

## THE CRIMINAL FROM LOST HONOUR

*By Friedrich Schiller*

In the whole history of man there is no chapter more instructive for the heart and mind than the annals of his errors. On the occasion of every great crime a proportionally great force was in motion. If by the pale light of ordinary emotions the play of the desiring faculty is concealed, in the situation of strong passion it becomes the more striking, the more colossal, the more audible, and the acute investigator of humanity, who knows how much may be properly set down to the account of the mechanism of the ordinary freedom of the will, and how far it is allowable to reason by analogy, will be able from this source to gather much fresh experience for his psychology, and to render it applicable to moral life.

The human heart is something so uniform and at the same time so compound! One and the same faculty or desire may play in a thousand forms and directions, may produce a thousand contradictory phenomena, may appear differently mingled in a thousand characters, and a thousand dissimilar characters and actions might be spun out of one kind of inclination, though the particular man, about whom the question was raised, might have no suspicion of such affinity. If, as for the other kingdoms of nature, a Linnæus for the human race were to arise, who could classify according to inclinations and impulses, how great would be the empire, when many a person whose vices are now stifled in a narrow social sphere, and in the close confines of the law, was found in the same order with the monster Borgia.

Considered from this point of view, the usual mode of treating history is open to much objection, and herein, I think, lies the difficulty, owing to which the study of history has always been so unfruitful for civil life. Between the vehement emotions of the man in action, and the quiet mind of the reader, to whom the action is presented, there is such a repelling contrast, such a wide interval, that it is difficult, nay, impossible for the latter, even to suspect a connexion. A gap remains between the subject of the history and the reader which cuts off all possibility of comparison or application, and which, instead of awakening that wholesome alarm, that warns too secure health, merely calls forth the shake of the head denoting suspicion. We regard the unhappy person, who was still a man as much as ourselves, both when he committed the act and when he atoned for it, as a creature of another species, whose blood flows differently from our own, and whose will does not obey the same regulations as our own. His fate teaches us but little, as

sympathy is only founded on an obscure consciousness of similar peril, and we are far removed even from the bare suspicion of such similarity. The relation being lost, instruction is lost with it, and history, instead of being a school of cultivation, must rest content with the humble merit of having satisfied our curiosity. If it is to become any thing more and attain its great purpose, it must choose one of these two plans: either the reader must become as warm as the hero, or the hero must become as cold as the reader.

I am aware that many of the best historians, both of ancient and modern times, have adhered to the first method, and have gained the heart of their reader, by a style which carries him along with the subject. But this is an usurpation on the part of the author, and an infringement on the republican freedom of the reading public, which is itself entitled to sit in judgment: it is at the same time a violation of the law of boundaries, since this method belongs exclusively and properly to the orator and the poet. The last method is alone open to the historian.

The hero then must be as cold as the reader or--what comes to the same thing--we must become acquainted with him before he begins to act; we must see him not only perform, but will his action. His thoughts concern us infinitely more than his deeds, and the sources of his thoughts still more than the consequences of his deeds. The soil of Vesuvius has been explored to discover the origin of its eruption; and why is less attention paid to a moral than to a physical phenomenon? Why do we not equally regard the nature and situation of the things which surround a certain man, until the tinder collected within him takes fire? The dreamer, who loves the wonderful is charmed by the singularity and wonder of such a phenomenon; but the friend of truth seeks a mother for these lost children. He seeks her in the unalterable structure of the human soul, and in the variable conditions by which it is influenced from without, and by searching both these he is sure to find her. He is now no more astonished to see the poisonous hemlock thriving in that bed, in every other part of which wholesome herbs are growing, to find wisdom and folly, virtue and vice, together in the same cradle.

Not to mention any of the advantages which psychology derives from such a method of treating history, this method has alone the preference, because it uproots the cruel scorn and proud security with which erect and untempted virtue commonly looks down upon the fallen, because it diffuses the mild spirit of toleration, without which no fugitive can return, no reconciliation between

the law and its offender is possible, no infected member of society can escape utter mortification.

