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Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
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The Gray Brethren and Other Fragments in Prose and Verse

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THE GREY BRETHREN AND OTHER FRAGMENTS IN PROSE AND VERSE

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The Grey Brethren

Some of the happiest remembrances of my childhood are of days spent in a little Quaker colony on a high hill.

The walk was in itself a preparation, for the hill was long and steep and at the mercy of the north-east wind; but at the top, sheltered by a copse and a few tall trees, stood a small house, reached by a flagged pathway skirting one side of a bright trim garden.

I, with my seven summers of lonely, delicate childhood, felt, when I gently closed the gate behind me, that I shut myself into Peace. The house was always somewhat dark, and there were no domestic sounds. The two old ladies, sisters, both born in the last century, sat in the cool, dim parlour, netting or sewing. Rebecca was small, with a nut-cracker nose and chin; Mary, tall and dignified, needed no velvet under the net cap. I can feel now the touch of the cool dove-coloured silk against my cheek, as I sat on the floor, watching the nimble fingers with the shuttle, and listened as Mary read aloud a letter received that morning, describing a meeting of the faithful and the 'moving of the Spirit' among them. I had a mental picture of the 'Holy Heavenly Dove,' with its wings of silvery grey, hovering over my dear old ladies; and I doubt not my vision was a true one.

Once as I watched Benjamin, the old gardener - a most 'stiff-backed Friend' despite his stoop and his seventy years - putting scarlet geraniums and yellow fever-few in the centre bed, I asked, awe-struck, whether such glowing colours were approved; and Rebecca smiled and said - "Child, dost thee not think the Lord may have His glories?" and I looked from the living robe of scarlet and gold to the dove-coloured gown, and said: "Would it be pride in thee to wear His glories?" and Mary answered for her - "The change is not yet; better beseems us the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.

The 'change from glory to glory' has come to them both long since, but it seems to me as if their robes must still be Quaker-grey.

Upstairs was the invalid daughter and niece. For years she had been compelled to lie on her face; and in that position she had done wonderful drawings of the High Priest, the Ark of the Covenant, and other Levitical figures. She had a cageful of tame canary-birds which answered to their names and fed from her plate at meal-times. Of these I remember only Roger, a gorgeous fellow with a beautiful voice and strong will of his own, who would occasionally defy his mistress from the secure fastness of a high picture-frame, but always surrendered at last, and came to listen to his lecture with drooping wings.

A city of Peace, this little house, for the same severely-gentle decorum reigned in the kitchen as elsewhere: and now, where is such a haunt to be found?

In the earlier part of this century the Friends bore a most important witness. They were a standing rebuke to rough manners, rude speech, and to the too often mere outward show of religion. No one could fail to be impressed by the atmosphere of peace suggested by their bearing and presence; and the gentle, sheltered, contemplative lives lived by most of them undoubtedly made them unusually responsive to spiritual influence. Now, the young birds have left the parent nest and the sober plumage and soft speech; they are as other men; and in a few short years the word Quaker will sound as strange in our ears as the older appellation Shaker does now.

This year I read for the first time the Journal of George Fox. It is hard to link the rude, turbulent son of Amos with the denizens in my city of Peace; but he had his work to do and did it, letting breezy truths into the stuffy 'steeple-houses' of the 'lumps of clay.'

"Come out from among them and be ye separate; touch not the accursed thing!" he thundered; and out they came, obedient to his stentorian mandate; but alack, how many treasures in earthen vessels did they overlook in their terror of the curse! The good people made such haste to flee the city, that they imagined themselves as having already, in the spirit, reached the land that is very far off; and so they cast from them the outward and visible signs which are vehicles, in this material world, of inward graces. Measureless are the uncovenanted blessings of God; and to these the Friends have

ever borne a witness of power; but now the Calvinist intruder no longer divides the sheep from the goats in our churches; now the doctrine of universal brotherhood and the respect due to all men are taught much more effectively than when George Fox refused to doff his hat to the Justice; the quaint old speech has lost its significance, the dress would imply all the vainglory that the wearer desires to avoid; the young Quakers of this generation are no longer 'disciplined' in matters of the common social life; yet still they remain separate.

