

The Pittsburg Gazette.

THE UNTAMEABLE SHREW.

Among the many relics of the past times which attract attention in the narrow busy streets of Vienna, is an inscription which will enlighten the minds of an old-fashioned house, in ancient days numbered 811, but now represents a woman wrestling with the devil, and inscribed beneath it are the following lines:

In the beginning of the 18th century it appears that this same Bognergasse, or Bow street, was the exclusive domain—not of beads and bobbles—but of bow and arrow manufacturers, who, even thus long after the invention of gun-powder, plied their flourishing trade. The house No. 811, was at that time occupied by an honest, peaceable burgher, a native of Silesenburger, one Kaspar Pergauer by name, who had settled there with his newly married wife, Frau Ursula, of whose stately figure and comely face the fond husband was not a little proud; moreover she had brought him a handsome dowry, and the young couple may be said to have started in life under the most promising conditions, and were accordingly the envy of many of their neighbors.

Kaspar carried on the business of bow and arrow maker, and being a man of orderly habits, regular life, and industrious propensities, he prospered accordingly. Unhappily he was not blessed with offspring, and as Dame Ursula had no taste for cats, dogs, parrots, or any other components of the menagerie which are usually the substitute for a childless ménage, she gradually became self-centred, and her temper began to afford external evidence that it was not right within. It never occurred to her to bestow her unoccupied energies on those who might have been glad to seek for any useful employment of her time; the consequence was, that dissatisfied with herself, she knew not why, her ill-humor vented itself on her unucky husband, when it had exhausted itself on her servants. So sour did her disposition grow, aggravated by the dissatisfaction she created in those around her, that it at length became impossible to keep either domestic or apprentices in the house; and then her undivided wrath fell with deadly effect upon the head of the unhappy Kaspar. With servants and apprentices, disappeared also acquaintances and neighbors, and Kaspar, whose home had once been so bright, tranquil and happy, felt as if a blight had fallen upon all his prospects. His house, became dingy and neglected, his little garden was overgrown with weeds, and what was worse, his business began to flag, and he foresaw that a change in his position was imminent. Kaspar began to sink under the weight of his misery, in which the only source of some consolation, viz: that matters could scarcely be worse. Reduced to his own company, for he dreaded that of his wife, he would speak out of his house unobserved, and steal to the bank of the river, there to muse on his wretched fate, and sometimes to try to muster courage to plunge into the current, as the only way of getting rid of the chain he could not break. But one day he had wandered as far as Peterfriedhof, sauntering listlessly along, with his hands swinging behind him, muttering to himself the complaints he could no longer confide to others. "All is vain," he said, "Heaven is deaf to my cry, and all my entreaties are spurned; as I can obtain no mercy from above, and I am not justified in trying what I can get from below. But this is the first time the thought had crossed him, and the sound of his own words startled him, as he pronounced them. He paused, aghast at the desperation which had wrung from him so formidable a resolution. "What am I saying?" exclaimed he, and can it be indeed I—Kaspar Pergauer, who would—

He was interrupted by a hollow and unnatural laugh beside him, and an unearthly voice replied to his half-uttered question. "Ah, my dear fellow," it said, "do not be so very particular; if you are in a mess, get out of it the best way you can. At the moment you call me—Lucifer in person, at your service, and ready to do what you want—that is, if I can."

Kaspar had not expected so ready a response to his appeal, and his blood pale and trembling, not knowing whether to regard the strange dark figure that stood before him as a friend or foe; at these last words, however, he recovered some of his courage, and repeating these in accents of astonishment, he seemed to be calling in question the identity of the stranger.

"Well," said Lucifer, "for there really was no mistake as to who he was; 'but the job you want to give me is not one that comes under the category of ordinary work; you see Heaven will have nothing to do with it, and although no doubt, it is more in my way, yet I don't promise, of my own accord, to do it for you. Then I wonder why you offered yourself," said Kaspar, somewhat tartly, for he was grievously disappointed.

"Now don't get yourself in a pet, Master Kaspar," replied Satan, "for I shall think your wife has some excuse for her temper; you haven't heard me to the end. Your life is intolerable, is it, Kaspar? I believe?" and he looked for Kaspar's gloomy assent.

"Well," he resumed, "I will do my best to relieve you of your burden. If I succeed I certainly expect to be remunerated, and I shall have nothing to complain of. I will and he placed his hand on his hip side just as if he had a heart there; but Kaspar did not notice it. "If I don't," he proceeded, "try some one else over; I shall have left you as you were when I found you."

"Then," said the benighted husband, "and I must know what you consider a cure, and what are the terms you expect?" "Prudence and fair Master Kaspar," said the devil, "testing his new talent" on the "back" and cleverly concealing his claws. "You like dealing with a man of business. You shall know my conditions. Indeed, if you are not satisfied with my word, we will put it down to red and white; you know, 'what honesty' added he, with a wink, "what description of writing-fluid we shall employ for this sort of deed?"

in this, I abandon her to you, and you to your ridiculous and most contemptible position; leaving you, however, as a consolation, the permission to make game of me for the rest of your life, and the certainty that I shall never show my face to you again. Now, I call that a very handsome offer—of course, replied Pergauer, rather sulkily, "any chance is preferable to leaving things as they are."

"Now then," resumed Satan, "follow my directions, like a holiday, and don't turn up for three days from this time—go, and enjoy your liberty."

