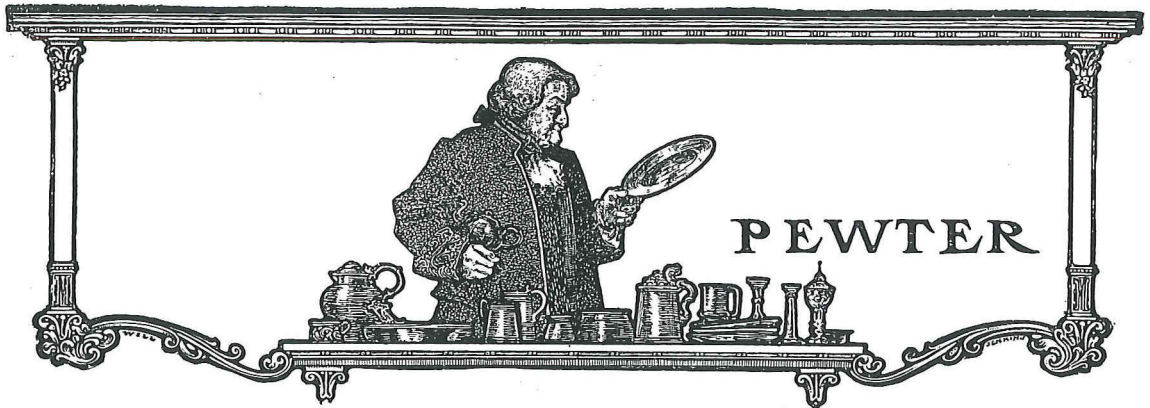


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Baron Trenck's Prison Cups By Ernest Radford

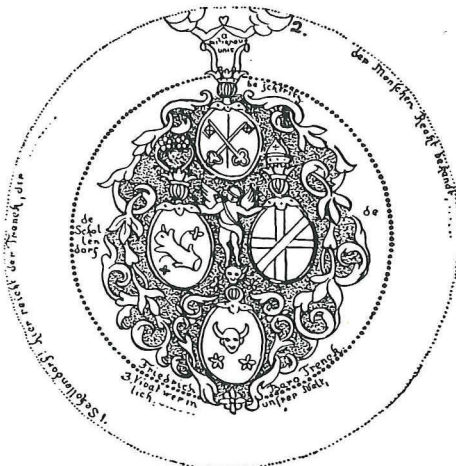
THE *Life and Adventures* of Baron Trenck, translated into English by Thomas Holcroft and published in 1788-93, was one of the most popular books of its day, and Messrs. Cassell & Co., who reprinted it some years ago, have given the modern reader the opportunity of forming his own opinion of it.

To himself of immense importance, he was deemed dangerous enough to become what is called a "marked man," and the consequence was that the Baron Trenck, who appears in his own book as a vain-glorious rowdy of a very obnoxious type, spent a considerable part of his life in prison. With the right or the wrong of it all we are not at the moment concerned. What we call Martial Law is a time-saving substitute for the other thing, and his real or supposed offences brought him into that court.

He laid claim to extraordinary natural parts, and amongst other things to a certain talent for drawing, which was re-discovered when, with so many years to dispose of,

he found, in the oddest of chances, the opportunity of trying his hand at it again. There should be pity for every such case, and the "sad mechanic exercise" of graver and pencil most probably saved him from madness. When, after his release, and towards the end of his days, he published this famous book, it at any rate appealed

to the ladies—so strongly, indeed, that bonnets "à la Trenck" were worn for a certain time, and perhaps some readers of THE CONNOISSEUR can tell us what they were like. For the rest, the Baron must tell his own story, and some idea can be obtained from the illustrations of what these remarkable cups were like. The verses can hardly be read, I fear, excepting in the book Mrs. Gerald Walker has, where the ornamentation of every compartment into which this cup was divided has been very carefully copied. As no two were alike, the owner of any has a unique possession. Whatever their merits, the object of most of the verses seems to have been to appeal to the Court of Mercy, and there is, as he said, "a remarkable circumstance attending these cups." "All were forbidden, under pain of death, to hold conversation with me, or to supply me

