1. About a knight who didn’t believe in demons

A knight Heinrich, from the fortress of Falkenstein, was the cellarer of our monk Caesarius, who at that time was Abbot of Prüm. Since this knight — I have this, if I recall correctly, straight from the mouth of Caesarius himself — refused to believe in demons and thought that everything he heard about them was utter nonsense, he called a religious man named Phillip to come to him who was infamous for his knowledge of the black arts and pleaded with him to make some demons appear. This man answered: The sight of these demons is disgusting and dangerous, it is not beneficial for just anyone to see them. But since the knight would not let it go, he finally said: If you are willing to provide assurances that no damage will come to me at the hands of your relatives and friends, should you be deceived or frightened or injured by these demons, then I will grant your wish. And the knight agreed to provide assurances. One day at midday, because midday demons are stronger, Phillip led the knight to a crossing, drew a circle around him with a sword, told him after he was standing therein the law of the circle and said: If you stick even one of your limbs outside of the circle before I return, it will mean your death, for the demons will immediately pull you out of the circle and kill you. He warned him as well that he should give and promise them nothing, even if they should ask, and that he should under no circumstances cross himself. And he added: They will try many ways to tempt and frighten you, but they cannot harm you if you pay attention to my advice. And then he left him.

When the knight was sitting alone in the circle he felt huge waves washing up against himself, then he heard the grunting of swine, the roar of the wind and many similar ghostly effects with which the demons tried to frighten him. But since darts that one sees coming are easier to avoid, he was able to defend himself against these things. Finally, however, he spied in the woods something like a terrifying human-like shadow, taller than the crowns of the trees, and this thing approached him. And he saw immediately that this was the devil, which proved to be true. He was, however, like a huge man, yes the largest and blackest, clothed in black robes, and so awful-looking that the knight was unable to look upon him. The knight said to him: It is well that you have come, for I wished to see you. For what purpose? asked the devil. And he said: I have heard so much about you. What have you heard? asked the devil, and the knight answered: Little good and much evil. To this the devil said: Many judge and condemn me for no reason. I have never hurt anyone, have done no harm to anyone unless provoked. Your master Phillip is a good friend of mine and I of his. Ask him if I have ever given him cause for injury. I do what pleases him, and he obeys me in all things. I have just come in response to his summons. Now the knight: Where were you when he summoned you? I was, said the demon, as far on the other side of the ocean as it is from here to the ocean’s edge. And for that reason it seems reasonable that you should reward me for my efforts.
with a present. The knight asked: What do you want? He said: I wish and also ask you to give me your cloak. Since the knight refused, then he demanded his belt, then a sheep from his herd. Since the knight refused all of this, he finally asked him for the rooster of the house. When the knight asked: What do you want my rooster for? The demon replied: He should sing for me. The knight: How do you propose to catch him? The demon said again: Don’t worry about it, just give him to me. The knight said: I will give you nothing. And then he asked further: Tell me, what makes you so knowledgeable? The demon said: Nothing of the evil that happens in the world is hidden from me. And so you may be sure that I am telling the truth, look, in that village and in that village and in that house and in that one you lost your innocence, there and over there is where you sinned. When the devil requested something else of him, he then stretched his hand out, as though he wanted to grab him and pull him out of the circle. He scared him so that he fell over backwards and screamed. At the sound of his scream Phillip hurried towards him, at which point the ghost immediately vanished. From that moment on the knight turned pale and never again regained his earlier color, turned his life around for the better and began to believe in demons. In fact he died not long ago.

2. How the devil pulled a priest out of the circle

At the same time a foolish priest summoned this same Phillip and offered him rewards if he would show him demons. After the latter had placed him in a circle as was just described and had instructed him, he allowed himself to be frightened and pulled from the circle, whereby he was so shattered before Phillip could get there that he died after three days. His house was occupied after that by Waleram, the Count of Lützenburg. I myself have met this Phillip, who a few years ago, and, they say, at the behest of his master and friend the devil, was murdered.

