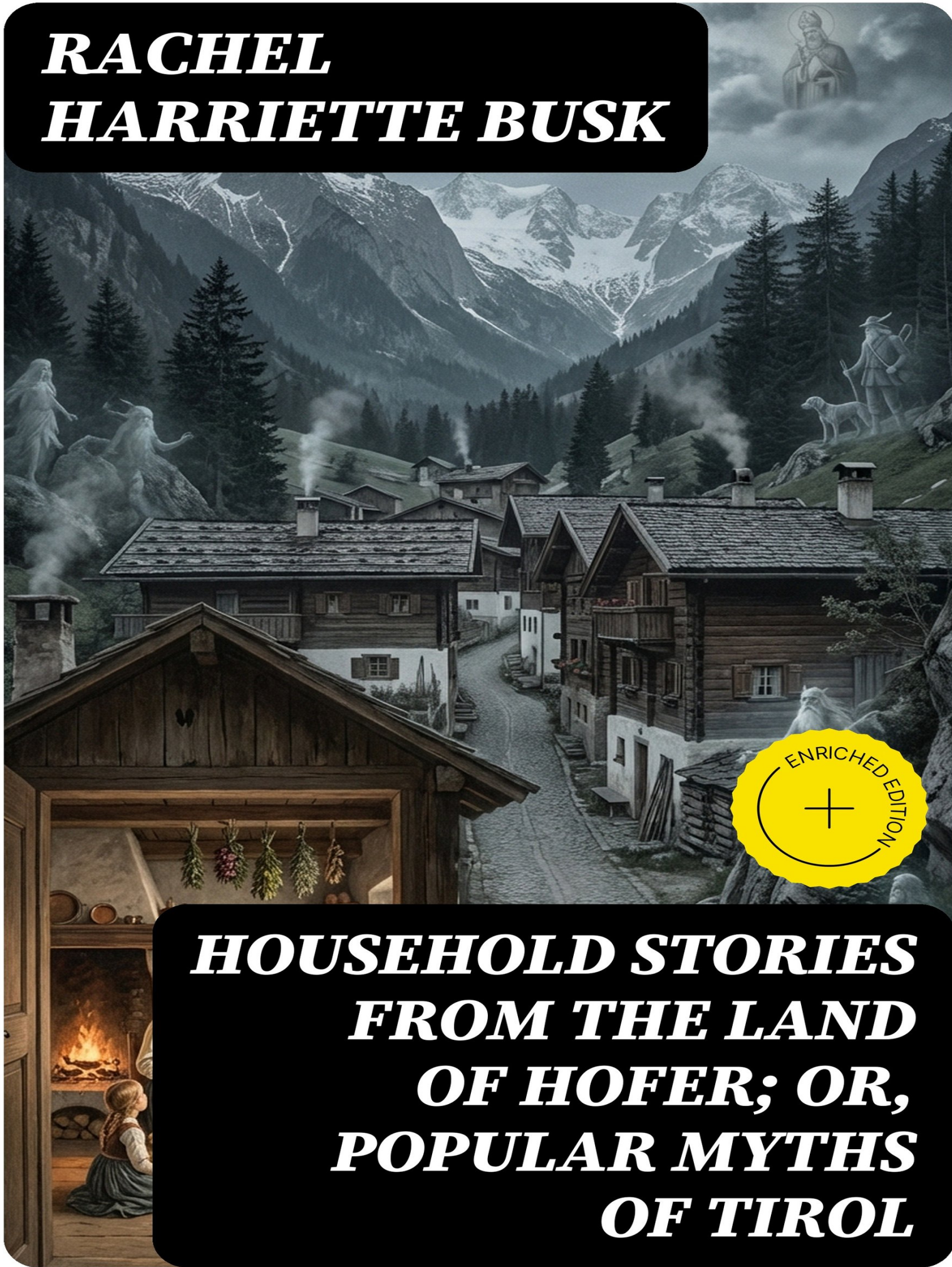


**RACHEL
HARRIETTE BUSK**



**HOUSEHOLD STORIES
FROM THE LAND
OF HOFER; OR,
POPULAR MYTHS
OF TIROL**

Rachel Harriette Busk

Household stories from the Land of Hofer; or, Popular Myths of Tirol

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Sadie Whitlock

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“Blessed are the people of whom history is silent; for history occupies itself more with the doings of fools than of the wise; with storms than with tranquil days: it immortalizes the butcher and the tyrant, and consigns to oblivion the innocent and peaceful.”—CIBRARIO.