We of the outward and visible covenant need them, with their inherited mysticism, ordered contemplation, and spiritual vision; we need them for ourselves. The mother they have left yearns for them, and with all her faults - faults the greater for their absence - and with the blinded eyes of their recognition, she is their mother still. "*What advantagethen hath the Jew?*" asked St Paul, and answered in the same breath - "*Much every way, chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*" What advantage then has the Churchman? is the oft repeated question today; and the answer is still the answer of St Paul.

The Incarnation is the sum of all the Sacraments, the crown of the material revelation of God to man, the greatest of outward and visible signs, "*that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the word of life.*" A strange beginning truly, to usher in a purely spiritual dispensation; but beautifully fulfilled in the taking up of the earthly into the heavenly - Bread and Wine, the natural fruits of the earth, sanctified by man's toil, a sufficiency for his needs; and instinct with Divine life through the operation of the Holy Ghost.

"In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread."

"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood ye have no life in you"

"And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

From Genesis to the Revelation of the Divine reaches the rainbow of the Sacramental system - outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace:-

The sacrament of purging, purifying labour, to balance and control the knowledge of good and evil:-

The sacrament of life, divine life, with the outward body of humiliation, bread and wine, fruit of the accursed ground, but useless without man's labour; and St Paul, caught up into the third heaven, and St John, with his wide-eyed vision of the Lamb, must eat this bread and drink this cup if they would live:-

The sacrament of healing, the restoring of the Image of God in fallen man.

The Church is one society, nay, the world is one society, for man without his fellow-men is not; and into the society, both of the Church and the world, are inextricably woven the most social sacraments.

Herein is great purpose, we say, bending the knee; and with deep consciousness of sins and shortcomings we stretch out longing welcoming hands to our grey brethren with their inheritance of faithfulness and steadfastness under persecution, and their many gifts and graces; and we cry, in the words of the Song of Songs which is Solomon's: "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone."

A Song of Low Degree

Lord, I am small, and yet so great,
The whole world stands to my estate,
And in Thine Image I create.
The sea is mine; and the broad sky
Is mine in its immensity:
The river and the river's gold;
The earth's hid treasures manifold;
The love of creatures small and great,
Save where I reap a precious hate;
The noon-tide sun with hot caress,
The night with quiet loneliness;
The wind that bends the pliant trees,
The whisper of the summer breeze;
The kiss of snow and rain; the star
That shines a greeting from afar;
All, all are mine; and yet so small
Am I, that lo, I needs must call,
Great King, upon the Babe in Thee,
And crave that Thou would'st give to me
The grace of Thy humility.

A German Christmas Eve

It was intensely cold; Father Rhine was frozen over, so he may speak for it; and for days we had lived to the merry jangle and clang of innumerable sleigh bells, in a white and frost-bound world. As I passed through the streets, crowded with stolidly admiring peasants from the villages round, I caught the dear remembered 'Gr|ss Gott!' and 'All' Heil!' of the countryside, which town life quickly stamps out along with many other gentle observances.

"Gelobt sei Jesu Christ!" cried little Sister Hilarius, coming on me suddenly at a corner, her round face aglow with the sharp air, her arms filled with queer-shaped bundles. She begs for her sick poor as she goes along - meat here, some bread there, a bottle of good red wine: I fancy few refuse her. She nursed me once, the good little sister, with unceasing care and devotion, and all the dignity of a scant five feet. "Ach, Du lieber Gott, such gifts!" she added, with a radiant smile, and vanished up a dirty stairway.