Had the criminal of whom I am now about to speak a right to appeal to that spirit of toleration? Was he really lost for the body of the state, without a possibility of redemption? I will not anticipate the reader's verdict. Our leniency will no more avail him, since he perished by the hand of the executioner, but the dissection of his crime will perhaps instruct humanity, and possibly instruct justice also.

Christian Wolf was the son of an innkeeper in a provincial town (the name of which must be concealed for reasons which will be obvious in the sequel), and, his father being dead, he assisted his mother in the business till his twentieth year. The business was bad, and Wolf had many an idle hour. Even from his school days he was notorious as a loose kind of fellow. Grown up girls complained of his audacity, and the lads of the town revered his inventive powers. Nature had neglected his person. A little insignificant figure, curly hair of an unpleasant blackness, a flat nose, and a swollen upper lip, which had been moreover put out of its place by the kick of a horse, gave a repulsiveness to his appearance, which scared all the women away from him, and afforded abundant material for the wit of his comrades.

Obstinately did he endeavour to gain what had been denied him; because he was unpleasant he determined to please. He was sensual, and persuaded himself that he was in love. The girl whom he chose ill-treated him; he had reason to fear his rivals were more fortunate; nevertheless the girl was poor. A heart that was closed to his endearments might possibly open to his presents, but he himself was oppressed by want, and his vain endeavour to produce an effective exterior absorbed the small gains of his miserable business. Too indolent and too ignorant to restore his dilapidated affairs by speculation, too proud, and also too delicate to exchange the condition of master which he had hitherto held, for that of peasant, he saw but one path before him--a path which thousands before and after him have taken with better success--that of stealing honestly. His native town bordered on a wood, which belonged to the sovereign; he turned poacher, and the profits of his depredations were faithfully placed in the hands of his mistress.

Among the lovers of Johanna was Robert, a huntsman in the service of the forester. This man soon perceived the advantage which had been gained over him by the liberality of his rival, and filled with envy, he investigated the source of this change. He appeared more

frequently at the Sun--this was the sign of the inn--and his watchful eye, sharpened by envy and jealousy, soon showed him whence the money had been procured. A short time before, a severe edict had been revived against poachers, condemning transgressors to the house of correction. Robert was unwearied in observing the secret paths of his rival, and finally succeeded in catching the unwary man in the very fact. Wolf was apprehended, and it was only by the sacrifice of all his property, that he was able--and then with difficulty--to escape the awarded punishment by a fine.

Robert triumphed. His rival was beaten out of the field, and Johanna's favour was at an end, now he was a beggar. Wolf knew his enemy, and this enemy was the happy possessor of Johanna. An oppressive feeling of want was combined with offended pride, necessity and jealousy raged together against his sensitiveness, hunger drove him out upon the wide world, revenge and passion held him fast. For a second time he turned poacher, but Robert's redoubled vigilance was again too much for him. Now he experienced all the severity of the law, for he had nothing more to give, and in a few weeks he was consigned to the house of correction attached to the capital.

This year of punishment had passed, absence had increased his passion, and his stubbornness had become greater under the weight of his misfortune. Scarcely had he regained his freedom than he hastened to the place of his birth to show himself to his Johanna. He appeared, and all shunned him. Pressing necessity at last subdued his pride, and overcame his sense of personal weakness,-- he offered himself to the opulent of the place, as willing to serve for daily hire. The farmer shrugged his shoulders as he saw the weakly looking creature, and the stout bony frame of a rival applicant was decisive against him in the mind of the unfeeling patron. He made one effort more. One office was still left--the very last post of an honest name. He applied for the vacant place of herdsman of the town, but the peasant would not trust his pigs to a scape-grace. Frustrated in every effort, rejected at every place, he became a poacher for the third time, and for a third time had the misfortune of falling into the hands of his watchful enemy.