Something of the deep, strong attachment to their native mountains which is innate in the children of the Alps steals over me when I think of my pleasant journeyings in Tirol¹.

Though it is a little, out-of-the-way country whose cry is seldom heard in the newspapers, though it exercises little influence in political complications, the character of its people is one which, next after that of our own, has a claim to our esteem and admiration. Hardy, patient, and persevering; patriotic and loyal to a fault; honest and hospitable to a proverb—they carry the observance of their religion into the minutest practice of every-day life; and there underlies all these more solid qualities a tender, poetical, romantic spirit which throws a soft halo round their ceaseless toil, and invests their heroic struggles for independence with a bright glow of chivalry.

Surrounded from their earliest years with living pictures of Nature’s choicest forms and colouring, they need no popular fiction to cultivate their imagination, no schools of design to educate their taste.

Shut out from the world’s ambitions by their pathless Alps, they have learned to see before them two aims alone—to

maintain the integrity and the sanctity of their humble homes on earth, and to obtain one day a place in that better Home above, to which the uplifted fingers of their sun-bathed mountain-peaks ever gloriously point.

The paramount claims on their hearts' allegiance of the hearth and the altar are inseparably interwoven in their social code, and their creed scarcely knows of a distinction between Nature and Nature's God.

At their mother's knee they have learnt, every one, to prattle of their Father in heaven with as complete a realization of His existence as of that of their father on earth. Just as they receive their toil-won food and raiment as an earnest of the paternal care of the one, the change of the seasons, the sunshine and the rain, betoken to them as certainly that of the Other. They scarcely trace any line of demarcation between the natural and the supernatural; and earth and sky are not for them the veil which hides Divinity, but the very temple and shrine of the Godhead dwelling among His creatures.

Going forth in this simple faith through the pure, unfogged atmosphere which surrounds them, it is scarce to be wondered at if they can trace the guiding footprints and the unerring hand of Providence where for others are only chances and coincidences. Or that—like the faint outline of wished-for land revealing itself to the trained eye of the sailor, where the landsman sees but a hopeless expanse of sky and ocean—they should recognize a personal will and individuality in the powers which are the messengers to them of the good pleasure of Heaven, in the germination of fruit and grain, in the multiplication of their flocks and herds; or of the envious malice of the Evil One, in the wind and the lightning, the torrent and the avalanche, destroying the work of their hands.

It is necessary to bear this well in mind, or we shall not appreciate the delights which their fantastic tales have in store for us. We must learn to realize that this way of viewing things has created a nomenclature, almost a language, of its own.

When the boisterous blast sweeps through their valleys, scattering the scent of the wild game, and driving them far out of their reach, they say it is the *Wilder Jäger*², the *Beatrik*³, or the *Nachtvolk*⁴, on his chase. Their restless energies, pent up within the shelter of their rattling walls and casements, invest him with a retinue of pitiless followers and fiery-eyed hounds—while the fate of some who have ventured out while he is said to be abroad, blown over precipices or lost in crevasses, is expressed by the fancy that his train is closed by a number of empty pairs of shoes, which run away with those who come within his influence.

When the bright beams of sun and moon enliven their landscape, or fructify their seed, or guide their midnight way, they fable of them as beautiful maidens with all sorts of fanciful names derived from associations as old as the world: *Perahta*, brightness, daughter of *Dagha*, the daylight—hence, also, *Perchtl* and *Berchtl*. In other localities, *Holda* or *Hulda*; in others again, they are known as *Angane*, and *Enguane*, the *Saligen Fraüelein*, *Nornen*, *Zarger Fraüelein*, and *Weissen Fraüelein*. They say they smile on the overburdened peasant, beguile his labour by singing to him, show him visions of beautiful landscapes, bestow wonderful gifts—loaves which never diminish, bowls and skittles, charcoal and corn of pure gold; to the husbandman they give counsels in his farming; to the good housewife an unfailing store—bobbins of linen thread which all her weaving never exhausts; they help the youth or the maiden

to obtain the return of the love they have longed for, and have some succour in store for every weary soul.

