for me to come during my vacation to Rome, where he still lived, and a few weeks before my twenty-fifth birthday I rode through the Porta del Popolo.

The evening before that anniversary my father took out the phial, showed it to me, and asked me what I thought of the verses that he had written on a label and attached to the bottle.

I read them, and they ran as follows:

In hearts alone where modesty resides  
Is found the priceless treasure of Pure Truth.  
If pride within you secretly abides  
That, forced by the elixir's charm, The Sooth  
You needs must speak—be wholly pure in thought,  
Despising not the teachings wise, of old;  
When Truth with equal earnestness was sought  
If speech be silver, silence then is gold!

The scales seemed to fall from my eyes, and I realised why the Ueberhells had borne such an evil and dreaded name among their fellow-citizens.

The day after I, too, was to use the elixir and I asked my father: "What shall I do if the power of the essence forces me to speak out everything that is true, simply because it is true, even when it is against my wish and will tend to my own annoyance and distress, as well as to that of others?"

And he replied solemnly: "The truth? Has any one yet found the right answer to the old question: 'What is Truth?' Can you be sure that the noble and mighty Goddess corresponds to your puny and individual conception of her?"

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This very idea had disturbed me during my ride over the Alps, and I exclaimed: "Therein lies the dangerous power of the elixir! It kindles in our minds the confidence that we know the truth by means of a charm, whereas we can only possess the desire to seek for it. Our certainty also misleads us to constrain others to think as we think, and to despise them and persecute them when they differ from us. The elixir made you happy, my father, because you are good and pure, and because the beautiful, to the pursuit of which you have dedicated your life, ennobles everyone and makes every thing harmonious that comes from you.

"But many generations had to pass before you appeared to do honour to the powers of the elixir. I myself have been cast in a less heroic mould, and who can prophesy what my children, if I ever have any, will be like. In this world where every thing is deceitful, and no one is outspoken, the man who alone is under the necessity of proclaiming what he considers the truth, is like a warrior who opposes himself without shield or harness to a fully armed foe. Therefore, my dear father, I am very reluctant to make use of the elixir to-morrow."

The old gentleman smiled and replied: "Inhale it in peace, my Ernst, for I will confide to you that I have poured the elixir into the Tiber, on whose banks the battle for the Truth has been so often joined, and where so many factions have imagined that they possessed the elixir of Truth. I have filled the phial with water and a drop of aromatic myrrh. The water I took from the fountain of Trevi, which, you know, is supposed to possess the power of inspiring longing—only for the Eternal City, I believe—but perhaps in our phial it may awaken a desire for the Eternal Truth. Let us leave the little bottle to our successors. It will not hurt them to use it while they are young, and they can commit to memory, at the same time, the maxim which is attached to it. Then if the harmless liquid which it contains, together with the adage and the example of their parents, arouse a craving for truth within them we shall have cared better for them than Doctor Melchior did for our ancestors."

"I think so, too," I answered gratefully. "But," I added, "when you poured the elixir into the river did you not sacrifice a valuable aid to yourself in remaining loyal to the Truth in your creations?"

"The old gentleman shook his head. Let the essence flow away!" he answered. "The verity of the Ueberhells, that is what each one thought to be true, was a thing of naught, and, if you consider it closely, a dangerous thing. Only the mind which is capable of comprehending the laws of Nature can escape the danger of mistaking the fortuitous, and ever changing reality, for the eternal and unchangeable truth. Therefore I do not regret what I have done. If one of my grandsons should wish to become a painter I have obviated the risk of his falling into the error of believing that he has succeeded when he has only slavishly imitated all the imperfections in the objects he sees around him. Nature reflected in a mirror, would he what his pictures under the influence of our



elixir, would have been like, and for a true work of art, in the highest acceptance of the term, something further is needed.”

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These words of my father removed my last regret for the loss of the elixir, and my sons and grandsons who are now grown men have, with God's help, brought it to pass that the burghers of Leipsic are willing once again to associate with the Ueberhells.

I have only one thing more to say before I close this story.

I have already mentioned the fact that I am a physician. When recently from England came the news of the discovery of vaccination and I saw how a small drop could penetrate through a man's entire system, then I regretted that my father had thrown away the elixir. If I still possessed it I would, despite my advanced age, try the experiment of inoculating myself with it. The exhalation of the elixir acted only on the tongue, and hence its fatal effect. If, however, it had been possible to infiltrate a desire for truth into the whole man, then, ah then! it might have been possible for a man really to know himself, which is the beginning of his salvation. One thought occurs to me for my consolation:

A race that has felt itself forced, generation after generation, to serve the truth must finally have acquired an instinct to do so, like the races of pearl-divers who by inheritance can hold their breath a phenomenally long time.

### POSTSCRIPT.

At this point my granddaughter Bianca came in to see me. Three days before she had been betrothed to young Karl Winckler, a descendant of the notary Anselmus.

As I had fallen asleep over my writing she read through undisturbed the book that had fallen from my hands onto the floor.

And so the secret was betrayed, for of course she told the story to her lover.

She expressed her thankfulness that the elixir was out of the world, but asserted impertinently, that if a drop of blood had been drawn from Frau Bianca—whose features as well as name she had inherited—instead of from the little Zeno, or if the women of the Ueberhell family had been allowed to inhale the elixir the consequences might have been entirely different.

"Woman," she said, "is ruler in the kingdom of the affections, and in Leipsic as well as elsewhere, the austere Goddess of Truth will find devoted and loving worshippers, as well as dutiful subjects, only when she exhibits goodness of heart combined with grace of manner as does my grandfather."

Perhaps she is not altogether wrong, though women....

And yet both Greeks and Romans represented Truth under the guise of a woman.



*Finis.*

## **ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:**

Caress or a spank from you—each at the proper time  
Clothes the ugly truth as with a pleasing garment  
Couple seemed to get on so perfectly well without them  
Death itself sometimes floats 'twixt cup and lip'  
Exceptional people are destined to be unhappy in this world  
If speech be silver, silence then is gold!

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