The double relapse had increased the magnitude of the offence. The judges looked into the book of laws, but not into the criminal's state of mind. The decree against poachers required a solemn and exemplary satisfaction; and Wolf was condemned to work for three years in the fortification, with the mark of the gallows branded on his back.

This period also had elapsed, and he quitted the fortification, a very different man from the man he was when he entered it. Here began a new epoch in his life. Let us hear him speak himself, as he afterwards confessed to his spiritual adviser, and before the court. "I entered the fortification," he said, "as an erring man, and I left it--a villain. I had still possessed something in the world which was dear to me, and my pride had bowed down under shame. When I was brought to the fortification, I was confined with three and twenty prisoners, two of whom were murderers, while all the rest were notorious thieves and vagabonds. They scoffed at me, when I spoke of God, and encouraged me to utter all sorts of blasphemies against the Redeemer. Obscene songs were sung in my presence, which, graceless fellow as I was, I could not hear without disgust and horror; and what I saw done, was still more revolting to my sense of decency. There was not a day in which some career of shame was not repeated, in which some evil project was not hatched. At first I shunned these people, and avoided their discourse as much as possible; but I wanted the sympathy of some fellow creature, and the barbarity of my keepers had even denied me my dog. The labour was hard and oppressive, my body weak; I wanted assistance, and, if I must speak out, I wanted compassion also, and this I was forced to purchase with the last remains of my conscience. Thus did I ultimately become inured to what was most detestable, and in the quarter of the year I had surpassed my instructors.

"I now thirsted after the day of liberty, as I thirsted after revenge. All men had offended me, for all were better and happier than me. I considered myself the martyr of natural rights, the victim of the law. Grinding my teeth, I rubbed my chains, when the sun rose behind the mountain on which the fortification stood;--a wide prospect is a two-fold hell for a prisoner. The free breeze that whistled through the loop-holes of my tower, the swallow that perched on the iron bar of my grating, seemed to insult me with their liberty, and made my confinement the more hideous. Then I swore a fierce, unconquerable hate against all that resembles man, and faithfully have I kept my oath.

"My first thought, as soon as I was free, was my native town. Little as I had to hope there for my future support, much was promised to my hunger for revenge. My heart beat more wildly as I saw the church-steeple rise in the distance from the wood. It was no more that heartfelt comfort, which I felt, when first I returned thither. The remembrance of all the afflictions, all the persecutions which I had suffered then roused me at once from a

frightful torpor; every wound bled afresh, every scar was opened. I quickened my steps, for I walked in the thought of terrifying my enemy by my sudden appearance, and I now thirsted as much after new humiliation as I had before trembled at it.

"The bells were ringing for vespers, while I stood in the middle of the market. The congregation was thronging to church. I was now recognised, and every one who came near me shyly shrank back. I was always very fond of little children, and even now, by an involuntary impulse, I gave a groschen to a boy who was skipping by me. The boy stared at me for a moment, and then flung the groschen into my face. Had my blood been cooler I should have remembered that the beard, which I had brought with me from the fortification, disfigured my face in the most frightful manner, but my bad heart had infected my reason. Tears, such as I had never shed, ran down my cheeks.

"The boy does not know who I am, nor whence I come,' I now said to myself, half aloud, 'and yet he shuns me like some noxious beast. Have I any mark on my forehead, or have I ceased to look like a man because I can no longer love one?' The contempt of this boy wounded me more bitterly than three years' service in the galleys, for I had done him a kindness, and could not charge him with personal hatred.