Such helps the people recognize of the masculine gender, also, in the so-called *Nörögl, Pechmannl, Pützl, Wiehtmännlein, Käsermännlein, and Salvanel*; for possibly, they say, not all the angels who rebelled with Lucifer may have been cast into the outer darkness. There may have been some not so evilly disposed themselves, but talked over and led astray by others; and such, arrested in their descent by a merciful reprieve, may have been only banished to the desolate and stony places of the earth, to tops of barren mountains and fruitless trees. Such as these might be expected to entertain a friendly feeling for the human beings who inhabit the regions which gave them shelter, and to be ready to do them a good turn when it lay in their way—lift weights, and carry burdens for them up the steep heights, and protect their wild game. And, also, it is not inconsistent with their nature to love to play them a mischievous trick full oft—make off with the provision of loaves prepared for the mowers; sit, while remaining invisible, on their sledges and increase their difficulty and confusion in crossing the mountain-paths lost in snow; entice them into the woods with beseeching voices, and then leave them to wander in perplexity; overturn the farm-maids' creaming-pans; roll the *Senner's* cheeses down the mountain sides.

Worse tricks than these are those of the *Wilder Mann*. When the soil is sterile and ungrateful; when any of the wonted promises of nature are unfulfilled; when the axe of the lonely woodman rebounds from the stubborn trunk and wounds him; when the foot of the practised mountain-climber fails him on the crisp snow, or the treacherously sun-parched heather; when a wild and lawless wight (for such there are even in Tirol, though fewer, perhaps, than

elsewhere) illtreats the girl who has gone forth to tend her father's flock upon the mountains, trusting in her own innocence and Heaven's help for her protection—it is always the *Wilder Mann*—in some places called the *Wilder Jörgel*, in others, the *Lorg*, the *Salvang* or *Gannes*, the *Klaubaut* or *Rastalmann*, in Vorarlberg, *Fengg*, *Schrättlig*, *Doggi*, and *Habergâss*—to whose account the misfortune or the misdeed is laid. His female counterpart is called *Trude* and *Stampa*, and the *Langtüttin*.

The mineral riches of the country, and the miners occupied in searching for them, are told of as of hidden treasure sought after or revealed, as the case may be, by the *Bergweib* and the *Bergmannlein*, or *Erdmannlein*, the *Venedigermannlein* and the *Hahnenkeckerle*, the stories of whose strength and generosity, cupidity and spite, are endless; while the mountain echoes are the voices of sprites playfully imitating the sounds of human life.

If the mountains and the forests are thus treated, neither are the lakes and torrents without their share of personification, and many are the legends in which the uses and beauties of the beneficent element are interpreted to be the smiles and the helpful acts of the *Wasserfraülein*, while the mischances which occur at the water's edge are ascribed to the *Stromkarl* and the *Brückengeist*.

The sudden convulsions of nature to which their soil has been subject from age to age are all charged with retribution for the sins of the people, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain. Castles and forest possessions of wicked rich men are sunk beneath the waters of lakes so that their foundations may never again be set up, and their place be no more found; while a curse pursues those who attempt to dig out the ill-gotten treasure. Villages are recorded to have been

swallowed by the earth or buried by the snow-storms when their people have neglected the commandments of God.

This literal adaptation of the admonitions of Holy Writ receives among this people another development in traditions of instances where good deeds done to the poor have been believed to have been actually done to visions of our Lord and of His Saints. Then again, their devout belief in both the irresistible justice and the ineffable love of God convinces them that there must be a place on earth where souls too soiled for heaven, yet not given over to utter reprobation, may wander till the final day of rest. And thus every shepherd, as he keeps his lonely watch upon the Alpine pastures, expects that he may meet the *feurige Sennin* who broke the Sunday rest; or the *Tscheier Friedl* who was cruel to the cattle in his charge; or the *büssender Hirt* who stole the widow's kine; or the *Markegger* who removed his neighbour's landmark; or the *Pungga-Mannl* who swore a false oath; or the *feuriger Verräther* who betrayed the mountain pass to the Roman legions.

