

Candide

or Optimism

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Voltaire

Translated by Sander Berg



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Candide *or Optimism*

*Translated from the German by Dr Ralph, with
additional notes found in the Doctor's pocket when
he died in Minden in the Year of Our Lord 1759.*

Chapter 1

*How Candide was raised in a beautiful castle,
and how he was thrown out of there.*

IN WESTPHALIA, IN THE CASTLE of Baron Thunder-ten-Tronkh, there lived a young man to whom Nature had given the sweetest of dispositions. His face was an open book. He was relatively sound of mind but very simple of spirit. That is, I think, the reason why he was called Candide. The older servants of the house suspected that he was the son of the Baron's sister and a good and honest local gentleman, whom the young lady in question had never wanted to marry, because he could only prove to have seventy-one noble forebears, the rest of his genealogical tree having been destroyed by the ravages of time.

The Baron was one of the most powerful lords in Westphalia, for his castle had a door and windows. He even had a tapestry decorating his main hall. The dogs in his yard could, in case of need, double up as a pack of hounds. His stable boys were his huntsmen, the local vicar his court chaplain. They all called him milord and laughed at his jokes.

Madame the Baroness weighed about twenty-five stone and was for that reason much esteemed. And the dignity with which she did the honours gained her even more respect. Her seventeen-year-old daughter Cunégonde was a healthy-looking, plump and attractive little thing with rosy cheeks. The Baron's

son took after his father in all respects. The tutor Pangloss* was the house oracle, and the young Candide listened to his lessons with all the earnestness of his tender years and character.

Pangloss taught metaphysico-theologo-cosmologonology. He proved admirably that there was no effect without a cause and that in the best of all possible worlds the castle of the Baron was the most beautiful of all castles, and the Baroness the best of all possible baronesses.

“It has been proved,” he said, “that things could not be otherwise. Given that all things have been made to a certain end, they have necessarily been made to the best end. Just look: noses are made to wear spectacles, and so we wear spectacles. Our feet are clearly shaped to wear shoes, and so we wear shoes. Rocks are formed so they can be cut to build castles, which is why the Baron has a beautiful castle – the greatest baron of the province must needs have the best home. And since pigs are made to be eaten, we eat pork throughout the year. As a result, those who have suggested that everything is good are talking nonsense. One should say instead that everything is the best it could be.”

Candide listened attentively and believed innocently, for he thought Miss Cunégonde was extremely beautiful, even if he never plucked up the courage to tell her. He concluded that, after the good fortune of being born the Baron of Thunder-ten-Tronck, the next level of bliss was to be Miss Cunégonde, the third to see her every day and the fourth to listen to Master Pangloss, the greatest philosopher of the province and hence of the earth.

One day Cunégonde went for a walk near the castle in a little wood they called “park”. In the bushes she saw Doctor Pangloss

giving a lesson in experimental physics to one of her mother's chambermaids, a very pretty and eager little brunette. Since Miss Cunégonde had a great gift for sciences, she observed with bated breath the repeated experimentation she witnessed. She clearly saw the Doctor's sufficient reason,* and the effects and causes. She left in a state of excitement, deep in thought and filled with a burning desire to become a scientist too, thinking she might be young Candide's sufficient reason and he hers.

She bumped into Candide on her way back to the castle. She blushed; Candide blushed too. She greeted him with a choked voice, and Candide spoke to her without knowing what he said. The next day after dinner, as everyone was leaving the table, Cunégonde and Candide found themselves behind a screen. Cunégonde dropped her handkerchief; Candide picked it up. She innocently took his hand. The young man innocently kissed the young lady's hand with an ardour, sensitivity and grace that were something else. Their lips met; their eyes caught fire; their knees trembled; their hands wandered. Baron Thunder-ten-Tronck happened to walk past the screen, and when he saw that cause and that effect, he threw Candide out of his castle with firm kicks up his behind. Cunégonde fainted. No sooner had she come to than the Baroness slapped her. And there was much commotion in the most beautiful and the most pleasant of all possible castles.

Chapter 2

*What became of Candide among the Bulgars.**

EXPELLED FROM HIS EARTHLY PARADISE, Candide walked for a long time without knowing where he was going. He wept, turning his eyes heavenwards, and often looked back at the most beautiful of all castles where the most beautiful of all young baronesses lived. He fell asleep in between two furrows in the middle of a field without having eaten. It began to snow heavily. The next day, rigid with cold, Candide dragged himself to the nearest village, which was called Valdberghoff-trarbk-dikdorff. He was penniless, starving and exhausted. In this sad state, he halted at the door of an inn. Two men dressed in blue spotted him: “Look, comrade,” said one of them, “now *there’s* a sturdy young man, and of the right height too.” They walked over to Candide and very politely invited him to have dinner with them.

“I feel honoured, gentlemen,” replied Candide with charming modesty, “but I cannot afford to pay my share.”

“Never mind that,” said one of the men in blue. “People of your stature and merit don’t have to pay a thing. You *are* five foot five, aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir, that’s my height,” he responded with a bow.

“Sir, please, join us at our table. Not only will we pay for your meal, but we’ll make sure that a man like you will never lack money. We men ought to look after each other.”

“You’re right,” said Candide. “That’s what Master Pangloss always used to say. I can see that it’s all turning out for the best.”

The men insisted on giving him a few crowns. He accepted and wanted to write out an IOU. The men refused and they sat down at their table: “Don’t you feel a deep love for—”

“Oh, yes!” he replied. “I feel a very deep love for Cunégonde.”