In the Quergasse a jay fell dead at my feet - one of the many birds which perished thus - he had flown townwards too late. Up at the Jagdschloss the wild creatures, crying a common truce of hunger, trooped each day to the clearing by the Jdger's cottage for the food spread for them. The great tusked boar of the Taunus with his brother of Westphalia, the timid roe deer with her scarcely braver mate, foxes, hares, rabbits, feathered game, and tiny songbirds of the woods, gathered fearlessly together and fed at the hand of their common enemy - a millennial banquet truly.

The market-place was crowded, and there were Christmas trees everywhere, crying aloud in bushy nakedness for their rightful fruit. The old peasant women, rolled in shawls, with large handkerchiefs tied over their caps, warmed their numb and withered hands over little braziers while they guarded the gaily decked treasure-laden booths, from whose pent-roofs Father Winter had hung a fringe of glittering icicles.

Many of the stalls were entirely given over to Christmas-tree splendours. Long trails of gold and silver *Engelshaar*, piles of candles - red, yellow, blue, green, violet, and white - a rainbow of the Christian virtues and the Church's Year; boxes of frost and snow, festoons of coloured beads, fishes with gleaming scales, glass-winged birds, Santa Klaus in frost-bedecked mantle and scarlet cap, angels with trumpets set to their waxen lips; and everywhere and above all the image of the Holy Child. Sometimes it was the tiny waxen Bambino, in its pathetic helplessness; sometimes the Babe Miraculous, standing with outstretched arms awaiting the world's embrace - Mary's Son, held up in loving hands to bless; or the Heavenly Child-King with crown and lily sceptre, borne high by Joseph, that gentle, faithful servitor. It was the festival of Bethlehem, feast of never-ending keeping, which has its crowning splendour on Christmas Day.

A Sister passed with a fat, rosy little girl in either hand; they were chattering merrily of the gift they were to buy for the dear Christkind, the gift which Sister said He would send some ragged child to receive for Him. They came back to the poor booth close to where I was standing. It was piled with warm garments; and after much consultation a little white vest was chosen - the elder child rejected pink, she knew the Christkind would like white best - then they trotted off down a narrow turning to the church, and I followed.

The Crjche stood without the chancel, between the High Altar and that of Our Lady of Sorrows. It was very simple. A blue paper background spangled with stars; a roughly thatched roof supported on four rude posts; at the back, ox and ass lying among the straw with which the ground was strewn. The figures were life-size, of carved and painted wood: Joseph, tall and dignified, stood as guardian, leaning on his staff; Mary knelt with hands slightly uplifted in loving adoration; and the Babe lay in front on a truss of straw disposed as a halo. It was the World's Child, and the position emphasised it. Two or three hard-featured peasants knelt telling their beads; and a group of children with round, blue eyes and stiff, flaxen pigtails, had gathered in front, and were pointing and softly whispering. My little friends trotted up, crossed themselves; it was evidently the little one's first visit.

"Guck! guck mal an," she cried, clapping her fat gloved hands, "sieh mal an das Wickelkind!"

"Dass ist unser Jesu," said the elder, and the little one echoed "Unser Jesu, unser Jesu!"

Then the vest was brought out and shown - why not, it was the Christchild's own? - and the pair trotted away again followed by the bright, patient Sister. Presently everyone clattered out, and I was left alone at the crib of Bethlehem, the gate of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It was my family, my only family; but like the ever-widening circle on the surface of a lake into which a stone has been flung, here, from this great centre, spread the wonderful ever-widening relationship - the real brotherhood of the world. It is at the Crib that everything has its beginning, not at the Cross; and it is only as little children that we can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

When I went out again into the streets it was nearly dark. Anxious mothers hurried past on late, mysterious errands; papas who were not wanted until the last moment chatted gaily to each other at street corners, and exchanged recollections; maidservants hastened from shop to shop with large baskets already heavily laden; and the children were everywhere, important with secrets, comfortably secure in the knowledge of a tree behind the parlour doors, and a kindly, generous Saint who knew all their wants, and needed no rod *this* year.