3. How a student from Toledo was lured out of the circle by the devil

Godeskalk of Volmuntstein, our own monk of blessed memory, once told me something that I cannot keep from you. Once when he asked this very same Phillip to tell him something marvelous concerning his art, the latter said: I will tell you an astounding story that happened during my time in Toledo. When several students from many different lands were studying the black arts, several Swabians and Bavarians heard the strangest and most unbelievable things concerning their teacher; and since they wished to test whether these things were true, they said to him: Master, you should really let us see with our own eyes the things you teach us, so that we get something from our studies. He resisted this, but since they did not relent (in the manner of peoples from these regions), he led them at the proper hour to a field, drew a circle with his sword around them and warned them on pain of death to remain in it, also neither to give the ghosts anything nor to accept any gifts from them. Then he withdrew for awhile and summoned the ghosts to appear. Soon they appeared in the guise of elegantly clad knights and conducted martial exercises all around the students. Now they acted as if they were falling, now they aimed their lances and swords at them, trying any way they could to get them out of the circle. When they were unsuccessful, they transformed themselves into beautiful maidens, danced around the youths and tried to lure them out with all many of seductive
movements. One that was prettier than the others seemed to have a special yen for one of the students. Every time she danced near him, she held out a golden ring to befuddle him and to inflame him with love through this gesture. When she had done this many times, the youth allowed himself to be lured and stretched out a single finger outside the circle toward the ring. Immediately she pulled him by the finger out of the circle and disappeared with him. After this catch had been made, the legions of evil vanished in a whirlwind. The students screamed and shouted, the master hurried to them, and all were yammering about the loss of their companion. The master said: I am innocent, you forced me into it. I had warned you, and you’ll never see him again. They said: If you do not restore him to us, we will kill you. Then he feared for his life, for he knew how wild the Bavarians are, and he said: I will try as long as hope remains. He then called the Prince of the ghosts, reminded him of his loyal service, and said, it would do great damage to the devil’s doctrine and he would be murdered if the youth were not be yielded to him. The devil was sympathetic and said: Tomorrow I plan to call a council at such and such a place on your behalf; be there, and if you can save him in some fashion, then that will be fine with me. To make a long story short, the Council of the Evil Ones met at the behest of the Prince of Darkness. The master charged that his student was forcibly taken. The adversary answered: Sir, I have done no injustice, no violence to him, he was disobedient to his master and paid no attention to the laws of the circle. As they were arguing back and forth, the devil asked someone sitting beside him for his opinion with the words: Oliver, you have always been someone of noble character, you are unfamiliar with the reputations of all. You decide the case. Oliver answered: I vote for giving the student back to his master. And turning to the adversary he said: Give him up, you have plagued him too much as it is. Since the others agreed with him, then in that very hour the student was released by order of the judge out of hell and given over to the master: the council was dissolved, and happy at his newly-won prize the master returned to his students. But the countenance of the youth was so pale and drawn, so changed was his color that he seemed to have just arisen from the grave. He told his companions what he had seen down below, how contrary to God and how disgustingly everything was conducted down there, and proved it more by example than by his words. Then he left the place and became a monk in our order.

4. How a dying priest saw many demons

In Dietkirchen, a convent of the city of Bonn, a priest by the name of Adolf was dying, a quite worldly and frivolous man who was the confessor of the aforementioned convent. A priest who was canon at the Bonn cathedral told me the following tale about this man. Long ago as he was playing dice with a relative one of his flock came to him in tears and pleaded with great humility that the confessor should have the grace to hear the confession of his mother and to give her Holy Communion. The priest said: I will come as soon as the game is over. When the visitor pressed him, saying that his mother could not wait, the priest said angrily to his fellow dicer: Cousin, I cannot believe this guy! He just won’t leave me alone. When the visitor saw that he was accomplishing nothing, he went away sobbing, and the sick woman had to leave this life without benefit of confession or communion. Three days later the man who had been dicing with the priest met the son of the dead woman and thinking of the priest’s complaint, he killed the son
for no reason. Following this and many other sins the priest fell deathly ill. He was close to succumbing, and a woman relative who sat by him and had seen not one jot of contrition on his part said in a troubled tone: Lord, you are very weak, prepare yourself to come into God’s presence. Call to him that he forgive you your sins and grant you a reasonable time for penance. To this the priest said in despairing tones: Do you see that huge barn across from us? Its roof thatch consists of fewer single straws than the number of demons who are assembled around me. With these words he fell into his death rattles and gave up the ghost, but only after he had seen all of those according to whose counsel he had always lived.

