The "Jass" at Thun

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COLLECTANEA.

THE "JASS" AT THUN.

(PLATE XI.)

AT Thun, in Switzerland, the annual Shooting Feast takes place in October, when three days are devoted to making holiday. One of the tallest and strongest boys in the town is previously selected by the schoolmasters for the honour of appearing during the feast in the costume of a "Jass" or Jester, shown in the accompanying photograph (Plate XI.). His mission is to walk about the town and belabour with his baton all the youngsters whom he can catch. During the rest of the year the "Jass" is held up as a bugbear wherewith mothers and nurses threaten their children, telling them that, if they are not good, the "Jass" will catch them, and give them a beating. Another name given to the "Jass" is "Fulla Hund," *i.e.* Fauler Hund, "Lazy Dog."

During a recent visit in the neighbourhood I made several enquiries about this custom from natives of Thun, and gathered the following account of its origin.

In the fourteenth century the town of Thun and the district surrounding it, including both shores of the lake, Interlaken, and the valleys of Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen, were under the lordship of the powerful Dukes of Kyburg. When the last of this family, three brothers, were living in their castle at Thun, they treated their subjects so badly that the latter applied to the Bernese government, begging to be freed from their yoke. A battle took place at Kiesen between Bern and

PLATE XI.

The Jass of Thun.

Leonardson & Co.

the Dukes of Thun, in which the Dukes were defeated, and thereupon the town of Thun and the whole of the Bernese Oberland were annexed to Bern. After their defeat the three Dukes of Kyburg committed suicide by throwing themselves over the walls of their castle, and there is an inscription in old Swiss German which marks the spot.

During their reign the Dukes used to keep a Jester (Jass), whose sympathies were with the downtrodden inhabitants of Thun. He was invited every year to their great Shooting Feast, which then took place annually in October, as it does now. This Jester of the Kyburgs used to be dressed exactly in the same costume as that which is worn by the "Jass" of to-day. The children in Thun knew that he had nothing to do but amuse his masters, and so they nicknamed him "Fulla Hund," "Lazy Dog."¹ As he was in the employ of the much-feared masters of the castle, he was greatly respected, and after the fall of the House of Kyburg he remained in Thun, and all his expenses were paid by the citizens. Mothers ordered the Jester to punish their children for calling him "Fulla Hund," and he used to beat those he caught at the feast in October, though in these more humane days he only pretends to beat them. There is no longer a professional "Jass," but the old tradition is still maintained, the part being taken by a schoolboy.

It may be remarked that this account of the fall of Thun is not to be found in the standard histories. The historians of the Swiss nation say nothing about this battle of Kiesen and this tragical end of the Kyburgs, though they give a detailed description of a murder which took place in the castle of Thun in 1322, when, after a bitter quarrel between two brothers of the House, one of them was thrown down from the top of the keep, whereupon the surviving brother betrayed Thun to the Bernese. There was fighting between Bern and Duke Rudolf of Kyburg for many years before 1384, when it was finally put an end to, not however so much owing to the

¹ I was told by one informant that the "Jass" is called "Fulla Hund" because he is too lazy to beat the boys, but only pretends to do so. It seems clear, however, that in former days he used to beat them.

victories of Bern as to a revolution which broke out in that city. In consequence of this, and in order to end hostilities, the Kyburgs were offered a sum of money, which was fixed by a commission appointed for the purpose at 37,800 florins. The Kyburgs accepted this sum, and from that time forth became politically extinct, their possessions passing to Bern. The family did not, however, actually die out until the year 1415. (See Dändliker, *Geschichte der Schweiz*, vol. i. p. 525, etc., and Van Muyden, *Histoire de la Nation Suisse*, vol. i., p. 284, etc.)

It will be observed that the account which was given me explains, no doubt correctly, the costume worn by the "Jass," but it does not explain satisfactorily why children periodically ran a sporting risk of being beaten by him at holiday time, nor why mothers used his name to threaten them with. Was the "Jass" a "Whipping Tom" of independent origin, who, at the end of the fourteenth century, adopted the Jester's dress? If not, a wider question opens, which may be worth asking: What was the origin of the Court Jester? He is certainly a gentleman of very ancient descent, and I suppose that in part he represents the savage respect for mental aberration, but he may represent something else as well. What is the meaning of his traditional dress, calf-skin coat, horns, etc.? Was the Jester's function of creating amusement original or acquired? and, if the latter, what was his original function? Perhaps members of the Folklore Society, some of whom are no doubt familiar with the Thun custom, will throw more light on the subject.

CHARLES J. BILLSON.

FOLKLORE FROM TANGIER.

[THE following stories from Morocco have been collected by Miss Feridah Kirby Green of Tangier, daughter of the late Sir W. Kirby Green, British Minister in Morocco. Miss Kirby Green writes: "They have all been told me by a native in