"I sat down in a timber-yard opposite the church. What I actually desired I do not know, but this I know, that I rose with indignation; when, of all my acquaintance that passed, not one would give me a greeting. Deeply offended, I left the spot to seek a lodging, when just as I was turning the corner of a street I ran against my Johanna. 'The host of the Sun!' she cried aloud, and made a movement to embrace me. 'Thou returned, dear host of the Sun--God be praised!' Her attire bespoke misery and hunger, her aspect denoted the abandoned condition to which she had sunk. I quickly surmised what had happened; some of the prince's dragoons who had met me, made me guess that there was a garrison in the town. 'Soldier's wench!' cried I, and laughing, I turned my back upon her. I felt comforted that in the rank of living beings there was still one creature below me. I had never loved her.

"My mother was dead, my creditors had paid themselves with my small house. I had lost every body and every thing. All the world shunned me as though I were venomous, but I had at last forgotten shame. Before, I had retired from the sight of men because contempt was unendurable. Now I obtruded myself upon them, and felt

delight in scaring them. I was easy because I had nothing more to lose, and nothing more to guard. I no more needed any good quality, because none believed I could have any.

"The whole world lay open before me, and in some strange province I might have passed for an honest man, but I had lost the spirit even to appear one. Despair and shame had at last forced this mood upon me. It was the last refuge that was left me, to learn to do without honour, because I had no longer a claim to it. Had my pride and vanity survived my degradation, I must have destroyed myself.

"What I had actually resolved upon was yet unknown even to myself. I had to be sure a dark remembrance that I wished to do something bad. I wished to merit my fate. The laws, I thought, were beneficial to the world, and therefore I embraced the determination of violating them. Formerly I had sinned from necessity and levity, now it was from free choice, and for my own pleasure.

"My first plan was to continue my poaching. Hunting altogether had gradually become a passion with me, and besides I was forced to live some way. But this was not all; I was tickled at the thought of scorning the princely edict, and of injuring my sovereign to the utmost of my power. I no more feared apprehension, for I had a bullet ready for my discoverer, and I knew that I should not miss my man. I killed all the game that came across me, a small quantity of which I sold on the border, but the greater part I left to rot. I lived miserably, that I might be able to afford powder and ball. My devastations in the great hunt were notorious, but suspicion no longer touched me. My aspect dissipated it: my name was forgotten.

"This kind of life lasted for several months. One morning I had, as usual rambled through the wood, to follow the track of a deer. I had wearied myself for two hours in vain, and was already beginning to give up my prey as lost, when I suddenly discovered it within gun-shot. I was about to take aim and fire, when I was suddenly startled by the appearance of a hat which lay on the ground a few paces before me. I looked closer, and discovered the huntsman Robert, who from behind the thick trunk of an oak tree was levelling his gun at the very animal which I had designed to shoot. At this sight a deadly coldness passed through my bones. Here was the man whom I detested more than any living thing, and this man within reach of my bullet. At the moment I felt as if the whole world depended on the firing of my gun, and the hatred of my whole life seemed concentrated in the tip of the finger

that was to give the fatal pressure to the trigger. An invisible fatal hand was suspended over me, the index of my destiny pointed irrevocably to this black minute. My arm trembled, when I allowed my gun the fatal choice, my teeth chattered as in an ague fit, and my breath, with a suffocating sensation, was confined in my lungs. For the duration of one minute did the barrel of the gun waver uncertainly between the man and the deer, one minute--and one more--and yet one more. It was a doubtful and obstinate contest between revenge and conscience, but revenge gained the victory, and the huntsman lay dead on the ground.

"My gun fell as it had been fired. 'Murderer,' I stammered out slowly--the wood was as silent as a churchyard, and I could hear plainly that I said 'murderer.' When I drew nearer, the man had died. Long did I stand speechless before the corse, when a shrill burst of laughter came as a relief. 'Will you keep counsel now, friend?' said I, and boldly stepping up to the murdered man, I turned round his face towards myself. His eyes were wide open. I was serious, and again became suddenly still. An extraordinary feeling took possession of me.

"Hitherto I had sinned on account of my disgrace, but now something had happened for which I had not yet atoned. An hour before, I think, no man could have persuaded me that there was any thing under heaven worse than myself, whereas, now I began to suspect that my condition an hour before was, perhaps, an enviable one.