“That’s not what I meant,” said one of the men. “We want to know if you feel a deep love for the King of the Bulgars.”

“Not in the least,” he responded, “since I’ve never laid eyes on him.”

“What? He’s the most charming king you’ll ever meet, and we must drink to his health.”

“With pleasure, gentlemen,” he said and took a sip.

“Enough of that,” the men told him. “We hereby declare you the stalwart protector, defender and hero of the Bulgars. Your fortune is made and your glory assured.”

There and then they put chains on his feet and took him to their regiment. They made him turn right and left, lift the ramrod, put it back, take aim, shoot and march at the double. And they gave him thirty strokes of the cane. The next day, he did slightly less badly at the drills, and he only received twenty. The day after that, he only got ten, and his comrades considered him a genius.

Candide was baffled and did not quite understand how all this made him a hero. One fine spring morning, he decided to go for a walk. In the belief that it was the prerogative of the human species, as well as of animals, to use their legs as they see fit, he walked straight ahead. He had not covered five miles before four other heroes, six feet tall, caught up with him, clapped him in irons and threw him in a dungeon. They

asked him the judicial question of whether he preferred to receive thirty-six strokes of the cane from the entire regiment or have his head filled with twelve lead bullets all at once. In vain he protested that man has free will and that he wanted neither one nor the other: he had to make a choice. He chose to exercise God's gift known as "freedom" and opted to run the gauntlet thirty-six times. He got no further than two. The regiment consisted of two thousand men. That added up to four thousand strokes of the cane, which laid bare his muscles and sinews from his neck down to his backside. As they were about to start the third round, Candide could not stand it any longer and pleaded with them to be so good as to destroy his skull. His request was granted. They blindfolded him and made him kneel. At that moment, the King of the Bulgars walked past and asked what the nature of his crime was. And since the King was exceedingly clever, he understood from everything Candide told him that he was a young metaphysician, woefully ignorant of the ways of the world. He pardoned him, showing a clemency that will be praised in all the newspapers until the end of time. A good-hearted surgeon healed Candide with a three-week treatment of balms recommended by Dioscorides.* Some of his skin had grown back, and he was able to walk again when the King of the Bulgars went to war with the King of the Avars.*

Chapter 3

*How Candide escaped from the Bulgars
and what became of him.*

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SIGHT to behold those two disciplined, nimble and dazzling armies. The trumpets, the fifes, the oboes, the drums, the cannon: together they created a harmony the like of which hell had never heard before. First, the cannon knocked over about six thousand men on both sides. Then the muskets removed from the best of all possible worlds nine to ten thousand scoundrels who infected its surface. The bayonet too was the sufficient reason for the death of several thousand men. All in all, as many as thirty thousand souls might have been lost. Candide, trembling like a philosopher, hid as well as he could during this heroic carnage.

When finally both kings had the *Te Deum* sung in their respective camps, he decided to go and ponder effects and causes elsewhere. He climbed over heaps of dead and dying men and reached a neighbouring village, which lay in ashes. It was an Avar village that the Bulgars had put to the torch, in compliance with the common law. Here, old men beaten to a pulp watched how their wives had their throats cut, their babies clinging to their bloody breasts. There, disembowelled girls were breathing their last after satisfying the natural needs of a number of heroes. Yet others, half-burnt,

screamed for someone to put them out of their misery. The ground was covered in bits of brain next to lopped-off arms and legs.

Candide fled to another village as fast as his feet could carry him. It was a Bulgar village that had received the same treatment from Avar heroes. Walking over quivering limbs and rubble, Candide eventually escaped from the theatre of war, carrying some victuals in his knapsack and constantly thinking about Cunégonde. His provisions were running out when he reached Holland. But having heard that everyone in that country was rich and Christian into the bargain, he was sure that he would be treated as well as he had been in the castle of the Baron before being kicked out on account of Cunégonde's beautiful eyes.

He asked a few serious-looking men for charity, but they all told him that if he continued his trade, he would be locked up in a poorhouse where he would be taught how to live properly.

Then he turned to a man who had just spent one hour preaching non-stop to a large crowd about charity. The speaker looked at him askance and asked him: "What are you doing here? Are you here for the good cause?"

"There is no effect without a cause," Candide replied modestly. "Everything is linked and always works out for the best. It was necessary for me to be driven away from Cunégonde and run the gauntlet, and now I have to beg for my bread until I'm able to earn my own. It could not have been any different."

"My friend," the orator asked, "do you believe that the Pope is the Antichrist?"

"It's the first I've heard of it," Candide replied, "but whether he is or not, I have nothing to eat."

“You don’t deserve to eat,” the other said. “Be off with you, you miserable tramp. Don’t you dare approach me ever again.”

The speaker’s wife, who had poked her head out of the window on hearing there was a man who was not sure whether the Pope was the Antichrist, emptied over his head a chamber pot full of... Heavens above! Is there nothing a lady would not do in her religious zeal?

A man who had not received baptism, a good Anabaptist* named Jacques, saw the cruel and undignified way in which they treated one of his brethren: a featherless biped in possession of a soul.* He took him home, washed him and gave him bread and beer as well as two florins. He even wanted to teach him how to manufacture those Persian fabrics they produce in Holland. Candide all but threw himself at his feet and cried out: “Master Pangloss was right in telling me that things could not be better in this world, because I’m infinitely more touched by your extreme generosity than by the harshness of that man in black and his lady wife.”

The next day, during a walk, he met a beggar covered in sores. His eyes were dead, the tip of his nose eaten away, his mouth crooked, his teeth blackened. His voice was gruff and he coughed violently, coughing up a tooth with each fit.