

FIVE GERMAN DITTIES

William Makepeace Thackeray

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| <u>FIVE GERMAN DITTIES</u> | 1 |
| <u>William Makepeace Thackeray</u> | 1 |
| <u>FIVE GERMAN DITTIES</u> | 1 |
| <u>A TRAGIC STORY</u> | 1 |
| <u>THE CHAPLET</u> | 2 |
| <u>THE KING ON THE TOWER</u> | 3 |
| <u>ON A VERY OLD WOMAN</u> | 4 |
| <u>A CREDO</u> | 4 |

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- FIVE GERMAN DITTIES.
 - A TRAGIC STORY.
 - THE CHAPLET.
 - THE KING ON THE TOWER.
 - ON A VERY OLD WOMAN.
 - A CREDO.

FIVE GERMAN DITTIES.

A TRAGIC STORY.

BY ADELBERT VON CHAMISSO.

" 's war Einer, dem's zu Herzen gieng."

There lived a sage in days of yore
And he a handsome pigtail wore;
But wondered much and sorrowed more
Because it hung behind him.

He mused upon this curious case,
And swore he'd change the pigtail's place,
And have it hanging at his face,
Not dangling there behind him.

Says he, "The mystery I've found,
I'll turn me round," he turned him round;
But still it hung behind him.

Then round, and round, and out and in,
All day the puzzled sage did spin;
In vain it mattered not a pin,

FIVE GERMAN DITTIES

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The pigtail hung behind him.

And right, and left, and round about,
And up, and down, and in, and out,
He turned; but still the pigtail stout
Hung steadily behind him.

And though his efforts never slack,
And though he twist, and twirl, and tack,
Alas! still faithful to his back
The pigtail hangs behind him.

THE CHAPLET.

FROM UHLAND.

"Es pfluckte Blumlein mannigfalt."

A little girl through field and wood
Went plucking flowerets here and there,
When suddenly beside her stood
A lady wondrous fair!

The lovely lady smiled, and laid
A wreath upon the maiden's brow;
"Wear it, 'twill blossom soon," she said,
"Although 'tis leafless now."

The little maiden older grew
And wandered forth of moonlight eves,
And sighed and loved as maids will do;
When, lo! her wreath bore leaves.

Then was our maid a wife, and hung
Upon a joyful bridegroom's bosom;
When from the garland's leaves there sprung
Fair store of blossom.

And presently a baby fair
Upon her gentle breast she reared;
When midst the wreath that bound her hair
Rich golden fruit appeared.

THE CHAPLET.

FIVE GERMAN DITTIES

But when her love lay cold in death,
Sunk in the black and silent tomb,
All sere and withered was the wreath
That wont so bright to bloom.

Yet still the withered wreath she wore;
She wore it at her dying hour;
When, to the wondrous garland bore
Both leaf, and fruit, and flower!

THE KING ON THE TOWER.

FROM UHLAND.

"Da liegen sie alle, die grauen Hohen."

The cold gray hills they bind me around,
The darksome valleys lie sleeping below,
But the winds as they pass o'er all this ground,
Bring me never a sound of woe!

Oh! for all I have suffered and striven,
Care has embittered my cup and my feast;
But here is the night and the dark blue heaven,
And my soul shall be at rest.

O golden legends writ in the skies!
I turn towards you with longing soul,
And list to the awful harmonies
Of the Spheres as on they roll.

My hair is gray and my sight nigh gone;
My sword it rusteth upon the wall;
Right have I spoken, and right have I done:
When shall I rest me once for all?

O blessed rest! O royal night!
Wherefore seemeth the time so long
Till I see you stars in their fullest light,
And list to their loudest song?

THE KING ON THE TOWER.

FIVE GERMAN DITTIES
ON A VERY OLD WOMAN.

LA MOTTE FOUQUE.

"Und Du gingst einst, die Myrt' im Haare."

And thou wert once a maiden fair,
A blushing virgin warm and young:
With myrtles wreathed in golden hair,
And glossy brow that knew no care
Upon a bridegroom's arm you hung.

The golden locks are silvered now,
The blushing cheek is pale and wan;
The spring may bloom, the autumn glow,
All's one in chimney corner thou
Sitt'st shivering on.

A moment and thou sink'st to rest!
To wake perhaps an angel blest,
In the bright presence of thy Lord.
Oh, weary is life's path to all!
Hard is the strife, and light the fall,
But wondrous the reward!

A CREDO.

I.

For the sole edification
Of this decent congregation,
Goodly people, by your grant
I will sing a holy chant
I will sing a holy chant.
If the ditty sound but oddly,
'Twas a father, wise and godly,
Sang it so long ago
Then sing as Martin Luther sang,
As Doctor Martin Luther sang:
"Who loves not wine, woman and song,

ON A VERY OLD WOMAN.

FIVE GERMAN DITTIES

He is a fool his whole life long!"

II.

He, by custom patriarchal,
Loved to see the beaker sparkle;
And he thought the wine improved,
Tasted by the lips he loved

By the kindly lips he loved.

Friends, I wish this custom pious
Duly were observed by us,

To combine love, song, wine,
And sing as Martin Luther sang,
As Doctor Martin Luther sang:
"Who loves not wine, woman and song,
He is a fool his whole life long!"

III.

Who refuses this our Credo,
And who will not sing as we do,
Were he holy as John Knox,
I'd pronounce him heterodox!

I'd pronounce him heterodox,
And from out this congregation,
With a solemn commination,

Banish quick the heretic,
Who will not sing as Luther sang,
As Doctor Martin Luther sang:
"Who loves not wine, woman and song,
He is a fool his whole life long!"