"God's judgments did not occur to me,--but I had a dim recollection of sword and cord, and the execution of an infanticide which I saw while a school-boy. There was something peculiarly terrible to me in the thought that my life from this moment had become forfeit. More I do not recollect. My first wish was that Robert was still living. I endeavoured forcibly to recall to my mind all the wrong that the deceased had done me during his life,--but strange to say, my memory seemed to have perished. I could recall nothing of that, which a quarter of an hour before had impelled me to madness. I did not understand how I had been induced to commit this murder.

"I was yet standing by the corpse. The crack of some whips, and the noise of carts, which were passing through the wood, brought me to my senses. The deed had been committed scarcely a quarter of a mile from the high road, and I was forced to think of my own safety.

"Unintentionally I strayed deeper into the wood. On the way, it struck me that the deceased once possessed a

watch. I needed money to reach the border--and yet I lacked courage to return to the spot, where the dead man lay. A thought of the devil and of an omnipotence of the deity began to terrify me. However, I summoned all my audacity, and resolved to set all hell at defiance. I returned to the place. I found what I had expected, and also money amounting to rather more than a dollar in a green purse. Just as I was about to put them both up, I suddenly stopped, and began to reflect. It was no fit of shame, nor was it the fear of increasing my crime by plunder. I believe it was out of a spirit of defiance that I flung away the watch, and only kept half the money. I wished to be taken for a personal enemy of the murdered man, but not for one who had robbed him.

"I now fled deeper into the wood, which I knew extended four German miles to the north, and there touched the border of the country. Till noon I ran breathless. The rapidity of my flight had dissipated the anguish of my conscience, but the return of that anguish was frightful, when my strength more and more declined. A thousand hideous forms passed before me, and struck into my heart, like sharp knives. Between a life filled with an increasing terror of death, and a violent end, the awful choice was now left me--and choose I must. I had not the heart to quit the world by self-destruction, and I was terrified at the prospect of remaining in it. Fixed as it were between the certain torments of life, and the uncertain terrors of eternity--unable to live or to die--I passed the sixth hour of my flight--an hour brimful of horrors, such as no living man could narrate.

"Slowly--absorbed in myself, and with my hat unconsciously slouched over my face, as if I wished to conceal myself from the eye of inanimate nature,--I had insensibly followed a narrow path, which led me through the deepest part of the thicket--when suddenly a rough imperious voice called to me, 'stop.' The voice was quite close; my abstraction and the slouched hat had prevented me from looking round. I raised my eyes and saw a wild man, armed with a great knotted club, approaching me. His figure was almost gigantic--at least my first surprise made me think so--and the colour of his skin was a yellow mulatto sort of black, with which the whiteness of a squinting eye stood in terrible contrast. Instead of a girdle he had a thick rope wound twice round a green woollen coat, in which were stuck a broad knife and a pistol. The cry was repeated, and a powerful arm held me fast. The sound of a man had frightened me, but the aspect of a villain gave me new heart. In my present situation, I had cause to tremble before every honest man, but none to tremble before a robber.

"'Who is there?' said the apparition.

"'One like yourself,' was my answer, 'if you really correspond to your appearance.'

"'That is not the way out? What are you looking for here?'

"'What is that to you?' retorted I, insolently.

"The man considered me twice from top to toe. It seemed as though he wished to compare my figure with his own, and my answer with my figure. 'You speak as rudely as a beggar,' he said at last.

"'Perhaps so. I was a beggar yesterday.'

"The man laughed. 'One could swear you did not want to pass for any thing better now.'

"'For something worse then.--I wished to proceed.

"'Softly friend, why in such a hurry? What time have you to lose?'

"I reflected for a moment. How the words came to my tongue I do not know. 'Life is short,' said I, slowly, 'and hell lasts for ever!'