One little lad, with a pinched white face, and with only an empty certainty to look forward to, was singing shrilly in the sharp, still air, "Zu Bethlehem geboren, ist uns ein Kindelein," as he gazed wistfully at a shop window piled high with crisp gingerbread, marzipan, chocolate under every guise, and tempting cakes. A great rough peasant coming out, saw him, turned back, and a moment later thrust a gingerbread Santa Klaus, with currant eyes and sugar trimming to his coat and cap, into the half-fearful little hands. "Hab' ebenso ein Kerlchen zu Haus'," he said to me apologetically as he passed.

I waited to see Santa Klaus disappear; but no, the child looked at the cake, sighed deeply with the cruel effort of resistance, and re-

frained. It was all his Christmas and he would keep it. He gazed and gazed, then a smile rippled across the wan little face and he broke out in another carol, "Es kam ein Engel hell und klar vom Himmel zu der Hirten Schaar," and hugging his Santa Klaus carefully, wandered away down the now brilliant streets: he did not know he was hungry any more; the angel had come with good tidings.

As I passed along the streets I could see through the uncurtained windows that in some houses Christmas had begun already for the little ones. Then the bells rang out deep-mouthed, carrying the call of the eager Church to her children, far up the valley and across the frozen river. And they answered; the great church was packed from end to end, and from my place by the door I saw that two tiny Christmas trees bright with coloured candles burnt either side of the Holy Child.

A blue-black sky ablaze with stars for His glory, a fresh white robe for stained and tired earth; so we went to Bethlehem in the rare stillness of the early morning. The Church, having no stars, had lighted candles; and we poor sinful men having no white robes of our own had craved them of the Great King at her hands.

And so in the stillness, with tapers within and stars alight without, with a white-clad earth, and souls forgiven, the Christ Child came to those who looked for His appearing.

A Christmas Idyll

The Child with the wondering eyes sat on the doorstep, on either side of her a tramp cat in process of becoming a recognised member of society. On the flagged path in front the brown brethren were picking up crumbs. The cats' whiskers trembled, but they sat still, proudly virtuous, and conscious each of a large saucer of warm milk within.

"What," said the Child, "is a symbol?"

The cats looked grave.

The Child rose, went into the house, and returned with a well-thumbed brown book. She turned the pages thoughtfully, and read aloud, presumably for the benefit of the cats: "In a symbol there is concealment yet revelation, the infinite is made to blend with the finite, to stand visible, and as it were attainable there." The Child sighed, "We had better go to the Recluse," she said. So the three went.

It was a cold, clear, bright day, a typical Christmas Eve. There was a carpet of crisp snow on the ground, and a fringe of icicles hung from every vantage-point. The cats, not having been accustomed to the delights of domesticity, trotted along cheerfully despite the chill to their toes; and they soon came to the forest which all three knew very well indeed. It was a beautiful forest like a great cathedral, with long aisles cut between the splendid upstanding pine trees. The green-fringed boughs were heavy with snow, the straight strong stems caught and reflected the stray sun rays, and looking up through the arches and delicate tracery and interlaced branches the eye caught the wonderful blue of the great domed roof overhead. The cats walked delicately, fearful of temptation in the way of rabbits or frost-tamed birds, and the Child lilted a quaint German hymn to a strange old tune:-

"Ein Kind gebor'n zu Bethlehem.
Alleluja!

Dess freuet sich Jerusalem,
Alleluja! Alleluja!"

The Recluse was sitting on a bench outside his cave. He was dressed in a brown robe, his eyes were like stars wrapped in brown velvet, his face was strong and gentle, his hair white although he looked quite young. He greeted the Child very kindly and stroked the cats.

"You have come to ask me a question, Child?"

"If you please," said the Child, "what is a symbol?"

"Ah," said the Recluse, "I might have known you would ask me that."

"The Sage says," went on the Child, "that it is concealment yet revelation."

The Recluse nodded.

