Till Eulenspiegel and Notgeld

By DWIGHT MUSSER

DIFFICULTIES are certain to arise when folk heroes or folk tale subjects are subjected to the scrutiny of historical research. In the United States, for example, where would one begin collecting the *facts* about Paul Bunyan? Or what archives contain the documentary evidence necessary for a scholarly inquiry into the real "Jack" of the "bean tree" and other American folk tales relished for generations around Southern Appalachian firesides? Credible evidence about the real Till Eulenspiegel is equally sparse. Even so, Eulenspiegel (Owl-glass in English) has been real to countless Germans of all ages who have not ceased to derive pleasure from the repeated tellings of his merry pranks.

Said to have been born at Kneitlingen, Brunswick, the peasant trickster has been the subject of both folk tales and numerous literary works. The first printed references appeared about 1500 in one or more of the Low German dialects. The earliest known High German text, *Ein kurtzweilig lesen von Dyl Ulenspiegel* (An Amusing Book about Till Eulenspiegel), came from Antwerp in 1515. The British Museum in London has the only known copy.

Some sources refer to an old *Volksbuch* attributed to Thomas Murner (1476-1530) that features the vagabond hero. Another view is that Murner may have only translated the tales into High German from older accounts. In any event, Till was alleged to have been born in 1283 and to have died of the plague at Moelln near Lubeck, Schleswig-Holstein about 1350. Since the 16th century his gravestone, with an owl and a mirror engraved on it, has been pointed out to the credulous.

The Low German texts, or parts of them, came by translation into Dutch and English about 1520, French in 1532, and Latin in 1588. A later English version, about 1560, opened with "Here beginneth a merye Jest of a man that was called Howleglas." A more modern version, *The Marvellous Adventures of Master Tyll Owlglass*, by Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie, was published in 1869.

Eulenspiegel themes have been reworked into musical and literary works over a period of many years. Richard Strauss composed a symphonic poem, *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, (Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks) as opus 28, 1894, which was recorded by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra under Strauss's direction. *Till Eulenspiegel*, an epic poem by Gerhard Hauptman, appeared in 1928. Other significant literary works with Eulenspiegel as the subject were produced by Hans Sachs (1553), Johann Fischart (1572), Johann Nestroy (1845), Frank Wedekins (1916) and Charles de Coster (1868).

The source of the name *Eulenspiegel* (owl's glass or owl's mirror) is an old German proverb: "Man is as little conscious of his own faults as an ape or an owl, looking into a mirror, is conscious of his ugliness."

The jacket of the Strauss recording has this interesting account: "Till's exploits, the stories of which are household tales in Germany, consisted of horseplay and jests that he practiced without discrimination, and, in some instances, with a frank and joyous lack of seemliness which would not bear unexpurgated narration. In Murner's book, Till is sentenced to the gallows, but escapes at the last moment. Strauss, however, does not let the rogue off, but despatches him on the scaffold."

In the folk tales, Till's jests and practical jokes generally depend on a pun and tend to be farcical. Although they have a serious theme, the pranks are often brutal and sometimes obscene. Just as Jack in the American folk tales outsmarts the giants as well as his "betters" and the unscrupulous, Till's appeal is that of the individual getting back at a society in which the common folk are held in low esteem, if not contempt. As Britannica has it, "The stupid yet cunning peasant demonstrates his superiority to the narrow, dishonest, condescending townsman, as well as the clergy and nobility."

At least four different German towns chose Eulenspiegel as the subject for notgeld or emergency paper money shortly after World War I. The most elaborate set of notes, issued by Kneitlingen in 1921, consists of 12 different scenes from the life and tales of the merry prankster. While perhaps puzzling to many who might view the notes, the scenes would be recognized instantly by almost any German and certainly by all of the residents of Kneitlingen.

As is the case with many other notgeld, the text on one Eulenspiegel note is difficult to translate since it is printed in an obscure dialect rather than the usual German tongue of the Empire. David Block's observation on this and on the significance of Eulenspiegel is worth consideration: "As you are aware, local dialects on so many series notes reflect the fragmentation by war of the German state, and with a consequent emphasis on local pride to replace the lost pride in the nation. The glorification of the past, and particularly of Eulenspiegel, resulted from disgust with the leaders and classes who betrayed the people into their humiliation. A parallel may be drawn between Till Eulenspiegel and Robin Hood."

Far from being merely colorful and ephemeral "money substitutes," a closer look into the German notgeld can lead one down winding historical trails as well as into the trackless depths of the human psyche.

German Notgeld with References to Till Eulenspiegel

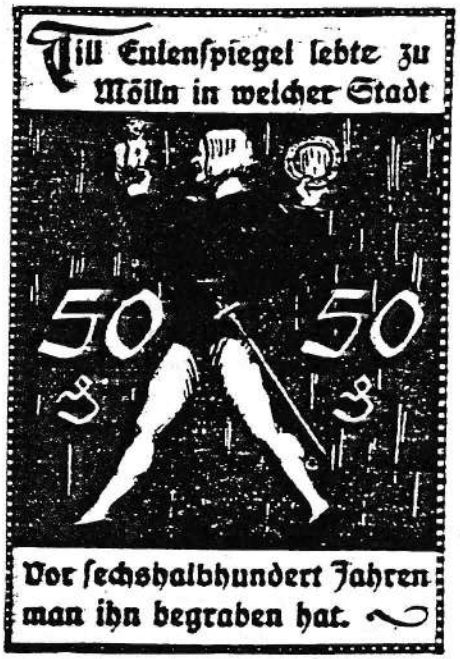
Braunschweig	S 119a	1 May 1921	10-25-50-75 Pfg.
Moelln	S 714	31 Dec 1921	25-50-100 Pfg.
Kneitlingen	S 559a	1 Jul 1921	4x50 4x75 Pfg. 4x1 Mk. (heavy paper)
Kneitlingen	S 559b	same as above but printed on light paper.	
Osterwieck	S 838	1 Jan 1921	50 Pfg. (one of a set of three)
Moelln	V 1406a	31 Dec 1921	50 Pfg.
Moelln	V 1406b	31 Dec 1921	50 Pfg.