On the other hand, the heroes and types of the Christian faith are thought of as taking a perpetual interest in the welfare of their struggling brethren: St. Nothburga and St. Isidore watch over the husbandman, and St. Urban over the vinedresser; St. Martin over the mower; St. Martha, St. Sebastian, and St. Rocchus, the *drei Pestschutzheiligen*⁵, are expected to be as potent in their intercession now as when at their prayers, when on earth, plagues were stayed. St. Anthony and St. Florian similarly protect against fire. St. Vigilius, the evangelizer of the country and martyr to his zeal, is still believed to guard its jealously-preserved unity of faith. In return, they receive special veneration: the ordinary dealings of life are regulated by the recurrence of their festivals, and the memory of sacred mysteries is kept in perpetual honour by

setting up their tokens in every homestead and every house, in every vineyard and in every field, on every bridge and by every wayside.

It is not surprising that a people so minded have tales to tell of wonderful events which seem to have befallen them, and which take the record of their lives out of the prosaic monotony which rules our own—tales always bearing a wholesome moral lesson, always showing trust in Providence and faith in the World Unseen, and always told with the charming simplicity which only a logically grounded expectation that events should turn out even so—and no invention or imagination—can give.

A selection of these tales I have put into English dress in the following pages. Though some few of them may be found to bear analogy with similar tales of other German nations, the distinctive qualities of the Tirolese, and the peculiar nature of the scenery amid which they have been conceived, will be found to have stamped them with a character entirely their own.

I think that what I have said is sufficient to give, to such of my readers as did not possess it already, the key to their application, and I need not now append to each a tedious interpretation of the fantastic personages and scenes I shall have to introduce.

It remains only to say a word as to their distribution. The present principality of Tirol is composed of four provinces. North Tirol, South Tirol, Wälsch or Italian Tirol, and Vorarlberg. North and South Tirol have been for long so closely united that, like their language and customs, their mythology has become so intimately intermingled that it scarcely comes within the scope of a work like the present to point out their few divergences or local peculiarities. But

those of Wälsch Tirol and Vorarlberg each maintain a much more distinctive character, and I have accordingly marked with a separate heading those which I have gathered thence.

“THE ROSE-GARDEN OF KING LAREYN,” however, is not the peculiar property of any one province. Though the three places which claim to occupy its site are all placed in South Tirol, this pretty myth is the common property of the whole country—its chief popular epic—and has even passed into the folklore of other parts of Germany also. It is beside the purpose of the present little work to enter into the controversy which has been raised concerning the authorship. There can be little doubt, however, that it was originally the utterance of some unknown minstrel putting into rough-and-ready rhyme one of the floating myths which symbolized the conflict of the heroes with the powers of evil, so popular in the middle ages. Then poets of more pretensions wrote out, and, as they wrote out, improved the song. Thus there are several different manuscripts of it extant, of between two and three thousand lines each, but not of equal value, for later scribes, in trying to improve, overlaid the simple energy of its diction with a feeble attempt at ornament which only served to damage its force. The name of the Norg-king who is the subject of it, is in these spelt variously, as Lareyn, Luarin, Luarine, &c.; the modern orthography is Laurin. The spelling I have adopted is that of the *Chronicon* of Aventinus.

I have thought it well to precede the story by some account of the Norg folk and some samples of their legends, that the reader may not come wholly unacquainted with their traditional character to the tale of the discomfiture of the last Norg-king.

1

It is common in England to speak of Tirol as “the Tyrol;” I have used the name according to the custom of the country itself.

2

The name for “the wild huntsman” in North and South Tirol.

3

The Beatrìk of the Italian Tirol is, however, a milder spirit than the *Wilder Jäger* of the northern provinces. He is also called *il cacciatore della pia caccia*, because he is supposed only to hunt evil spirits.

4

The name in Vorarlberg.

