

Chapter Twenty-Five

The actual truth about ways of achieving invulnerability

Because I thought to myself that I was now living in an era in which, because of the terrible war, there would be no place safer to dwell than right in the midst of the army of the Most Christian King, to whom all, no matter where they turned, were subjugating themselves, look you, I requested of my pater that he permit me to stay with him till I would be able to go home again in good safety. I found him more than willing to do this, particular since he had managed to obtain the consent of the general staff that he might keep me with him. But that was not all there was to it; rather the pater said to me that if I wished to live in his company, I must needs endeavor zealously to be the man I promised him in my confession to become, namely the sort of person who not only rues from the bottom of his heart the sins he has committed, but also guards himself against them in the future and casts aside everything which might seduce and incite him to anger God further; as far as he could tell, he said, I had by far not rejected completely the most abominable idolatry with which I was more afflicted than any heathen and which lay in the infernal arts with which I burdened myself; he was surprised, he said, that I had not opened my eyes of my own accord instead of after his admonition, that I had not myself considered who it was Whom I had so often and so much scorned and offended, namely God, my Creator, my most kind Heavenly Father, from whom I had everything which I possessed—soul, body, life, physical adornment, strength, beauty, limbs whole and healthy and straight, good sense and reason, sustenance and temporal goods; Who was indescribably

more loyal to me and had probably shown me more love than had my own parents; Who had not created me deaf, blind, halt, mute, senseless, leprous or otherwise of monstrous form, nor an earthworm or a mindless beast or a thing without any senses, but had rather created me a reasonable, well-formed creature in His own image who was capable, like the angels, of eternal bliss; He who had also promised me life everlasting, which he granted His chosen ones, and had appointed His holy angel to be my tutor, servant, protector and defender; Who had protected me himself and had only recently, in more than visible and palpable fashion, preserved me from death in this life and eternal damnation in the next when wretched Satan (in whose protection I had betaken myself, forsaking God) was about to deliver me up for slaughter and deprive me of both temporal and eternal life by making me self-assured and foolhardy because of both my invisibility and my invulnerability. "Consider, my son," the pater said further, "that in a situation of that sort our just God might probably have permitted to die many a mortal who had perchance not angered Him grossly and so often! O, my child, how can your heart be so hard as not to dissolve into tears when you recognize how often and how grossly you have offended your Creator with your sins, for which He, for the sake of His justice, might so often have damned you, but did not do this, but rather has mercifully waited till this very hour for you to mend your ways; yea, has enticed and called upon you in the most friendly way to reform so that He may make you blessed and may impart to you His salvation. And this is the deed of the Almighty, who has not the least need for you, whose venerability and majesty is praised, honored and adored with trembling and wonder by countless millions of holy angels and mortals, Whose all-powerful indescribable glory, magnificence and most holy perfection neither angel nor mortal may comprehend. Look you, my son! With this most holy and all-powerful majesty you, it seems to me, are still

in conflict, and you are still an adherent of the devil, who is, after all, the very worst enemy you could ever, ever have, etc.”

With these words and more of the like, which, however, I have since forgotten, the honest pater valiantly exhorted me and so touched me to the bottom of my heart that I felt more than sufficiently and my own conscience told me superabundantly enough what manner of honorable fellow I was. But in spite of all that, I sought (without doubt inspired and driven on by wretched Satan himself) other excuses and imagined to myself that I was being reproached by the pater unkindly and too much, because I wished to excuse my sins and blindly refused to be considered an idolater, much less an enemy of God and a servant of the devil; for I said that never in all the days of my life had I ever worshiped the arch-fiend, much less made a compact with him or abjured God; rather the art of making myself invisible had fallen to me by accident and without my seeking or pursuing it; which art perhaps reposed in a natural way in a little root or stone which was in my ant-hill; so, likewise, the arts by which I made myself invulnerable to shot and stopped up the musket barrels of others or undid their invulnerability, were nothing evil at all, since I employed naught but holy and therefore very powerful words to accomplish these things, which words neither the Christian church nor any sensible man anywhere would repudiate and condemn. However, I said, if anyone would demonstrate to me that in practicing these arts I was really acting against God, I should be willing to throw all the plunder I had got from them into the fire and never in all my days to make use of anything of the like again.