"He stared at me. 'May I be d--d,' he said at last, 'if thou hast not brushed close by a gallows.'

"'Very possibly. So good bye for the present, comrade!'

"'Topp, comrade!' he cried, as he drew a tin flask out of his hunting-pouch, took a good draught from it, and handed it to me. Flight and anguish had exhausted my energies, and nothing had passed my lips the whole day. I had already feared that I should have sunk from exhaustion in this wood, where no refreshment was to be expected for three miles round. Judge how joyfully I responded to this health. With the animating draught new strength flowed into my bones, new courage into my heart, and I felt hope and the love of life. I began to think that perhaps I was not quite wretched; so much at least was the welcome beverage all to do. Yes, I must even confess that my situation approached that of happiness, for at last, after a thousand vain hopes, I had found a creature who seemed similar to myself. In the condition to which I had fallen I should have drunk good fellowship with the spirit of evil himself for the sake of having a confidant.

"The man had stretched himself out on the grass. I did the same.

"Your liquor has done me good,' said I. 'We must become acquainted.'

"He struck fire to light his pipe.

"Have you carried on this business long?"

"He looked hard at me. 'What do you mean by that?'"

"Has this often been stained with blood?" I drew the knife from his girdle.

"Who are you?" said he, in a fearful tone, and he laid down his pipe.

"A murderer like you, but only a beginner.'

"The man stared at me, and took up his pipe again. 'Do you reside here?' he said at last.

"Three miles off. I am the host of the Sun at ----, of whom perhaps you have heard.'

"The man sprung up as if possessed. 'The poacher Wolf,' he cried hastily.

"The same!"

"Welcome, comrade, welcome!" cried he, and shook my hands violently. 'That is brave, that I have you at last, mine host of the Sun. Day and night have I been thinking how to get you. I know you well. I know all. I have reckoned on you long ago.'

"Reckoned on me! For what?"

"The whole country round is full of you. You have enemies! A bailiff has oppressed you, Wolf! They have ruined you, and the wrongs you have suffered cry aloud to Heaven.'

"The man became warm. 'Because you have shot a few hogs, which the prince feeds in our fields they have dragged you about for years in the house of correction and the fortification, they have robbed you of your house and business and made you a beggar. Has it come to this, brother, that a man is worth no more than a hare? Are we not better than brutes of the field? And a fellow like you could suffer that?'"

"Could I alter it?"

"That we shall see. But tell me, whence do you come, and what do you purpose?"

"I began to tell him all my history. The man, without waiting till I had finished it, sprung up with joyous impatience, and drew me after him. 'Come, brother host of the Sun,' said he, 'now you are ripe, now I have you when I wanted you. I shall get honour by you. Follow me.'

"Where will you take me?"

"Do not stop to ask, but follow.' He then forcibly dragged me along.

"We had proceeded about a quarter of a mile. The wood became more and more steep, pathless and wild, neither of us uttered a word, until at last my leader's whistle startled me out of my meditations. I raised my eyes, we were standing on the edge of a steep rock, which was bowed down into a deep cleft. A second whistle answered from the interior hollow of the rock, and a ladder slowly rose from the abyss, as of its own accord. My conductor descended first, and told me to wait till he returned. 'I must first chain up my dog,' said he, 'you are strange here, and the beast would tear you to pieces.'

"I now stood alone before the abyss, and well I knew that I was alone. The improvidence of my leader did not escape my attention. It only required a hearty resolution to draw up the ladder; then I should have been free, and my flight would have been secure. I confess that I perceived that. I looked down into the abyss, which was now to receive me, and it dimly reminded me of the descent into hell, from which there is no redemption. I began to shudder at the career I was about to enter; only a rapid flight could save me. I resolved on this flight; I had already stretched my hand towards the ladder, but at once there was a thunder in my ears, a noise about me like the scornful laughter of hell, and it seemed to say: 'What can a murderer risk?' My arm fell back as if paralysed. I had reckoned rightly, the time for repentance had passed, the murder I had committed lay towering up behind me like a rock, and cut off my retreat for ever. At the same time my conductor re-appeared and told me I might come. There was now no longer any choice. I clambered down.

