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## **Illustrations of northern antiquities, from the earlier Teutonic and Scandinavian romances**

**Weber, Henry William**

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Libussa, or the prince's table

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## LIBUSSA,

OR

## THE PRINCE'S TABLE;

A BOHEMIAN TALE.

THOSE who wish to know more of this beautifully romantic and poetical, historical, and moral tale of Pagan times, may consult Herder's "Volkslieder," vol. iii. ; the third volume of "Die Deutchen Volksmærenchen," by Musæus, where it is very agreeably amplified ; Hageck's "Bohmische Chronik," near the beginning, referred to by Herder, but which I have not seen ; " Jo. Dubravii Olmutzensis Episcopi Historia Bohemica, ab origine gentis, &c. Hanoviæ, 1602," and " Æneæ Sylvii Historia Bohemica," in the works of that learned prelate, (afterwards Pope Pius the Second) printed at Basil, in 1551 ; and " Stranskii Respublica Bohemiæ, Elzev. 1634."

The narrative of the good Bishop of Olmutz is given in the true spirit of faithful and ingenuous credulity, and is extremely curious and interesting. It differs from the poetical legend only in entering more fully into detail. In the hands of the more judicious Æneas Sylvius, it assumes a more dignified and classical, but perhaps to readers of such a work as this, a less engaging form. Both, however, have made

use of the same materials, although the latter has been more fastidiously scrupulous.

As to the translation, strict fidelity, and a plain, unambitious, and characteristic simplicity, is all that has been aimed at :

*" Descriptas servare vices, operumque labores."*

Hon. de A. P. 1 86.

## LIBUSSA, OR THE PRINCE'S TABLE;

A

## BOHEMIAN TALE.

Who is that Lady on the green wold sitting  
Amid twelve noble Chieftains? 'Tis Libussa,  
'Tis the wise daughter of the prudent Kroko,  
Bohemia's Princess, sits, and thinks and judges.

Even now sharp sentence on the wealthy Rotzan  
Has she awarded. Fierce in wrath he rises,  
And thrice the ground strikes with his spear, exclaiming

“ Woe to us Bohemians! Woe to us bold warriors!  
Thus by a woman to be rul'd and cozen'd;  
A long-hair'd woman, with short understanding!  
Death—Death were better than a female ruler!”  
This heard Libussa: deep in her still bosom  
Sank the harsh words; for an indulgent mother  
To all the land, and friend to justice ever  
Was she; yet kindly thus she answer'd, smiling:

"Woe to you then, ye Bohmians, ye bold warriors,  
Thus rul'd and cherish'd by a gentle Woman;  
A Man henceforth shall ye have for a Ruler,  
The Dove shall to the Eagle yield the sceptre!"

Serene and beautiful in anger rose she:  
"To-morrow, when again we meet,—to-morrow  
Your wish shall be accomplish'd."

All in silence,  
Awe-struck, and sore abash'd remain'd before her,  
And felt how ill-requited were her wisdom,  
Her truth, and mother's love.—But she had spoken,  
And all new-fangled parted, every fancy  
But on the morrow and their Prince now dwelling.

Long, to Libussa's hand and throne aspiring,  
With gay attire and courtly adulation,  
And proud parade of herds and rich possessions,  
Had many a Magnate woo'd her. But Libussa  
For wealth or splendour, hand nor throne will barter.  
Whom will she choose? In anxious care the nobles  
All pass'd the sleepless night, hoping the morrow.

The morrow comes. The prescient Libussa,  
Reckless of sleep or slumber, takes her journey  
All lonely to the high and holy mountain;  
There to the Goddess KLIMBA prays: The Goddess  
Hears, and discloses thus the rich futurity.