On the following morning, with the first beam of the rising sun, Lucifer, in the form and garb of Kaspar, stood by the bedside of Dame Ursula; he contemplated the sleeping creature for a moment with some trepidation, but he had formed his plans. His first attempt at taming the shrew before him, was to be by means of gentleness and affection; so he bent down over the reclining form, and impressed a passionate kiss upon the gray locks. Ursula, disturbed thus suddenly from her downy slumber, opened her eyes, and before the tender culprit had time to withdraw, or even foresee what was coming, applied a well-directed box on the ear, making it ring again. Stunned by the unexpecting reception, he retreated with speed, apprehensive of what might follow; and seating himself in Kaspar's unfinished work, he began to consider what his next move should be in his critical game; for it was clear he had not as yet hit upon the right method. As may be supposed, the unwelcome reply was not likely to proceed very favorably; and it is needless to recount the various scenes which succeeded each other between the strange couple as it were on the Sabbath day, that by the time night came, the supposed husband's back was covered with stripes, and his face bore tokens of having come into close contact with the nails of Mrs. Pergauer.

"Regarding the system of jealousy with which he had begun to proceed in his efforts, the shrew-tamer proposed to try next day what effect a little rational argument would produce. Having accordingly prepared his attack, he advanced her in a tone of great forbearance, placing her hand before her in so true and startling a light, that taken completely, back by the force of his words, the scold for once lost her tongue, and sat in mute astonishment, unable to utter a word, and to see just and temperate observations; but the storm was all the time brewing within, and the more she felt herself in the wrong, the more difficult did she find it to control her anger. Her only resource lay in the hope of silencing her admonisher by noise and invectives; she accordingly thundered forth a volley of abuse, and the dinner having now been put upon the table, she turned round to look for some weapon with which she could chastise him, her eye fell upon the tureen of scalding soup; this she seized, and in another moment the seething contents had bathed his head and neck, and he was running down his face and arms, placing him in a most pitiable plight. Blinded by the hot liquid and breathless from the suddenness of the attack, he could not see the mischief he was doing, and he looked on in amazement, as he saw the shrew-bath, Lucifer only recovered himself to hear the street door slammed with violence, and to perceive that his temporary wife had flung herself out of the house.

"He and rich!" he exclaimed, "in vengeance does this mean? Is this virago of a woman going to defeat me with my own arms? Am I to stand by and see myself her sport? And yet it is beginning to look uncommonly as if I were going to get the worst of it. More than half the time I had given myself to subdue her villainous temper has expired, and I don't seem to be any nearer my aim than I was at first. However, one more experiment in retreat, and I must manage to finish her off with this."

No sooner had Ursula returned home than the supposed Kaspar met her, and looking at her sternly, bade her follow him into the sitting-room, as he had something important to communicate to her. Arrived there, he looked down and put the key in his pocket. "Sit down," he said, "and listen in silence, if you can, to what I have to say." Ursula stared and obeyed mechanically, for she was completely mystified by the sudden change in her husband's manner. "My patience," began he, "is at an end. I have made up my mind to endure your vile temper no longer. I have tried every proper and rational means of taming you, and I find that you have no regard for a man, and cannot be treated as a reasonable being. I have now to tell you, once for all, that unless from this hour, you renounce your violent ways, and behave decently and quietly as a respectable woman should, I mean to get myself formally separated from you, and to turn you out of doors."

He paused, and for a moment, as he looked into the woman's astonished face, he believed he had at last succeeded in impressing her; but it was only for a moment. Her reply was only a loud scornful laugh, in the midst of which she began in her old way. "You are a mere creature!" she said, "what new freak is this? Has your mind got a twist, for it seems as crooked as one of your own bows, that you think to intimidate me by such language, as that you seek to your wretched work by trying to earn something, instead of turning preacher and lecturing those who are in every way superior to yourself; and for your pains, take heed that you don't get the worst of it. I mean to get the better of the other."

At last Satan found the day was going against him, and infuriated at the humiliating thought that he was to be vanquished by a woman, he advanced towards the woman. Recognizing me and he annihilated!" With these words, he threw off his disguise and stood before her in his real guise; but he had miscalculated the moral courage of his adversary. "I'll avenge then, did not lose her self-possession, but seizing both his horses in her vigorous grasp she dragged him to the ground and there held him pinned, till he cried for quarter! This is the moment chosen by the artist for the moral painting in the Bognergasse which excited our curiosity.

The devil had no choice but to ponder himself for once, out-donny; he fled away with his tail between his legs, uttering a fiendish cry of impotent rage, and leaving Dame Ursula mistress of the situation. Kaspar returned home on the appointed day, fully prepared for the event; he found his home as quiet as a convent, and he had learned that henceforward resistance would be useless, and that he must resign himself to endure what it was evident he could not endure. He accepted his fate in a spirit of true Christian submission to the will of Providence, and made it his daily habit to offer up his sufferings in expiation of the sins of his former life. He became a second job, and when he turned him from his troubles; it was his turn to cheat the devil; for those who stood around his bed, declared that they saw his spirit ascend to heaven, and that he departed in a peaceful and happy manner. It is subsequent to the christening, discreetly days a veil, but hints that there is much probability in the popular report that when she departed this life, Lucifer took his revenge, and as he departed, he carried off the spirit of Kaspar, and he was seen to depart in a peaceful and happy manner.

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