5. How a demon bewailed his lost glory

Once, in St. Peter’s Church in Cologne, when a woman who had been possessed by a demon was being horribly tormented, it so happened that another possessed woman was brought in. Immediately the two fell into dispute, heaping upon each other such awful insults and tirades that everyone in earshot was astonished. The one demon said to the other: You miserable slut, why did we ever have to support Lucifer and be cast out of eternal glory? The other answered: Why did you do it? And since the first one of them again uttered contrite words, the other said: Shut up! It is way too late for contrition, you can never return. This same evil spirit was asked about returning to heaven and answered in words that I myself was present to hear: If a column made of heated, glowing iron were to exist that stretched from earth to heaven, covered with knives and razors, then I would gladly, even if I still had flesh which would suffer from it, climb up and down it from here to eternity, if I could only return to the glory that I once enjoyed.

6. How a lay brother was deceived by the promise of becoming a bishop

In the Cistercian monastery of Kamp on the Lower Rhine which was located in the Diocese of Cologne — this I heard from a priest of our order, a man dedicated to the truth, who was intimately familiar with the case — there lived a lay brother who had learned so much from the monks who surrounded him that he had actually learned to read. Lured and deceived by this he secretly arranged to have books written and to acquire them so that he eventually became enamored of the vice of property. And since university studies were denied to him, he ran away from the monastery with the goal of learning things. But because of his age he made little progress. Finally he returned to the monastery, regretting what he had done, and since he repeated this no fewer than three times, running away to the worldly schools then returning, he provided the devil with ample opportunity for deceiving him. For the devil appeared to him in the guise of an angel and said: Keep studying diligently, for it will come to pass and has been determined by God that you will become Bishop of Halberstadt. This fool who was unfamiliar with the devil’s tricks, hoped that in him the miracles of long ago would return. To make a long story short, one day the seducer appeared to the lay brother and said in a loud voice with cheerful demeanor: Today the Bishop of Halberstadt has died, hurry so that you get to the city of which God has destined you to become Bishop. For God’s decisions are never to be reversed. The unhappy lay brother departed in the middle of the night from the monastery and found lodging with a prominent priest near
the city of Xanten in the Netherlands. But in order to arrive most gloriously in his new post, he arose before dawn, stole a comely horse from his host, put on his host’s cloak, mounted, and rode away. Later that morning the squires noticed the loss, they followed the fugitive and seized him. They brought him with the stolen horse to the city courts where he was condemned, so that he did not ascend to the chair of Bishop but rather to the gallows as a thief. Do you see now where the promises of the devil will lead you?