"Up, up, Libussa! quick from hence descending,  
Behind the mountain, on the banks of Bila,  
Thy snow-white steed shall find the Prince, thy Husband,  
Where now, with two white steers industrious ploughing,

The goad, the emblem of his stem, he holdeth,  
 And eats his viands from an Iron Table.  
 Haste, daughter, haste! The hour of Fate is hasting!  
 The Goddess ended; and Libussa hasted,  
 Convcen'd her Bœhmians, on the earth low laying  
 Her crown, and thus address'd them:

“Up, ye Bœhmians!  
 Up, ye bold warriors! There, behind the mountain,  
 On Bila's banks, my snow-white steed shall find him;  
 The Prince, my Husband, and my Offspring's Father,  
 Where now with two white steers he ploughs industrious.  
 The goad, the emblem of his stem, he holdeth,  
 And eats his viands from an Iron Table:  
 Haste, children, haste! The hour of Fate is hasting!”

And they did haste, and took the Crown and Mantle,  
 The steed, swift as the wind, before them running,  
 And the white eagle hovering stately o'er them,  
 Till on the Bila's banks, beyond the mountain,  
 Still stood the steed, upon a peasant neighing  
 That in his field was ploughing. Struck with wonder  
 Stood all; while he strode onward, inly musing,  
 Eager and anxious, with his white steers ploughing,  
 In his right hand a wither'd goad-staff holding.

With friendly salutation loud they greet him:  
 He, his white steers more keenly urging, hears not.  
 “Hail, stranger, darling of the Gods! our Ruler!”  
 And they approach him, round his shoulders throwing  
 The Mantle, and the Crown on his head setting.  
 “O had ye, sapient, let me end my labour,  
 And p ough my field out, nothing it had injur'd  
 Your kingdom!—But the hour of Fate is flying!”

The goad-staff in the earth anon he planted ;  
 The snow-white steers he from the yoke unloosèd :  
 " Go where ye came from !"—Through the air ascending  
 Soar'd the white steers, and in the neighbouring mountain  
 Entering, vanish'd, and the mountain closèd ;  
 And where it clos'd, a muddy torrent issued  
 Of water, and still issues ; and the goad-staff  
 Green from the earth, in three fair branches parting,  
 Luxuriant rose, and beautiful ! Amazement  
 Chain'd every tongue ; when Przemysl the Thoughtful  
 (Such was his name) anon the plough up-turning,  
 And from his scrip his homely dinner drawing  
 Of bread and cheese, upon the plough-share laid it,  
 Low on the sward with courteous cheer he set them :  
 " Approach, and share the cates your prince provides ye !"

And they, astonish'd at the true fulfilment  
 Of Fate's prediction, saw the Iron Table,  
 And goad green-flourishing ; when lo ! a wonder !  
 Two of the stately branches straight were blasted,  
 And the third blossomèd. They with amazement  
 Broke silence, and the plougher thus address'd them :  
 " Cease, cease, my friends, your wonder ! There before ye  
 Is of my royal house the stem that blossoms.  
 Many shall seek to wear the crown, and wither,  
 And one alone with royal honours flourish."

" But wherefore is that Table strange of Iron ?"  
 " And wot ye not what table 'tis a monarch  
 Must ever eat from ? Iron is it ; iron ;  
 And ye the steers that plough to earn him viands !"  
 " But why so eager was our prince in ploughing ?  
 Why griev'd he that the field had not been ended ?"

" O had it ended been ! Had wise Libussa  
 But later sent ye to me ! So 'twas destin'd,  
 Rich fruit and plenty never in your kingdom  
 Had fail'd.—But now my steers are in the mountain !"

Then graceful rising, on the white steed mounted,  
 That paws, curvetts, and prances in proud triumph.  
 His sandals of the linden bark were plaited,  
 And his own hand with simple bast had sew'd them.  
 And on his feet they put the royal buskin :  
 " O leave me," said the prince on the white charger,  
 " My sandals of the linden bark, O leave me,  
 That my own hand with simple bast has sewed ;  
 'Twill to my sons and grandsons be a token  
 How once their royal ancestor was sandal'd ;"  
 Then kiss'd, and in his bosom hid the sandals.  
 And they rode on ; and still so kindly spoke he,  
 Still with such wisdom, that they ween'd they saw him  
 A Deity in his long garments riding.

