

**ВИЛЬГЕЛЬМ
ГАУФ**

THE SEVERED
HAND

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The Severed Hand

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The Severed Hand / From «German Tales» Published by the American
Publishers' Corporation:*

Содержание

From "German Tales." Published by the American Publishers' Corporation.	4
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	10

Wilhelm Hauff
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I was born in Constantinople; my father was a dragoman at the Porte, and besides, carried on a fairly lucrative business in sweet-scented perfumes and silk goods. He gave me a good education; he partly instructed me himself, and also had me instructed by one of our priests. He at first intended me to succeed him in business one day, but as I showed greater aptitude than he had expected, he destined me, on the advice of his friends, to be a doctor; for if a doctor has learned a little more than the ordinary charlatan, he can make his fortune in Constantinople. Many Franks frequented our house, and one of them persuaded

my father to allow me to travel to his native land to the city of Paris, where such things could be best acquired and free of charge. He wished, however, to take me with himself gratuitously on his journey home. My father, who had also travelled in his youth, agreed, and the Frank told me to hold myself in readiness three months hence. I was beside myself with joy at the idea of seeing foreign countries, and eagerly awaited the moment when we should embark. The Frank had at last concluded his business and prepared himself for the journey. On the evening before our departure my father led me into his little bedroom. There I saw splendid dresses and arms lying on the table. My looks were however chiefly attracted to an immense heap of gold, for I had never before seen so much collected together.

My father embraced me and said: "Behold, my son, I have procured for thee clothes for the journey. These weapons are thine; they are the same which thy grandfather hung around me when I went abroad. I know that thou canst use them aright; but only make use of them when thou art attacked; on such occasions, how-over, defend thyself bravely. My property is not large; behold I have divided it into three parts, one part for thee, another for my support and spare money, but the third is to me a sacred and untouched property, it is for thee in the hour of need." Thus spoke my old father, tears standing in his eyes, perhaps from some foreboding, for I never saw him again.

The journey passed off very well; we had soon reached the land of the Franks, and six days later we arrived in the large

city of Paris. There my Frankish friend hired a room for me, and advised me to spend wisely my money, which amounted in all to two thousand dollars. I lived three years in this city, and learned what is necessary for a skilful doctor to know. I should not, however, be stating the truth if I said that I liked being there, for the customs of this nation displeased me; besides, I had only a few chosen friends there, and these were noble young men.

The longing after home at last possessed me mightily; during the whole of that time I had not heard anything from my father, and I therefore seized a favorable opportunity of reaching home. An embassy from France left for Turkey. I acted as surgeon to the suite of the Ambassador and arrived happily in Stamboul. My father's house was locked, and the neighbors, who were surprised on seeing me, told me my father had died two months ago. The priest who had instructed me in my youth brought me the key; alone and desolate I entered the empty house. All was still in the same position as my father had left it, only the gold which I was to inherit was gone. I questioned the priest about it, and he, bowing, said: "Your father died a saint, for he has bequeathed his gold to the Church." This was and remained inexplicable to me. However, what could I do? I had no witness against the priest, and had to be glad that he had not considered the house and the goods of my father as a bequest. This was the first misfortune that I encountered. Henceforth nothing but ill-luck attended me. My reputation as doctor would not spread at all, because I was ashamed to act the charlatan; and I felt everywhere the want of

the recommendation of my father, who would have introduced me to the richest and most distinguished, but who now no longer thought of the poor Zaleukos! The goods of my father also had no sale, for his customers had deserted him after his death, and new ones are only to be got slowly.

Thus when I was one day meditating sadly over my position, it occurred to me that I had often seen in France men of my nation travelling through the country exhibiting their goods in the markets of the towns. I remembered that the people liked to buy of them, because they came from abroad, and that such a business would be most lucrative. Immediately I resolved what to do. I disposed of my father's house, gave part of the money to a trusty friend to keep for me, and with the rest I bought what are very rare in France, shawls, silk goods, ointments, and oils, took a berth on board a ship, and thus entered upon my second journey to the land of the Franks. It seemed as if fortune had favored me again as soon as I had turned my back upon the Castles of the Dardanelles. Our journey was short and successful. I travelled through the large and small towns of the Franks, and found everywhere willing buyers of my goods. My friend in Stamboul always sent me fresh stores, and my wealth increased day by day. When I had saved at last so much that I thought I might venture on a greater undertaking, I travelled with my goods to Italy. I must however confess to something, which brought me not a little money: I also employed my knowledge of physic. On reaching a town, I had it published that a Greek physician had arrived, who

had already healed many; and in fact my balsam and medicine gained me many a sequin. Thus I had at length reached the city of Florence in Italy.

I resolved upon remaining in this town for some time, partly because I liked it so well, partly also because I wished to recruit myself from the exertions of my travels. I hired a vaulted shop, in that part of the town called Sta. Croce, and not far from this a couple of nice rooms at an inn, leading out upon a balcony. I immediately had my bills circulated, which announced me to be both physician and merchant. Scarcely had I opened my shop when I was besieged by buyers, and in spite of my high prices I sold more than any one else, because I was obliging and friendly towards my customers. Thus I had already lived four days happily in Florence, when one evening, as I was about to close my vaulted room, and on examining once more the contents of my ointment boxes, as I was in the habit of doing, I found in one of the small boxes a piece of paper, which I did not remember to have put into it.

I unfolded the paper, and found in it an invitation to be on the bridge which is called Ponto Vecchio that night exactly at midnight. I was thinking for a long time as to who it might be who had invited me there; and not knowing a single soul in Florence, I thought perhaps I should be secretly conducted to a patient, a thing which had already often occurred. I therefore determined to proceed thither, but took care to gird on the sword which my father had once presented to me. When it was close upon

midnight I set out on my journey, and soon reached the Ponte Vecchio. I found the bridge deserted, and determined to await the appearance of him who called me. It was a cold night; the moon shone brightly, and I looked down upon the waves of the Arno, which sparkled far away in the moonlight. It was now striking twelve o'clock from all the churches of the city, when I looked up and saw a tall man standing before me completely covered in a scarlet cloak, one end of which hid his face.

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