7. How two heretics deceived many people with miracles

Two people, simple not in mind but in their dress, not sheep but rather ravening wolves came to Besancon and pretended to be the most pious people in the world. They were pale and drawn, went barefoot and fasted every day. They never missed a mass at the main city church, and they never took anything but the poorest nourishment from anyone. When they had gained the trust of the populace through such hypocrisy, they began to spew forth the most awful poison and to preach new and unbelievable heresies. But so that the simple people would believe their doctrines, they scattered flour on the floor and walked over it without leaving a trace. In the same way they walked across the water without sinking. They had huts set afire while they were in them and when these were burned to ashes, they emerged unscathed. Then they said to the masses: If you do not believe our words, at least believe our deeds. When the bishop and the priests heard this, they were afraid. Yet when they opposed these charlatans openly and denounced them as heretics, deceivers and servants of the devil, several of them were stoned to death by the crowds. But there lived also a bishop in the region, a good and learned man born in our own province. Our old monk Konrad, the one who told me this, lived in the city at that time and knew him personally. Now when the bishop saw that his words were no use and that these devil’s servants were turning the people away from the true faith, he summoned a priest he knew who was practiced in the black arts and said to him: Thus and such is happening through the work of these two. I beg you, search through your knowledge of the devil’s arts and find out who they are, where they come from and through what powers they are able to work such miracles. For it is impossible that they could display such signs through the power of God since their doctrines are so godless. When the priest said: Lord, I have renounced these arts for the longest time, the bishop answered: Then you can see in what sort of straits I find myself. Either I will be forced to accede to their doctrines or I will be stoned to death by the people. I promise to absolve you of your sins if you will make these arts known to me. The cleric obeyed, summoned the devil, and when the devil asked the reason for the summons he answered: I very much regret having turned away from you. And because I wish to follow you in all things in the future, so please tell me who these two people are, how their doctrines work, and by what means they achieve their great miracles. The devil answered: They are mine, sent by me, and they preach whatever I put in their mouths. The cleric: How is it that nothing can harm them, that they do not sink in water and that fire does not singe them? The devil responded: They keep my manuscript, on which their oath of obedience is written sewn in their armpits between their skin and their flesh. Through these they work their wonders, and nothing can harm them. The cleric: And when the manuscripts would be taken from them? Then, answered the devil, they would be as weak as ordinary men. When the cleric had heard this, he thanked the demon and said: Go now and come
again when I summon you. He returned to the bishop and told him everything. The bishop rejoiced, called the people together at the proper place and said: I am your shepherd and you are my sheep. If these people can support their doctrines through miraculous signs, as you claim, then I agree to follow them just as you do. If not, then it is proper that they be punished and that you return to the doctrines of the Father in true penance. The people answered: We have seen many signs from them. But I have never seen even one, said the bishop. To make a long story short, the people accepted the bishop’s counsel. The heretics were summoned. The bishop was there. A fire was lit in the middle of the city. Yet before the heretics appeared in public, they had been summoned to the bishop. He said to them: Now we’ll see whether you are concealing tools of sorcery on your persons. Then they stripped off their clothing and said confidently: Search us as carefully as you wish, our bodies and our clothing. You will find nothing. The warriors, as instructed by the bishop, raised their arms and when they found scars under their armpits, they carved them open with knives and drew forth the manuscripts. When the bishop had seen this, he brought them before the people and after calling for silence he cried in a loud voice: Now your prophets should walk into the fire and if they remain unscathed, I swear I shall believe them. The miserable ones shivered in fear and said: We cannot walk into the fire now. The bishop immediately showed the evidence of their perfidy to the people and displayed the manuscripts. Then all were enraged and threw the devil’s servants into the already burning fire, so that they were burned to death and then descended into hell to burn in the eternal fire. In this way, through the grace of God and the efforts of the bishop, the essence of heresy was stopped in its tracks and the seduced and mislead populace was purified through proper penance.

8. Of heretics who were burned in Cologne

Under the Archbishop Rainald’s direction dozens of heretics were arrested in Cologne, interviewed by learned men, turned over to the urban authorities and condemned by the worldly courts to death. As they were being led to their pyres following the judgment, one of them by the name of Arnold, whom the other heretics saw as their master — this was reported by people who were present—asked for a loaf of bread and a basin full of water. Some wished to give it to him, but smart people advised against it and said: If he had the help of the devil, he could do something with it to move weaker sensibilities to affront or even destruction.

N: What could he have wanted with the bread and water?
M: As I learned through the words of another heretic, whom the King of Spain had arrested and burned three years ago, he wanted to make some sort of debased communion out of it in order to prepare his damned companions for eternal perdition. For a Spanish abbot of our Order who passed through here not long ago and who, along with the bishop and the church officials, had condemned the errors of that heretic, reported that he had said that the first, best peasant at his table could make the body of Christ out of the bread that was served there. That condemned man was a smith.