And they approach'd the palace of Libussa.  
 With joy she greets him there with all her maidens;  
 The people hail'd him for their Prince and Ruler;  
 And wise Libussa chose him for her Husband.  
 And long they reign'd ; were good and happy ever;  
 And Faith and Right and Justice ever triumph'd ;  
 And they built cities ; and the goad still flourish'd ;  
 And still remain'd the sandals for a token ;  
 And ever clear with labour was the plough-share,  
 While PREMISLAUS liv'd with WISE LIBUSSA.‡



• • • •  
• • • •

O woe ! O woe ! The goad-staff now is wither'd ;  
The sandals of the linden bark are stolen ;  
And th' iron board's become a gilded table !

## NOTES ON LIBUSSA.

*Amid twelve noble Chieftains.—P. 462. v. 1.*

THIS Royal Folkmote, or Court of Twelve Judges, where the prince presides, is the prototype of our Parliament, which was at first only a Supreme Court of Judicature; and of our trial by a Jury of Twelve; and marks the antiquity of the legend, and simplicity of manners which it commemorates.

The antient and widely-extended partiality to the number *Twelve*, in all things divine and human, where power and civil rule were concerned, was probably first connected with religious observance, relating to the passing of the Sun through the Signs of the Zodiac; and as we have the highest of all authorities for it, the generally received impressions among mankind may in this, as in many other cases, have been consulted and conformed to, in the adoption of human means for the effecting of divine purposes. Hence the Twelve Patriarchs sitting upon Twelve Thrones, judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel; the Twelve Apostles, under their divine Head; Jupiter and the Twelve *Dii Majores Gentium*; Odin and his Twelve Gods, in the Gothic Mythology; and their secularised representatives, under the second Odin, in Scandinavia; Arthur, and his Knights of the Round Table, in Britain; Charlemagne, and his *Dusüperes*, in France, &c. &c.

Having examined many of those antient Circles of Stones which are commonly called Druidical, and finding them in places where it seemed very improbable, making all due allowance for the altered face of the country, that there ever could have grown groves of oak, such as the Druids are said to have chosen for celebrating their mysteries; I have been inclined to suspect that they were *Celtic Mote Hills*, and dedicated to *juridical* rather than *sacrificial* purposes. May not the Judge have sat, *sub dio*, on the large flat stone facing the south or east side, dispensing, like the sun, (whom, as the arbiter and dispenser of Nature, he represented) the blessings of Order, Justice, and Prosperity? And may not each of the *Patres* and *Notables* who had a seat in the court, have sat by one of the perpendicular stones, with those who were to be judged, and their advocates and evi-

dences, in the middle, and the attending multitude on the outside of the circle? And were not these circles of stones erected, as God was worshipped, *in the high places*, to be at all times seen by the people of the surrounding district or circle, to remind them of their duty, when the court was not sitting?

————— 'Tis *Libussa*;

'Tis the wise daughter of the prudent *Kroko*.—P. 462. v. 1.

"Crocus tunc erat [qui] ante alios boni justique viri speciem præ se ferebat, sermoneque comis et affabilis habebatur, ac multitudini maxime gratus ex opinione divinitatis, quam ex divinatione augurioque collegerat.—Cæterum valde superstitiosus erat, ut qui fontes et lucos pro diis coleret." Dubrav. p. 5.—"Moriens autem tres filias reliquit, Brelam, herbarum et medicinae peritam; Therbam sive Therbizam, augurem et sortilegam; tertiam Libussam, quæ ut natu minor fuit, ita divinarum humanarumque rerum scientia major." Æn. Sylv. p. 85.—"Vetus autem mos etiam Germanis fuit, ut mulieribus fatidicis summos haberent honores." Dubrav.

————— the high and holy mountain;

There to the goddess *Klimba* prays.—P. 463. v. 7.

