

The Hunter Hackelnberg and the Tut-Osel

Folk-Lore And Legends: German

German

Intermediate
5 min read

The Wild Huntsman, Hackelnberg, traverses the Hartz mountains and the Thuringian forest, but he seems mostly to prefer the Hakel, from which place he derives his name, and especially the neighbourhood of Dummburg. Ofttimes is he heard at night, in rain and storm, when the moonlight is breaking by fits and starts through the troubled sky, following with his hounds the shadows of the wild beasts he slew in days of yore. His retinue generally proceed from the Dummburg, straight over the Hakel to the now desolate village of Ammendorf.

He has only been seen by a few children, who, having been born on a Sunday, had the power of seeing spirits. Sometimes he met them as a lonely huntsman, accompanied by one solitary hound. Sometimes he was seen in a carriage drawn by four horses, and followed by six dogs of the chase. But many have heard the low bellowing of his hounds, and the splashing of his horse's feet in the swamps of the moor; many have heard his cry of "Hu! hu!" and seen his associate and forerunner—the Tut-Osel, or Tooting Ursula.

Once upon a time three wanderers seated themselves in the neighbourhood of the Dummburg. The night was already far advanced. The moon gleamed faintly through the chasing clouds. All around was still. Suddenly they heard something rush along over their heads. They looked up, and an immense screech-owl flew before

them.

“Ha!” cried one of them, “there is the Tut-Osel! Hackelnberg, the Wild Huntsman, is not far off.”

“Let us fly,” exclaimed the second, “before the spirits overtake us.”

“We cannot fly,” said the third; “but you have nothing to fear if you do not irritate him. Lay yourselves down upon your faces when he passes over us. But, remember, you must not think of addressing Hackelnberg, lest he treat you as he treated the shepherd.”

The wanderers laid themselves under the bushes. Presently they heard around them the rushing by, as it were, of a whole pack of hounds, and high in the air above them they heard a hollow sound like that of a hunted beast of the forest, and ever and anon they trembled at hearing the fearful-toned voice of the Wild Huntsman uttering his well-known “Hu! hu!” Two of the wanderers pressed close to the earth, but the third could not resist his inclination to have a peep at what was going on. He looked up slantingly through the branches, and saw the shadow of a huntsman pass directly over him.

Suddenly all around was hushed. The wanderers rose slowly and timidly, and looked after Hackelnberg; but he had vanished, and did not return.

“But who is the Tut-Osel?” inquired the second wanderer, after a long pause.

“In a distant nunnery in Thuringia,” replied the first, “there once lived a nun named Ursula, who, even during her lifetime, tormented all the sisterhood by her discordant voice, and oftentimes interrupted the service of the church, for which reason they called her Tut-Osel, or Tooting Ursula. If matters were bad while she lived, they became far worse when she died. At eleven o’clock every night she now thrust her head through a hole in the convent tower and tooted most miserably, and every morning at about four o’clock she joined unasked in the matin song.

“For a few days the sisterhood endured this with a beating heart, and on bended knees; but on the fourth morning, when she joined in the service, and one of the nuns whispered tremblingly to her neighbour—

“Ha! it is surely our Tut-Osel!” the song ceased, the hair of the nuns stood on end, and they all rushed from the church, exclaiming—

“Ha! Tut-Osel! Tut-Osel!”

“Despite the penances and chastisements with which they were threatened, not one of the nuns would enter the church again until the Tut-Osel was banished from the walls of the nunnery. To effect this, one of the most celebrated exorcists of the day, a Capuchin friar, from a cloister on the banks of the Danube, was sent for; and he succeeded, by prayer and fasting, in banishing Ursel in the shape of a screech-owl to the far-distant Dumburg.

“Here she met Hackelnberg, the Wild Huntsman, and found in his wood-cry, ‘Hu! hu!’ as great delight as he did in her ‘U! hu!’ So they now always hunt together; he glad to have a spirit after his own kind, and she rejoiced in the extreme to be no longer compelled to reside within the walls of a cloister, and there listen to the echo of her own song.”

“So much for the Tut-Osel. Now tell us how it fared with the shepherd who spoke to Hackelnberg.”

“Listen to the marvellous adventure,” said the third wanderer. “A shepherd once hearing the Wild Huntsman journeying through the forest, encouraged the spirit hounds, and called out—

“Good sport to you, Hackelnberg.’

“Hackelnberg instantly turned round and roared out to him, in a voice like thunder—

“Since you have helped me to set on the hounds, you shall have part of the spoil.’

“The trembling shepherd tried to hide himself, but Hackelnberg hurled the half-consumed haunch of a horse into the shepherd’s cart with such violence that it could scarcely be removed.”

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