N: So what happened to the Cologne heretics?
M: They were led out of the city and were burned together next to the Jewish cemetery. As their bodies were engulfed in flames, Arnold, as many saw and heard, laid his hand on
the half-burned heads of his followers and said: Be firm in your faith, for today you will come to Laurentius: since they actually had little to do with the doctrines of Laurentius. Yet among them was a beautiful but heretical virgin who was spared the fire through the pity of those present. They thought they would either marry her off, or if she preferred, would take her to a convent of virgins and she appeared to agree to this. But no sooner were all of the heretics dead than those who held her asked her: Tell me the name of your seducer! And then she pointed to Arnold, slipped out of their hands and, covering her face, threw herself on his still-burning corpse in order that she should burn with him in the flames of hell forever.

9. Of Dietrich, who was carried by the devil over the city of Lübeck

Concerning Dietrich of Soest, our lay brother, I once heard that when he was young, another young man in the city of Lübeck courted a maiden on his behalf, as he had promised Dietrich he would do. The woman was agreeable, and just when Dietrich thought that he would enjoy her charms, the other boy got to her first. When Dietrich saw this he said in a rage: May the devil who led me to this see me back home. Immediately the one he had invited seized him, lifted him into the air, and when he had carried him over the city, he let him fall rather inelegantly on the shores of the lake on the other side. Then he said to him: If you hadn’t crossed yourself properly a moment ago, I would have killed you then and there. For in the moment he had been seized, he had managed to make the sign of the cross. Let go by the devil, he fell hard to the earth, so that he lay there senseless and coughed up blood. Finally he recovered a little, crept on all fours to the water, washed his face and drank, and thus he finally made it, after much effort, back to his quarters. As he entered the house and saw a light, he immediately fainted again. A priest was summoned who read the beginning of the Gospel of John over him and, adding other prayers, managed to secure him from the assaults of the devil. After this his entire body shivered for almost a year so that he had difficult holding a goblet steady enough to drink from it. He maintains to this day that as the devil held him with claws of steel and carried him along, he saw the Church of St. Nikolaus and the buildings of the city in the moonlight.

10. Of Albert who fell ill when he saw the devil

When our lay brother Albert was a novice and was keeping watch in the courtyard by night with another lay brother for fear of what might happen, just before the sign was to be given for early mass, he saw from afar something that looked like the shadow of a person over by the washroom. He thought it looked like the monk Friedrich and went over in order to greet him and tell him that he should get some rest. But because he knew that Friedrich wasn’t quite right in the head, he held back a little in order that he not be injured. And as he stood there the shadow began to grow until it reached the height of the buildings. When in that moment the bell was rung in the dormitory, he went into the house where the ovens were heated for the day’s baking. No sooner did he see the fires there, he felt a weakness assail all of his limbs. Immediately he left the cookhouse and went over to sit under a tree. Nevertheless he remained so weak in his spirit and in his limbs that he could neither drink nor sleep for an entire week.
11. How two young men saw the devil in the person of a woman

Once two worldly young men who had not yet become knights (one of them was the steward of the Abbot of Prüm, who told me about this), were riding for pleasure on Midsummer’s Eve after sundown along a little stream which flows by the monastery. They saw on the opposite bank of the stream something that looked like the figure of a woman in dressed in flowing robes, and since they thought that she was practicing sorcery as some like to do on Midsummer’s Eve, they rode through the water to try and catch her. She seemed to lift up her garment and to flee; they followed her on their swift steeds but were unable to catch up with the fleeing figure who seemed to dissolve in front of them like a shadow. When the horses could go no further one young man said: What are we doing? It is surely the devil. And as they crossed themselves the figure vanished from their sight. From that moment on both they and their animals were beset by weakness for a long time and barely escape from that place with their lives.

12. Of a woman who held hands with the devil in the guise of a squire

In Kuninkskirgen — the priest of this village told this story to our monk Lambert — a respectable woman arrived with another woman from somewhere and walked through the village. The devil, who had taken on the appearance of a cheerful squire, seized her hand and pressed it softly. When she said: Let me loose! he disappeared. Immediately she felt unwell and said to her companion: That squire squeezed my hand and look, as a result I am beset with heart trouble. The other woman said: But he wasn’t here. He was, too, she answered. He gave me a terrible look. When she got home she went to bed and after a few days she was dead.

