

The Children of Hameln by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

In the year 1284 a mysterious man appeared in Hameln. He was wearing a coat of many colored, bright cloth, for which reason he was called the Pied Piper. He claimed to be a rat catcher, and he promised that for a certain sum that he would rid the city of all mice and rats. The citizens struck a deal, promising him a certain price. The rat catcher then took a small fife from his pocket and began to blow on it. Rats and mice immediately came from every house and gathered around him. When he thought that he had them all he led them to the River Weser where he pulled up his clothes and walked into the water. The animals all followed him, fell in, and drowned.

Now that the citizens had been freed of their plague, they regreted having promised so much money, and, using all kinds of excuses, they refused to pay him. Finally he went away, bitter and angry. He returned on June 26, Saint John's and Saint Paul's Day, early in the morning at seven o'clock (others say it was at noon), now dressed in a hunter's costume, with a dreadful look on his face and wearing a strange red hat. He sounded his fife in the streets, but this time it wasn't rats and mice that came to him, but rather children: a great number of boys and girls from their fourth year on. Among them was the mayor's grown daughter. The swarm followed him, and he led them into a mountain, where he disappeared with them.

All this was seen by a babysitter who, carrying a child in her arms, had followed them from a distance, but had then turned around and carried the news back to the town. The anxious parents ran in droves to the town gates seeking their children. The mothers cried out and sobbed pitifully. Within the hour messengers were sent everywhere by water and by land inquiring if the children -- or any of them -- had been seen, but it was all for naught.

In total, one hundred thirty were lost. Two, as some say, had lagged behind and came back. One of them was blind and the other mute. The blind one was not able to point out the place, but was able to tell how they had followed the piper. The mute one was able to point out the place, although he [or she] had heard nothing. One little boy in shirtsleeves had gone along with the others, but had turned back to fetch his jacket and thus escaped the tragedy, for when he returned, the others had already disappeared into a cave within a hill. This cave is still shown.

Until the middle of the eighteenth century, and probably still today, the street through which the children were led out to the town gate was called the bunge-lose (drumless, soundless, quiet) street, because no dancing or music was allowed there. Indeed, when a bridal procession on its way to church crossed this street, the musicians would have to stop playing. The mountain near Hameln where the the children disappeared is called Poppenberg. Two stone monuments in the form of crosses have been erected there, one on the left side and one on the right. Some say that the children were led into a cave, and that they came out again in Transylvania.

The citizens of Hameln recorded this event in their town register, and they came to date all their proclamations according to the years and days since the loss of their children.

According to Seyfried the 22nd rather than the 26th of June was entered into the town register.

The following lines were inscribed on the town hall:

In the year 1284 after the birth of Christ

From Hameln were led away

One hundred thirty children, born at this place

Led away by a piper into a mountain.

And on the new gate was inscribed: Centum ter denos cum magus ab urbe puellios
duxerat ante annos CCLXXII condita porta fuit.

[This gate was built 272 years after the magician led the 130 children from the city.]

In the year 1572 the mayor had the story portrayed in the church windows. The accompanying inscription has become largely illegible. In addition, a coin was minted in memory of the event.

Der Rattenfänger.

Mündlich, aus Deutschböhmen.

Der Rattenfänger weiß einen gewissen Ton, pfeift er den neunmal, so ziehen ihm alle Ratten nach, wohin er sie haben will, in Teich oder Pfütze.

Einmal konnte man in einem Dorf der Ratten gar nicht los werden und ließ endlich den Fänger holen. Der richtete nun einen Haselstock so zu, daß alle Ratten dran gebannt waren und wer den Stock ergriff, dem mußten sie nach; er wartete aber bis Sonntags und legte ihn vor die Kirchenthür. Als nun die Leute vom Gottesdienst heimkamen, ging auch ein Müller vorbei und sah gerade den hübschen Stock liegen, sprach: "das gibt mir einen feinen Spazierstock." Also nahm er ihn zur Hand und ging dem Dorf hinaus, seiner Mühle zu. Indem so huben schon einzelne Ratten an aus ihren Nigen und Winkeln zu laufen und sprangen querfeldein immer näher und näher, und wie mein Müller, der von nichts ahnte und den Stock immer behielt, auf die Wiese kam, liefen sie ihm aus allen Löchern nach, über Acker und Feld und liefen ihm bald zuvor, waren eher in seinem Haus als er selbst und blieben nach der Zeit bei ihm zur unausstehlichen Plage.



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The Rat Catcher by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

The rat catcher knows a particular tone, which he sounds nine times on his pipe, and then all rats follow after him, wherever he wants them to go, into a pond or a pool.

Once a village could not be rid of its rats, and finally they sent for the rat catcher. He prepared a hazel stick in such a manner that all rats were drawn toward it. They would then have to follow anyone who took hold of the stick. Waiting until a Sunday, he laid it in front of the church door. As the people were going home after the worship service, a miller came by, saw the good-looking stick lying there and said, "That will make a fine walking stick for me." He picked it up and left the village, walking toward his mill.

Meanwhile a number of rats began to leave their cracks and corners and came running and jumping across the fields toward him. The miller, still carrying the stick, had no idea what was happening. When he came to a meadow, they ran from their holes and ran across the fields and pastures after him. Running ahead, they were inside his house before he himself was, and they stayed there as a plague that could not be overcome.

The Brothers Grimm, Jacob (January 4, 1785 – September 20, 1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (February 24, 1786 – December 16, 1859), are amongst the most well-known storytellers of European folk tales. They were German academics, linguists, cultural researchers, and authors who collected folklore and traditional stories.

Their interest in folklore grew into a lifelong dedication to collecting German folk tales. Their first collection of folk tales, *Children's and Household Tales* (*Kinder- und Hausmärchen*), was published in 1812.

Their work popularized such stories as "Cinderella", "The Frog Prince" (*Der Froschkönig*), "Hansel and Gretel" (*Hänsel und Gretel*), "Rapunzel", "Rumpelstiltskin" (*Rumpelstilzchen*), and "Snow White" (*Schneewittchen*).