Hereupon the pater answered: “My child, you ought not, to be sure, to demand any proof, but rather place complete faith in the artless words of your father-confessor, who is sitting here in God’s stead and has no other business before him save to further your soul’s blessedness. However, I shall prove by your own example that through both

the art of invisibility and the art of making yourself invulnerable, stopping up others' musket barrels and the like you have become ensnared in the toils of the arch-fiend and were in fact in his power, so that he might have been able to proceed with you at full gallop to the infernal abyss, had God in His infinite goodness not taken mercy on your wretched state, perfected you up till now; and recently, through the gunshot wound you received (which you should never hold to be a misfortune, but rather the greatest act of grace by God) enticed you to turn to Him again and given you cause to know yourself. I am not talking with you now in confession, of course, but what is said to you should be under the seal of silence which confession requires. You say the art of making yourself invisible you did not intentionally seek, but rather it fell to you by chance. I shall not dispute your allegation, but, my child, do you not think about the fact that you got the material which you are using for it from a necromancer, from an apostle of the arch-fiend; yea, through the assistance of the devil himself? You should have recognized the tree by its fruits even if you had not known that your honorable so-called art of making yourself invisible had come to you through Satan's dealings. For think back, my son, and you will find that your invisibility caused you to fall into the very most abominable sins and vices you ever committed in your life and gave you every opportunity to commit them. What further effort did the wretched devil devote to you to drag you into his realm of the condemned, when with invisibility he had already so roped you that you were running toward hell on your very own accord? It appears as if the arch-fiend would have liked to stop tempting you further since you were his certain pawn, but you, contrarily, were not content simply to be damned, but were much more cruel to your soul than the arch-enemy of souls himself, for it was not sufficient for you to wallow around in the filth of lewdness and incontinence like a sow in the muck; rather you wished also to besmirch yourself

with the devil's help by stealing, almost as if the sins you had already committed did not make your damnation severe enough; and here it makes no difference whether you stole from a Jew or a Christian. I say not without good right "with the devil's help," for dear friend, what expert in the sciences of nature has ever found out or determined that there is a plant which has the power to cause a lock with steel springs, made by human hands, to spring open? 'Tis Satan himself who, in the form of a root, permits himself to be summoned by curious, perverse men, and who opens locks to help thieves to steal.

Look you, my son, this was the first visible devil which served you and demanded for his efforts naught else save that you should valiantly violate both the seventh commandment and civil law, so that he might bring you if not to the gallows at least all the farther into damnation; and this state of yours at the time would have been dangerous enough and it would have been high time for you to begin to mend your ways, even if you had not had the art of invisibility. But what, miserable man, did you do in this wretched state of yours? Oh, what a pity! You went and in fact forsook the kind Protector of man, Who till then had preserved you from your well-deserved eternal damnation and had mercifully waited for you to mend your ways, and you gave yourself, without any need, over to the important protection of him who goes about like a roaring lion and seeks naught else save to devour your soul! For you 'twas not enough that in a pleasant time of peace you offended the most holy majesty of God by practicing the most terrible vices; rather you also wished to heap the measure of your sins yet fuller in this present war, which is none of your affair in the least, namely when you, like a thief, stole their lives from your fellow Christians, for whom Christ suffered that He might preserve them. For you 'twas not enough that you had till now carried the devil with you in the form of a root and had broken open locks with it; rather, so that your damnation might be all the greater

and all the more certain and so that God might be all the more offended and angered, it must also needs have been attested in writing, in proper form, how much and actually you had obligated yourself to the devil, which occurred through the slips of paper which you carried with you on your person or even chewed up and swallowed in order to be invulnerable to shot, particularly since the slips of paper of the Passau art (which bear that name because a student at Passau invented them) have no other content, despite the many signs of a cross written on them, save the following terrible rhyme, which because of its abominableness no Christian ought ever utter, much less let be put down on paper:

Devil, help me fine
And my body and soul are thine.

And it is just the same with this fine so-called Passau art as it is with the many kinds of other invulnerabilities and other sorcerer's arts which consist of words. You say, of course, that nothing that you used was evil, but rather they were naught but holy words and calling on the name of God and His holy angels. I shall not deny that it appears to be that way; but, my son, read the life and especially the confession of the French sorcerer Gaffredi, a priest from Marsilia who troubled himself greatly with those sorts of arts, and also himself invented many of them. And then you will find that sorcerers, when they name the most holy Trinity in these matters, mean Lucifer when they say God the Father, Beelzebub when they say God the Son, Astaroth when they say God the Holy Ghost, and the mother of the Antichrist when they say the Holy Virgin Mary; and that they employ the sign of the cross so often and manifoldly in these matters to no other end than one uses honey with simple-minded folk, such as smearing it on the edge of children's cuts so that one can thereby all the more easily prevail on them to take the bitter drink for worms;

for the person must needs be quite desperate who straightway from the beginning would knowingly give his soul to the devil, if such pepper was not first sprinkled on the stinking carrion.