"Just as a mystery that we cannot understand is the greatest possible wisdom. Go in and sit by my fire, Child; there are chestnuts on the hearth, and you will find milk in the brown jug. I will show you a symbol presently."

The Child and the two cats went into the cave and sat down by the fire. It was warm and restful after the biting air. The cats purred pleasantly, the Child sat with her chin in her hand watching the glowing wood burn red and white on the great hearthstone.

"The Recluse generally answers my questions by showing me something I have seen for a long time but never beheld, or heard and never lent ear. I wonder what it will be this time," she said to herself.

The grateful warmth made the Child sleepy, and she gave a start when she found the Recluse standing by her with outstretched hand.

"Come, dear Child," he said; and leaving the sleeping cats she followed him, her hand in his.

The air was full of wonderful sound, voices and song, and the cry of the bells.

The Child wondered, and then remembered it was Christmas night. The Recluse led her down a little passage and opened a door. They stepped out together, but not into the forest.

“This is the front door of my house,” said the Recluse, with a little smile.

They stood on a white road, on one side a stretch of limestone down, on the other steep terraces with gardens and vineyard. The air was soft and warm, and sweet with the breath of lilies. The heaven was ablaze with stars; across the plain to the east the dawn was breaking. A group of strangely-clad men went down the road followed by a flock of sheep.

“Let us go with them,” said the Recluse; and hand in hand they went.

The road curved to the right; round the bend, cut in the living rock, was a cave; the shepherds stopped and knelt, and there was no sound but the soft rapid breathing of the flock. Then the Child was filled with an overmastering longing, a desire so great that the tears sprang hot to her eyes. She dropped the Recluse’s hand and went forward where the shepherds knelt. Once again the air was full of wonderful sound, voices and song, and the cry of the bells; but within all was silence. The cave was rough-hewn, and stabled an ox and an ass; close to the front a tall strong man leaning on a staff kept watch and ward; within knelt a peasant Maid, and on a heap of yellow straw lay a tiny new-born Babe loosely wrapped in a linen cloth: around and above were wonderful figures of fire and mist.

The infinite, visible and attainable.

The mystery which is the greatest possible wisdom.

* * * * *

“Come, Child,” said the Recluse.

The fire had burnt low; it was quite dark, save for the glow of the live embers.

He threw on a great dry pine log; it flared like a torch. The cats’ stretched in the sudden blaze, and then settled to sleep again. The Child and the Recluse passed out into the forest. The moon was

very bright and the snow reflected its rays, so that it was light in spite of the great trees. The air was full of wonderful sound, voices and song, and the cry of the bells; and the Child sang as she went in a half-dream by the side of the Recluse:-

“In dieser heil’gen Weihnachtszeit,
Alleluja!
Sei, Gott der Herr, gebenedeit,
Alleluja! Alleluja!”

and wondered when she would wake up. They came to the old, old church in the forest, and the pictured saints looked out at them from the lighted window; through the open door they could see figures moving about with tapers in their hands; save for these the church was still empty.

The Recluse led the way up the nave to the north side of the Altar. The Child started a little; she was really dreaming then a kind of circular dream, for again she stood before the cave, again the reverend figure kept watch and ward over the kneeling Maid and the little Babe. The sheep and the shepherds were not there, but a little lamb had strayed in; and the wonderful figures of fire and mist - they were there in their place.

“Little one,” said the Recluse softly, “here is a symbol - concealment yet revelation - the King as servant - the strong helpless - the Almighty a little child; and thus the infinite stands revealed for all of us, visible and attainable, if we will have it so. It is the centre of all mystery, the greatest possible wisdom, the Eternal Child.”

“You showed it me before,” said the Child, “only we were out of doors, and the shepherds were there with the sheep; but the angels are here just the same.”

The Recluse bowed his head.

“Wait for me here with them, dear Child, I will fetch you after service.”

The church began to fill; old men in smock frocks and tall hats, little children wrapped warm against the cold, lads, shining and