5

The three helpers against the plague. There are many churches so called in Tirol.

NORG MYTHS.

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The Norgen were a mighty folk in olden time in Tirol. In their span-high bodies resided a power which no child of man, were he ever so stalwart and well-limbed, could resist. But they were also for the most part a peaceable race, and more inclined to assist than to obstruct the industrious inhabitants of the country in their labours; so long as they were treated with respect and deference they seldom interfered with any one. Then they were generally scrupulously honourable, and strict keepers of their word. A service rendered one of them was sure to be repaid a hundredfold[1q]. An injury brought a corresponding retribution, and scorn, contempt, or ridicule roused their utmost vengeance; while some there were who entertained a true spirit of mischief, and indulged in wanton tricks which showed their character was not altogether free from malice.

They were most often to be met in lonely paths and unfrequented fastnesses of nature, but a solitary Nörglein could also occasionally stray within the haunts of men, at times asking hospitality at their hands, and at others getting into the bedrooms at night, and teasing the children in their sleep, hence the common proverb—

“Shut the door closely to,
Or the Norg will come through¹.”

And at other times, again, they would take part in the field and household labours, as if they found it sport. The name of Norg was chiefly appropriated to them in South Tirol; in Vorarlberg the analogous cobbold went by the name of

Rutschifenggen. Every locality, every valley, every hamlet, and almost every farm, had its own familiar dwarf whose doings were handed down as household words.

Thus it is told that there was once a countrywoman, who lived in a lonely Meierhof² of the Passeierthal, standing over her stove, preparing a pancake for her husband's dinner, and as he was a great eater she used an immense number of eggs—three dozen and more—in his pancake: as fast as she broke the eggs into the pan, she threw the shells behind her. Three Norgs came by as she was so occupied and amused themselves with playing with them and arranging them into all kinds of patterns. The Meierin³ was a grumpy sort of woman, and instead of finding pleasure in the glee of the little people, grew cross with them, and scattered the dirty black ashes among the eggshells they had arranged so prettily. Offended at this ill-natured treatment, the Norgs took their departure, but first laid the thread of the good wife's spinning-bobbin as a snare across the floor, and then stationed themselves outside the window to see what happened.

Presently the husband called to know if the pancake was not ready, and the Meierin, running to satisfy him, with both hands engaged in holding the dish of the enormous pancake, caught her feet in the thread, and fell flat on the ground with her face in the dish, while the three Norgs completed her vexation by setting up a loud laugh in chorus.

Here is another story of their doings, in which they play a different part. There was a storm in the valley of Matsch, and a storm in the valley of Matsch is often a terrible matter. This was one of the worst: the pitiless flood streamed down the heights, and threatened to overflow the banks of the *Hochseen*⁴; the wind from the glacier howled

dismally over the mountain-sides; the people closed their doors and shutters against the blast, and listened to the roar of the elements, trembling with the thought that every moment might come the signal of the inundation which should carry them and their habitations away in its torrent. In the solidest and most important house of the straggling village, which bears the same name as the valley, was gathered the family of the richest man of the place, who had no reason to share these fears, but with singing and lively conversation chased away the dismal influence of the lugubrious sounds without.

Suddenly, between the angry gusts of wind, a doleful voice was heard piteously praying for help. One of the party opened the casement, and looked out, but with more of curiosity than interest, and then quickly closing it again, came back into the room with a laugh to describe the ludicrous figure he had seen. It was a little mannikin with a beard big enough for a full-grown man, his clothes drenched with the rain, and slung over his shoulder a tiny bundle tied in a handkerchief, which yet seemed to bow him down with its weight. The description provoked a chorus of laughter, and the wretched little Norg—for it was a Norg—would have been no more thought of but that his wail became more irritating than that of the wind, and at last the master of the house got up and shouted to him to go on, for it was useless to stand droning there, he was not going to open his house at that time of night, or to such a ridiculous object. But though he banged the window to as closely as possible after delivering himself of this speech, the little man's menacing couplet yet reached his ear—

“The reckoning day
Is not far away⁵.”