The seat of the guardian goddess of these herdsmen and agriculturists was supposed to be on the top of a mountain, (every nation had its own Olympus,) from whence she looked abroad upon the ways of men, distributing rewards and punishments according to their deserts. At this day, this circumstance is often alluded to in the popular ditties of the aboriginal inhabitants of these countries; a fine example of which occurs in the following fragment of a Lettish orphan's Ode to Hope:

Noswihduai laime brauze,	Eager, hasting, sweat-becover'd,
Noswihduaschi kummelin'.	<i>Laima</i> drove her foaming steeds, <sup>1</sup>
Man nabbagam bahrischam	Me poor orphan, left forlorn,
Ruhmes weetu mekledam'.	Me a little place to find.
Zitti laudis tà sazzii',	Other folks then of me said:
Tew laimite	Thy good <i>Fortune</i>
Noslihkusii':	Drown'd [in tears] is.
• • • • •	• • [No!] • •
Man' laimite kalnina	My <i>Laima</i> sits on a hill,
Sehsch sudrab' sohlinâ,	On [a] silver pedestal,
Man weetin dohmadam'.	Musing of [a] spot for me!

<sup>1</sup> See in next note, the account of the "Horse" *Svantovii*.

Were such a device of Greek or Roman origin, its appropriate beauty would often have been adverted to.

KLIMBA was the Goddess of Fate, answering to the Fortuna of the Romans. By the Esthonians, Livonians, Curlanders, ancient Prussians, &c., she was worshipped under the name of LAIMA,<sup>1</sup> the prefix K being omitted. Of this worship, many traces still remain in the tales, superstitions, and popular usages of these people. But the gods, as well as the men of early ages have been so mixed and jumbled together, that it is now extremely difficult to distinguish them. *Klimba* or *Laima* was accounted the general patroness of the country, and seems to have been originally the same as *Ops, Terra Mater, the Hertha*, (Tacit. Germ. c. 40.) of the Germans, and the *Triglas* of the Vandals, (Sched. de Diis Germanis, Syngt. 3, c. 10, &c. &c.)

This supposition is justified by the attributes of the goddess, as well as by the consideration that the *Goddess of the Earth* was worshipped by the same people under the name of *Lauma*. This latter had the distribution of rain and hail particularly in her disposal, and every Friday-eve was dedicated to her, on which it was unlawful for any woman to spin, &c. This vigil, (*Peekts wakkars*, i. e. the fifth-day wake, or vigil) is still religiously kept in Livonia and Curland, by every woman who has it in her power, and whose piety is not interfered with by the whip of a taskmaster or mistress.

When the Teutonic knights, and the ecclesiastical ruffians who accompanied them, introduced the Christian religion into this unhappy land with fire and sword, and not only rivalled, but if possible exceeded, the horrors to which their own forefathers had not long before been subjected by Charlemagne under a similar pretence, the monks persuaded the poor Neophytes that *Lauma*, instead of being, as they believed, a beneficent power, the protectress of women in childbed, and of infants and sucklings, was no other than the Roman *Lamia*, a she-devil, or sorceress, famous, like Mr Lewis's Grim White Woman, for devouring babes alive. In this the good fathers so far succeeded, that in the dialect of Livonia and Curland, *Lauma* bears the same import as *Lamia*, the Night-hag, or Night-Mare.

But it is much easier to give up names than prejudices. The *Lauma* or *Lamia* of the monks, was resigned to the fury of their ghostly tyrants with the more readiness, because they still had remaining their old and amiable divinity, *Thekla, Tekla, or Tikla*,<sup>2</sup> the goddess of benison, growing and thriving, who among the good old Letts had long presided over the tender bodies and minds of children, to guard them from accident, disease, and

<sup>1</sup> Letticè, *lemt*, to ordain, and *ma'*, mother. In the Lithuanian dialect *laimus* signifies gain.