13. How a woman was embraced by the devil

A woman who lived near the Castle of Altenahr had the same thing happen to her. Since she was married to an alcoholic she never dared go to bed until he had returned from the tavern. One night as she had prepared some dough for breadmaking the next morning and was sitting exhausted in front of her house waiting for her husband, she saw two men clad in white approaching. One of them jumped on her in order to embrace her and gave her a powerful squeeze. When she screamed both men disappeared into the night. She fled into the house and no sooner had she seen the light then she fell senseless to the ground which caused her daughter to shriek in fright. After a few days she died. By which judgment of God this happened I have no idea.

14. How the devil shot dice with a knight

In Soest lived a knight by the name of Thiemo who was such a devoted dice player that he never ceased playing whether it was day or night. He always carried a pouch full of money in his pocket just in case he might meet someone who was up for dicing. And he was so accomplished and lucky in gaming that hardly anyone ever played him without losing. But so that the world should learn that such games are an offense to God because
they cause nothing but anger, jealousy, fighting and injury, the devil got permission to play with this man who had outplayed so many others and to empty the purse of this one who had emptied so many other purses. One night the devil appeared in the guise of a fanatical dicer and entered the house of the knight carrying a pouch full of money under one arm, took a seat at the table, stacked up his coins, started casting the dice and began to win. Since he appeared to win every game and soon threatened to take the knight’s last penny, the knight cried angrily: You must be the devil, right? He answered: That’s enough! It’s almost morning. We have to go. And he seized him and flew with him through the roof so that the tiles ripped out his guts. What happened to the corpse and where he discarded it, remain unknown, even to his son who searched long and hard for it. In the morning they found pieces of his intestines hanging from the roof and buried them in the churchyard. Truly the devil does give his servants in this world some leeway, but in the end he always deceives them.

15. How a demon led a knight through the thorns

A respected priest who is now a monk in our monastery told me the following story. The priest of a village once took part in the worldly festivals of his flock in order to win their favor. He also frequented the tavern and took part in all of their local customs. And so the words of the Prophet were borne out by this priest’s actions (James 24,2): Just as the people are, so, too, will be their priest. And he had as his godfather a knight in the village who was his equal in vices and sin. And both were inseparable, not in Christ, but in their love of the world. Often one would invite the other to go to parties or debauchery, often the other would drag his friend into the nearest tavern. And when the devil, the master of all treachery, had seen this, he resolved to turn their close companionship into abject hatred. So he appeared one night when the knight was asleep at his bedside, disguised as the priest and conveyed to him with obscure words and gestures that he should follow him. When the half-naked knight got out of bed and followed him barefoot, he was led through a field full of stickers and thorns. Since the soles of his feet were soon torn and blood began to flow he screamed in anger: You damned priest! You will pay for this! The devil continued to cry: Follow! Follow! The knight, on the verge of going insane, grabbed a hoe that he found in the field and swung and split what he thought was the priest’s head. He lay there with blood streaming down his face as the knight returned to his home. There he complained bitterly to his wife, his servants, and his friends how the priest had had so much fun at his expense. Since they refused to believe him, he added: I have cracked his crown for him a bit in return. That very same night the priest arose in response to an urgent need cracked his head to hard on the edge of a balcony that he sorely injured his head and blood was streaming down his face. He went back to bed, and when in the morning the church bells rang for mass and the people waited in the church, he was unable to come on account of his injury. When the knight heard the reason for the priest’s absence he said: You see what I told you? To make a long story short, The relatives and friends of the knight were so angry that when the priest denied everything they refused to believe him and for that reason he was banished from his own church for two years, and he was able to achieve a reconciliation with them only after a long time and many attempts.
Source:
Helmut Herles, ed. and tr.
*Von den Geheimnissen und Wundern des Caesarius von Heisterbach*
pp. 151-170.
Translated from the German by David Tinsley.