Nevertheless the Norg begged no more, but endeavoured to pass on his way. He could not get far: the torrents of rain had obliterated the path which led from the rising ground on which this house was built, to the next, and it was scarcely safe to descend in the dark with the loose stones rattling away under the feet. Fortunately a glimmering light betrayed a low hut built into the slope. It looked so poor and humble, that the Norg felt ashamed to ask aught of its inhabitants, who could scarcely have had enough for their own needs; but when he saw how utterly forlorn was his position, he sat down on a stone, and wept.

Notwithstanding that the poor little Norg had such a hoarse voice that it was more like that of a wild animal than a man, there was a compassionate little maid within who perceived it was a voice of distress, and put her head out to ask who was there. "Poor old man!" she cried; "come inside and dry yourself, and let me give you something warm." But before he could answer he heard a weak voice within, "Beware, Therese, of the wolves—remember we are in 'Matsch der Wölfe Heimath⁶.'" "Never fear, mother dear," replied the maiden, "this is no wolf, but a very distressed little old man, who does not look as if he could harm any one; and besides we are now in June—the wolves don't threaten us in the summer," and she opened the door, and let in the little man.

By the time she had dried his clothes and fed him with some warm soup, the worst of the storm had abated, and he was able to go on his way. The maiden offered him shelter for the night, but he declared he must reach home before midnight, and prepared to depart. Before he left he asked her what there was she most desired. "Oh, that my mother be restored to health!" answered Theresa; "I desire nothing more than that!"

The Norg walked to the bedside, and informed himself of the nature of the sick mother's illness. "Your mother shall be cured," said the little man; "but you must come to me to-morrow at midnight to the Nörgelspitz;" and as the girl started at the impossibility of the feat, he continued, "You have only to make your way as far as the *Wetterkreuz*, and there call three times 'Kruzinegele! Kruzinegele! Kruzinegele!' and I will be at your side, and take you up the rest of the way." And he took his departure, singing—

"Morgen oder Heut
Kommt die Zahlzeit."

The next night Theresa courageously set out on her way, and climbed as far as the *Wetterkreuz*—and it was lucky she had to go no farther, for here she sank down quite exhausted. She had not lain there many seconds when she saw a procession of little men just like Kruzinegele, with a litter and torches, who carried her up till they came to a door in the rock, which opened at their approach. This led to a magnificent crystal hall glittering with gold and gems, and on a gold throne sat Kruzinegele himself, with his fair daughter by his side. When the litter was brought to the steps of the throne, he came down courteously, and renewed his thanks for her hospitality, but she could not find a word to say, in her astonishment at seeing him so changed. Meantime he sent his daughter to fetch the herbs which were to cure the poor mother, and gave them to her, telling her how to administer them. "You see," he added—

"Morgen oder Heut
Kommt die Zahlzeit;

and your rich neighbour will find it so too." Then he told the little men to carry her home, and they laid her in the litter, and bore her away; and she remembered nothing

more till she found herself comfortably in bed, with the rising sun kissing her cheeks. But the appearance of every thing was as much changed as Kruzinegele himself had been! The walls that used to bulge, and reek with mildew and damp, were straight and smooth; glass casements replaced the ricketty shutters; nice white curtains tempered the sunshine; the scanty and broken furniture was replaced by new. But what she valued above all, in her hand were the herbs which were to make her mother's healing drink! Their decoction was her first occupation; and by the next day they had restored her mother to health, and joy once more reigned in the cottage, thanks to the Norg!

It had been the rich churl's custom, equally with the other villagers, to take his cattle on to the mountain pastures to graze for the beginning of the summer season *am Johanni*⁷. His grazing ground was just the highest pasture of the Nörgelspitz. The festival now soon arrived, and the picturesque processions of cattle with their herds went lowing forth as usual, to enjoy their summer feed.

When the Norg's enemy, however, arrived at his destination, instead of the emerald slopes he was wont to find, with their rich yield of *marbel* and *maim*⁸, all ready prepared by St. Martin's care⁹ for the delight of his cows and sheep, all was stony and desolate! Three days they spent wandering about in search of a few blades to browse, but even this was denied them—nor ever again did the Nörgelspitz bring forth any thing but ice and snow!

