



# *The Cellar of the Old Knights in the Kyffhauser*

Folk-Lore And Legends: German

German

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*Intermediate*

*6 min read*

There was a poor, but worthy, and withal very merry, fellow at Tilleda, who was once put to the expense of a christening, and, as luck would have it, it was the eighth. According to the custom of the time, he was obliged to give a plain feast to the child's sponsors. The wine of the country which he put before his guests was soon exhausted, and they began to call for more.

“Go,” said the merry father of the newly baptized child to his eldest daughter, a handsome girl of sixteen,—”go, and get us better wine than this out of the cellar.”

“Out of what cellar?”

“Why, out of the great wine-cellar of the old Knights in the Kyffhauser, to be sure,” said her father jokingly.

The simple-minded girl did as he told her, and taking a small pitcher in her hand went to the mountain. In the middle of the mountain she found an aged housekeeper, dressed in a very old-fashioned style, with a large bundle of keys at her girdle, sitting at the ruined entrance of an immense cellar. The girl was struck dumb with amazement, but the old woman said very kindly—

“Of a surety you want to draw wine out of the Knights’ cellar?”

“Yes,” said the girl timidly, “but I have no money.”

“Never mind that,” said the old woman; “come with me, and you shall have wine for nothing, and better wine too than your father ever tasted.”

So the two went together through the half-blocked-up entrance, and as they went along the old woman made the girl tell her how affairs were going on at that time in Tilleda.

“For once,” said she, “when I was young, and good-looking as you are, the Knights stole me away in the night-time, and brought me through a hole in the ground from the very house in Tilleda which now belongs to your father. Shortly before that they had carried away by force from Kelbra, in broad daylight, the four beautiful damsels who occasionally still ride about here on horses richly caparisoned, and then disappear again. As for me, as soon as I grew old, they made me their butler, and I have been so ever since.”

They had now reached the cellar door, which the old woman opened. It was a very large roomy cellar, with barrels ranged along both sides. The old woman rapped against the barrels—some were quite full, some were only half full. She took the little pitcher, drew it full of wine, and said—

“There, take that to your father, and as often as you have a feast in your house you may come here again; but, mind, tell nobody but your father where you get the wine from. Mind, too, you must never sell any of it—it costs nothing, and for nothing you must give it away. Let any one but come here for wine to make a profit off it and his last bread is baked.”

The girl took the wine to her father, whose guests were highly delighted with it, and sadly puzzled to think where it came from, and ever afterwards, when there was a little merry-making in the house, would the girl fetch wine from the Kyffhauser in her little pitcher. But this state of things did not continue long. The neighbours wondered where so poor a man contrived to get such delicious wine that there was none like it in the whole country round. The father said not a word to any one, and neither did his daughter.

Opposite to them, however, lived the publican who sold adulterated wine. He had once tasted the Old Knights’ wine, and thought to himself that one might mix it with ten times the quantity of water and sell it for a good

price after all. Accordingly, when the girl went for the fourth time with her little pitcher to the Kyffhauser, he crept after her, and concealed himself among the bushes, where he watched until he saw her come out of the entrance which led to the cellar, with her pitcher filled with wine.

On the following evening he himself went to the mountain, pushing before him in a wheelbarrow the largest empty barrel he could procure. This he thought of filling with the choicest wine in the cellar, and in the night rolling it down the mountain, and in this way he intended to come every day, as long as there was any wine left in the cellar.

When, however, he came to the place where he had the day before seen the entrance to the cellar, it grew all of a sudden totally dark. The wind began to howl fearfully, and a monster threw him, his barrow, and empty butt, from one ridge of rocks to another, and he kept falling lower and lower, until at last he fell into a cemetery.

There he saw before him a coffin covered with black, and his wife and four of her gossips, whom he knew well by their dress and figures, were following a bier. His fright was so great that he swooned away.

After some hours he came to himself again, and saw, to his horror, that he was still in the dimly lighted vaults, and heard just above his head the well-known town clock of Tilleda strike twelve, and thereby he knew that it was midnight, and that he was then under the church, in the burying-place of the town. He was more dead than alive, and scarcely dared to breathe.

Presently there came a monk, who led him up a long, long flight of steps, opened a door, placed, without speaking, a piece of gold in his hand, and deposited him at the foot of the mountain. It was a cold frosty night. By degrees the publican recovered himself, and crept, without barrel or wine, back to his own home. The clock struck one as he reached the door. He immediately took to his bed, and in three days was a dead man, and the piece of gold which the wizard monk had given him was expended on his funeral.

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