<sup>2</sup> *Tikls* in the Lettish dialect signifies discreet and virtuous. *Tikla* is invoked in Livonia, to still children when naughty, not as *The Saxons* are; or as *the wolf* was (and the *Cossacks* probably will be) in France, and *Brownie* in Scotland; but as the rewarder of infant virtue, as well as the punisher of infant vice.

vice, and to form them to vigour, beauty, and virtue. And what slave is there, however subdued, degraded, and oppressed, who can so far resign every hope and prospect of futurity, as no more to offer incense at the altar of *Fate* and *Fortune*? *Klimba* or *Laima*, and *Tikka*, are still resorted to by young and old. To *Tikka* the midwife and patient still address their secret vows; her invisible hand is still believed to receive the little stranger on his first visit to the light; she spreads his first flannel under him; blesses the child-bed; and then and there bestows the gifts and graces by which the colour of his future destiny is to be decided. It was very natural that quiet and unambitious husbandmen, as were these antient tribes when their merciless German invaders first came among them, should make *Mother Earth* the source of fortune and prosperity; and accordingly *Laima* in the Lettish dialect now signifies *Fortune* or *Fate*; and fragments of antient hymns are sung by the peasants at their popular festivals, in which the beneficent goddess is celebrated under the endearing name of *LAIMA MAHMINA*, or *Mother Goodluck*.

The beautiful execution of the mythical emblems upon marbles and coins, often disposes us to find an elegance and propriety in their allusions, to which they are not always entitled. Designing the *Goddess of Fortune* as she was designed by the Greeks and Romans, conveys a very bad moral. The people ought to be taught, that *Fortune* is the least blind of all Goddesses; and that she is, like the Slavonic *Laima*, the wide-surveying and never-slumbering rewarder of Perseverance, Industry, Economy, Integrity, and Domestic Virtue.

As the eagle was the bird of Jupiter, the woodpecker of Mars, the peacock of Juno, the owl of Minerva, and the dove of Venus, so the lesser titmouse\* is the favourite bird of "Mother Goodluck," and consequently a bird of omen, as in the following Lettish fragment, of which I shall give a *verbatim* prose translation.

Sihle skaisti padseedaj  
 Brahlis istabs gallinà.  
 Eij mahsit klausitees,  
 Kahdu dseeemu sihle dseed.  
 &c. &c. &c.

The Titmouse sang very sweetly.  
 My brother is in the chamber:  
 'Go, my little sister, and hear  
 What song the Titmouse sings.'

\* This hardy and lively little bird remains in Russia during all the severity of the hardest winters.

The Titmouse sings this song :

" Brother must to the wars."

" Go, my little sister, into the garden,

Adorn thy brother's cap (*with roses.*)"—

She sang, and adorned his cap,

And accompanied him with tears.

" Weep not,

My little sister!

If I return not myself,

Yet if my charger, perchance, return,

Ask of my charger,

" Where fell thy rider?"—

\* \* \* \* \*

The rider fell there,

Where blood ran in streams;

Where men made a bridge of bones;<sup>1</sup>

Where hedges were plaited of swords

Nine rows thick.

\* \* \* \* \*

I saw my brother

Shouting in the battle;—

Five rose-sprigs in his cap,—

The sixth at his sword's point.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

There lie the heroes like oaks,

By the heaps of piled-up swords.

*Thy snow-white steed shall find the prince, thy husband,*

*Where now, with two white steers, industrious ploughing.*—P. 463. v. 3.

It is to be observed, that all these animals, sacred to the guardian goddess of a virtuous people, are *white*; the *white Eagle*, the emblem of empire founded on Wisdom and Justice; the *white Horse*, of honourable defensive War; and the *white Steers*, of honest agri-

<sup>1</sup> Walked on the bodies of the dead.

<sup>2</sup> i. e. Earning by his valour a sixth rose to complete his chaplet.

cultural Industry.—There is something finely poetical in the idea of the goddess of Industry lending her own sacred steers to the husbandman the most distinguished among her worshippers for wisdom, integrity, and industry. *Worshipping the Ox*, as the Egyptians did, was a much less simple and rational manner of *dedicating* him to the same deity.