"We had proceeded some steps, beneath the wall of the rock, when the ground became wider and some huts were visible. In the midst of these was a round grass plat, on which about eighteen or twenty persons were lying round

a charcoal fire. 'Here comrades,' said my conductor, placing me in the centre of the circle. 'Our host of the Sun! Bid him welcome!'

"The host of the Sun!" cried all at once, and they all--men and women--rose and pressed round me. Shall I confess it. The joy was hearty and unaffected, confidence, nay, esteem appeared in every face; one pressed my hand, another familiarly shook me by my coat--the whole scene resembled that at the re-appearance of an old and valued friend. My arrival had interrupted the feast, which they had just begun. They now continued it, and invited me to pledge the welcome. Game of all kinds formed the meal, and the wine flask passed without flagging from hand to hand. Good cheer and unity seemed to animate the entire band, and the contest among them all was who should show the most extravagant delight at my arrival.

"They had seated me between two women, which was the post of honour at the table. I expected to find the refuse of their sex, but how great was my astonishment when I discovered among this infamous troop the most beautiful female forms that my eyes had ever beheld. Margaret, the eldest and most beautiful of the two, was called Miss, and could scarcely have been five-and-twenty. Her words were very bold, and her gestures still more so. Maria, the younger, was married, but she had fled from a husband, who had ill-used her. She was more elegant, but pale and delicate-looking, and less striking to the eye than her fiery neighbour. Both women strove hard to excite my passion. The beautiful Margaret endeavoured to overcome my bashfulness by loose jests, but the whole woman was repulsive to me, and the bashful Maria had gained my heart for ever.

"You see, brother host of the Sun,' began the man who had brought me, 'You see how we live together, and every day is like this one. Is it not true, comrades?'

"Every day like this!' repeated the whole band.

"If, then, you can resolve to find pleasure in our mode of life, strike a bargain and be our leader. I have held that post hitherto, but I will give it up to you. Are you content, comrades.'

"A joyful 'Yes!' was responded from every throat.

"My head was on fire, my brain was turned, and my blood was boiling with wine and passion. The world had cast me out as infected with the plague, but here I found a brotherly reception, honour, and comfort. Whatever choice I made death awaited me, but here I could at least

sell my life for a higher price. Sensuality was my most violent tendency; hitherto the other sex had only shown me contempt, but here I should find favour and boundless enjoyment. My determination cost me but little. 'I stay with you, comrades,' cried I, loudly and resolutely, and walked into the midst of the band. 'I remain with you,' I cried again, 'if you will give me my beautiful neighbour.' All agreed to grant my request, and I was the declared possessor of a harlot, and owner of a band of robbers."

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The following part of the history I entirely pass over; the merely detestable has nothing instructive for the reader. An unfortunate man who had sunk to this depth, would at last necessarily allow himself all that raises the indignation of mankind. He did not, however, commit another murder, as he himself confessed upon the rack.

The fame of this man shortly spread over the entire province. The high roads became unsafe; the citizens were rendered uneasy by the burglaries committed in the night; the name of the "Host of the Sun" became the terror of the country-people, justice searched for him, and a reward was offered for his head. He was fortunate enough to frustrate all attempts made against his liberty, and cunning enough to turn to the account of his safety the superstition of the wonder-loving peasantry. His comrades had to spread the report that he had made a compact with the devil, and understood witchcraft. The district in which he played his part, belonged less at that time than now to the enlightened part of Germany; the reports were believed, and his person was secure. No one showed a desire to attack the dangerous fellow who had the devil at his service.