Of the sleek droves which had started, the envy of all beholders, few beasts lived to return; the prosperity of the once flourishing *Hof* had fled, and before many years were out its proprietor was obliged to leave it, a ruined man. Theresa had in the meantime married a thrifty peasant,

whose industry enabled him to be the purchaser of the abandoned Hof, which he soon stocked to the full extent of former days. Ofttimes a curious grey-bearded little stranger would drop in at night to share their comfortable meal, and before he went away he would always sing his couplet—

“Morgen oder Heut
Kommt die Zahlzeit.”

Such occasional apparitions of the strange visitants excited the curiosity of the inhabitants of the earth to the utmost, and many a weird story was told of frightful injury happening to those who had striven to penetrate their retreat, and for a long period none had any success in the enterprise.

It happened one day, however, that a daring hunter who had been led far from his usual track, and far from the country with which he was familiar, by the pursuit of a gemsbock, found himself at the entrance of a low-arched cavern. As night was about to fall and the sky wore a threatening aspect, he was glad to creep within this shelter till the light of morning should enable him to find his way home once more.

He had not proceeded far within the dim corridor, when he perceived that in proportion as he got farther from the light of day the cave became brighter instead of darker! Eagerly seeking the cause of this phenomenon, he perceived that the walls were all encrusted with gold and precious stones, which emitted constant sparkles of light. He thereby recognized at once that he had reached an approach to one of the resorts of the Mountain-folk, as the Norgs were also called from having their habitation in the hearts of the mountains.

80

“On our right soared the implacable ridges of the Marmolata,” writes a modern traveller; “the sheer, hard smoothness of whose scarped rocks filled one with a kind of horror only to look at them.”

81

“We have hay in the stables, and more also in the meadow.”

82

Berg-Segen (literally “mountain-blessing”) is the form in which Tirol in its piety expresses the ordinary word crop.

83

See [Preface](#).

84

Two kinds of more or less mischievous *strie*, or wild fairies.

85

“Fearless Johnny.” John is a favourite name in Wälsch Tirol, and bears some twenty or thirty variations, as Giovannazzi, Gianaselli, Gianot, Zanetto, Zanolini, Zuani, Degiampietro (John Peter), Zangiacomi (John James), &c.

86

The Latin name of the god of hell remains throughout Italy, and holds in its nurseries the place of “Old Bogie” with us.

87

“Earthly soul, stand off three paces, and tell me your grief.”

88

Vine-trellis.

89

Tapestry hanging before a door.

90

Witch.

91

A wayside cross under a little penthouse, such as is to be met at every turn of the road in Tirol.

92

The south wind, which does much mischief at certain times of the year, and is most dreaded in Vorarlberg.

93

Dialectic for a basket in Vorarlberg.

94

It has been my aim generally, in making this collection, to give the preference to those stories which have a moral point to recommend them; my readers will not, perhaps, take it amiss, however, if I present them with this specimen of a class in which this is wanting, and which aims only at amusement. It is, moreover, interesting from the strong evidence it bears of extremely remote origin; for the light way in which putting people to death, deception, and selfishness are spoken of prove it has a pre-Christian source, while the unimportant accessories show how details get modified by transmission.

95

It must be understood that it is an *outside* staircase that is here alluded to, and the shutter of an unglazed window on its landing serving for a door also.

96

In a lordly manner.

97

A cluster of houses too small to be designated a village.

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Memorable Quotes

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1q "A service rendered one of them was sure to be repaid a hundredfold."

2q "In our kings were bound up our life and our strength;"

3q "all planted with roses of surpassing beauty,"

4q "it was a fascination of delight at finding herself in the midst of those riches she coveted,"

5q "It was the Nickel of the Röhlerbüchel who was before her,"

6q "The only mode of ransom is this—let the Baroness guess my name."

7q "No one commands here but I,"

8q "Another destiny is for you!"

9q "Open, hoary rock!"

10q "and the Three Black Dogs behind."

11q "Put your trust in God, and all will yet be well."

12q "he should never listen to it"

13q "The Devil goes wandering over the earth in many disguises,"