Typical back of the Braunschweig notes.





Moelln 1406b—31 Dec. 1921—front.

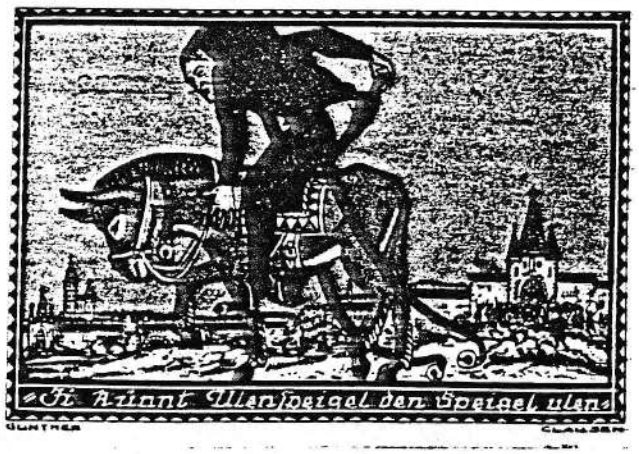




Braunschweig—S119a—1 May 1921.

Moelln—1406b—back.

Kneitlingen—selections from S559a & b—July 1921.

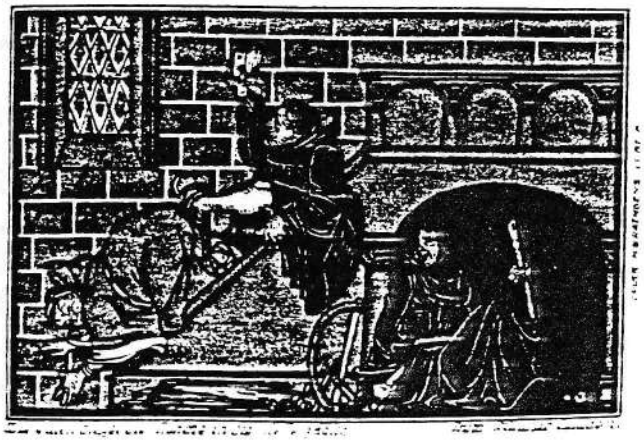














Kneitlingen—typical back with owl motif.



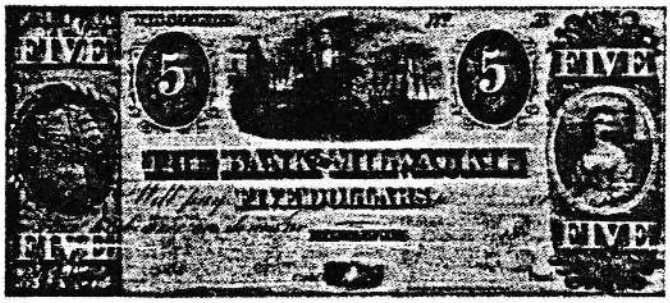
Moelln—S714—31 Dec. 1921—front.



Moelln—S714—back.

Acknowledgements: *Encyclopedia Britannica;* record jacket by Everest Records; correspondence with David Block and Herman Krause. Notgeld compiled and illustrated from collection of writer. *The Jack Tales*, edited by Richard Chase, published by Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1960. (The Jack tales of American folklore have parallels in the British Isles, northern Europe and the West Indies. While no specific parallels between the Jack and Eulenspiegel tales have been pointed out, they are of the same unaccountably wise "peasant trickster" genre with similar cultural roots springing from the same geographical area.)

1983 MidAmerica Show at Milwaukee



Milwaukee will again play host to the MidAmerica Coin Show at the MECCA Convention Center July 29-31, 1983. MECCA is Wisconsin's largest convention center and will be the site of the 1984 Central States Numismatic Society Convention. It is conveniently located one block from a freeway exit and is within five blocks of 13,000 off-street parking spaces.

Last year's MidAmerica Show, with a 165-table bourse, was the largest locally sponsored coin show ever held in the state of Wisconsin and featured a number of free educational programs about different aspects of coin and currency collecting, as will the 1983 MidAmerica Show.

Special discount room rates of $30 single or $35 double will be available at the Marc Plaza Hotel, located a block from MECCA. The Hyatt-Regency, directly across the street from MECCA and connected to the convention center by an enclosed skywalk, will offer a special rate of $48 single or double. These discounted rates will be available to all collectors and dealers attending the MidAmerica Show and requesting the special rate at the time they place their reservation.

According to Kevin Foley, Bourse Chairman for the MidAmerica Show, "Our 1982 show in Milwaukee was one of the best attended coin shows in the entire country last year and both dealer and collector interest in the 1983 show has been exceptional. The Milwaukee numismatic community was pleased to see many of the bigger dealers here last year, and judging from the enthusiastic response of the dealers in signing up for the 1983 show, I'm anticipating yet another outstanding show in Milwaukee."

Dealers interested in bourse space at the July 29-31 MidAmerica Coin Show should contact Bourse Chairman Kevin Foley at P.O. Box 589, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201, or by calling (414) 282-2388.

Ich bin der Doktor Eisenbarth
A Dental Notgeld Note
BEN Z. SWANSON, D.D.S.