Respecting the *sacred Horse*, a good illustration is found in *Saxo Grammaticus, lib. xiiij. F. 158, d.* “Præterea peculiarem albi coloris equum titulo possidebat; cujus jubæ aut caudæ pilos convellere nefarium ducebatur. Hunc soli sacerdoti pascendi insidendique jus erat, ne divini animalis usus, quo frequentior, hoc utilior haberetur. In hoc equo, opinione Rugiæ, SVANTOVITUS (id simulacro vocabulum erat) adversum sacrorum suorum hostes bella gerere credebatur. Cujus rei præcipuum argumentum extabat, quod is nocturno tempore stabulo insistens, adeo plerumque mane sudore ac luto respersus videbatur, tanquam, ab exercitatione<sup>1</sup> veniendo, magnorum itinerum spacia percurrisset. Auspicia quoque per eundem equum hujusmodi sumebantur, &c. &c.”

“Effigies [Svantoviti] erat quadrifrons, qualis olim Jani apud nonnullos, ut circumstantes ab omni fani parte, conspectu simulachri perfruerentur. Dextrâ cornu, levâ arcum gestabat, proxime suspensa erant, ensis, frenum, sella, juxtaque candidus equus stabulabatur simulachro consecratus. \* \* \* Vinum pridie solenniter in cornu quod dextrâ gerebat, infusum, si postridie integrum sine ulla diminutione manebat, bonum incrementi liquidarum fluentiumque rerum illius anni eventum significari dicebat [sacerdos:] malum vero, si quid de vino fuerat sua sponte diminutum. Habuit et placenta, à sacerdote et populo comesa, sua præsentia, futuram ejus anni copiam aut inopiam præsentia. \* \* \* Diu hæc superstitio, et cultus ejusdem simulachri etiam inter Boemos viguit, donec Divus Vinceslaus, Principem Boemiæ agens, impetratis ab Othone Cæsare *Divi Viti* reliquiis, sanctum virum idolo profano abolito, venerandum Boemio exhibuit.”—Dubrav. p. 6.

Dubravius calls this idol *Svatovit*; and it is called *Svantovit* by Stranskus (Respub. Boiem. p. 248,) who enters more into detail on the subject of Libussa and her religion. Whatever may have been the origin of the *name*, the *attributes* of *Svantovit* had certainly nothing to do with Saint Vitus, whose image was full as useless, and much more expensive, to his worshippers, than that of his predecessor.

*The good-staff in the earth anon he planted.*—P. 465. v. 11.

“Stimulum vero, quo boves urgebantur, terræ defixum, mox fronduisse, ac tres corilli ramos emisisse: ex quibus duo statim exaruerunt, tertium in arborem ejusdem generis proceram excrevisse. \* \* \* Vidi inter privilegia regni, litteras Caroli Quartj<sup>2</sup> Romanorum Imperatoris, Divi Sigismundi Patris, in quibus hæc tanquam vera continentur, villæ-

<sup>1</sup> For the nature of his supposed exercise, see the preceding note.

<sup>2</sup> Charles the Fourth was set up by the Pope, in 1347, and crowned at Rome.

que illius incolæ in qua hæc gesta creduntur, libertate donantur, nec plus tributi pendere jubentur, quam nucum illius arboris exiguam mensuram."—Æn. Sylv. p. 86.

————— *Through the air ascending,  
Soar'd the white steers.*—P. 465. v. 11.

"Solutos boves elevatos in aëra ferunt, et in altissimam præscissæ rupis speluncam delituisse, nunquam postea visos."—Æn. Sylv. 86.

*My sandals of the linden bark O leave me, &c.*—P. 465. v. 12.

"Servati calcei diu apud Bohemos religiose habiti, ac per sacerdotes templi Vissegradensis ante Reges delati, dum pompa coronationis educitur."—Æn. Sylv. p. 86.