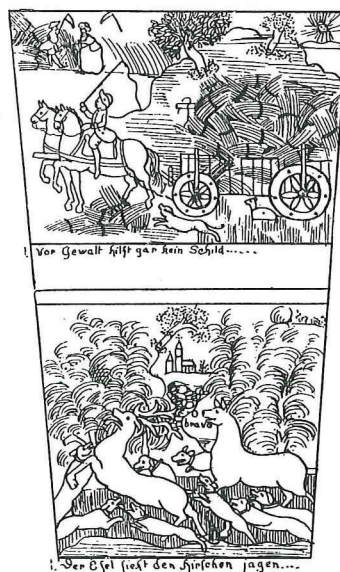
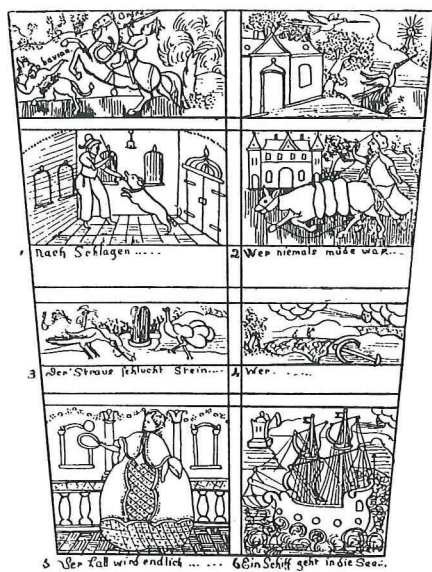


THE LID (INSIDE)



THE LID (OUTSIDE)

Baron Trenck's Prison Cups



SECTIONS OF THE SIDES

with pen and ink; yet, by this open permission of writing what I pleased on pewter, was I enabled to inform the world of all I wished, and to prove that a man of worth was oppressed."

"Open his cage, break his fetters, ye friends of virtue,
And his songs shall be the delight of your abodes!"

"The difficulties of this engraving will be conceived, when it is remembered that I worked with candle light on shining pewter, attained the art of giving light and shade, and by practice could divide a cup into two and thirty compartments as regularly with the unaided hand as with a pair of compasses."

It was long before he had either light or air in his prison sufficient for a man's health, but under some more considerate governor than his predecessors, he had a more decent allowance of both. "Having light, I began to carve with a nail, on the pewter cup in which I drank, satirical verses and various figures, and attained so much perfection that my cups at last were considered as masterpieces, both of

engraving and invention, and were sold dear as rare curiosities. My first attempts were rude as may well be imagined . . . but in course of time I improved, and each of the inspecting officers wished to possess one; so a whole year was spent in this employment, which thus passed quickly away, because I wished by my verses and devices to inform the world of my fate. The King gave orders that they should all be examined, but this command was not obeyed, for the officers made merchandise of them, and their

value increased so much, that they are now in various museums throughout Europe. The late Langrave of Hesse-Cassel presented one of them to my wife, and another came in a very unaccountable manner from the Queen-dowager of Prussia to Paris (I have given prints of these two with the verses they contained in my works). A third fell into the hands of the Prince Augustus Lobkowitz, then a prisoner of war at Magdeburg, who, on his return to Vienna, presented it to the Emperor, who placed it in his museum."



SECTIONS OF THE SIDES

The Connoisseur

It would have been hard to take less than we have from the pages concerned with this matter, because the narrator hardly wasted a word, and the interest is well sustained. On nothing but pewter, or a very similar substance, could work of this kind have been done under circumstances so extraordinary, and the metal has its testimonial in the work of the Baron Trenck. In the catalogue of the exhibition which we had in Clifford's Inn lately, this particular cup was described as one

which is "said to have been done by Baron Trenck while in prison," but apart from the impossibility of copying it, the evidence of its being genuine is overwhelming, and in conclusion, it may be mentioned that the sceptics of the British Museum were silenced when they had identified the arms of the artist on the under side of the lid. After ten years imprisonment, he was released in 1763, which is the date engraved on this cup.



PEWTER CUP WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND VERSES
BY THE BARON TRENCK