He had already for a year followed his melancholy profession, when it began to grow insupportable. The band at whose head he stood, did not fulfil his brilliant expectations. A seductive exterior had dazzled him amid the fumes of the wine; now he saw with horror how frightfully he had been deceived. Hunger and want took the place of that superfluity by which his senses had been lulled; very often he had to risk his life on a meal, which was scarcely sufficient to keep him from starvation. The phantom of that brotherly concord vanished; envy, suspicion, and jealousy raged among this abandoned crew. Justice had offered a reward to any one who should deliver him up alive, with a solemn pardon if he were an accomplice--a powerful temptation for the dregs of the earth! The unhappy man knew his peril. The honesty of those who betrayed God and man, was a bad security for his life. From this moment sleep was gone; a deadly and

eternal anguish preyed on his repose; the hideous spectre of suspicion rattled behind him, wherever he fled, tortured him when he was awake, lay down by him when he went to sleep, and scared him with horrible visions. His conscience, which had been for some time dumb, now recovered its speech, and the adder of remorse, which had slept, now awoke amid the general storm of his bosom. All his hatred was now diverted from mankind, and turned its frightful edge against himself. He now forgave all nature, and found none but himself to execrate.

Vice had completed its instruction of this unhappy being; his naturally good sense at last overcame the mournful delusion. Now he felt how low he had fallen, calm melancholy took the place of grinding despair. With tears he wished the past were recalled, for now he felt certain that he could go through it differently. He began to hope that he might be allowed to become honest, because he felt that he could be so. At the highest point of his depravity, he was perhaps nearer to goodness than before his first fault.

About the same time, the seven years' war had broken out, and recruiting was going on with vigour. This circumstance inspired the unhappy man with hope, and he wrote a letter to his sovereign, an extract of which I insert:

"If your princely favour feels no repugnance towards descending to me, if criminals of my class are not beyond the sphere of your mercy, grant me a hearing, I beg of your most serene highness! I am a murderer and a robber; the law condemns me to death, the tribunals are in search of me, and I offer myself to serve as a volunteer. But at the same time, I bring a singular request before your throne. I detest my life, and do not fear death, but it is terrible for me to die without having lived. I would live to make reparation for a portion of the past, I would live to make some atonement to the state, which I have offended. My execution will be an example to the world, but no compensation for my deeds. I detest vice, and have a burning desire for integrity and virtue. I have shown the talents for becoming formidable to my country--I hope I have some left to be of service to it.

"I know that I am asking something which is unprecedented. My life is forfeit, and it is not for me to negotiate with justice. But I do not appear in bonds and fetters before you--I am still free--and fear on my part has the smallest share in my request.

"It is for mercy that I ask. If I had a claim to justice, I should no longer venture to assert it. But of one thing I may remind my judge. The epoch of my crimes begins with the judgment that for ever deprived me of honour. Had fairness been less denied me on that occasion, I should not now, perhaps, have stood in need of mercy.

"Show mercy, my prince, instead of justice. If it is in your princely power to move the law in my favour, then grant me my life. From henceforth it shall be devoted to your service. If you can do so, let me learn your gracious will from the public journals, and I will appear in the metropolis on your word as a prince. If you have resolved otherwise, let justice do her part, I must do mine."

This petition remained unanswered, and so did a second, and a third, in which the applicant asked for a trooper's place in the prince's service. His hopes for a pardon were utterly extinguished, so he resolved to quit the country, and to die as a brave soldier in the service of the King of Prussia.

He succeeded in escaping from his land, and began his journey. The road led him through a little provincial town, where he wished to pass the night. A short time before, mandates of exceeding strictness had been published throughout the country, requiring a severe examination of travellers, because the sovereign, a prince of the empire, had taken part in the war. The toll-collector (Thorschreiber) of this little town had just received a mandate, and he was sitting on a bench before the toll-bar, when the "Host of the Sun" came up. The appearance of this man had in it something comical, and at the same time wild and terrible. The lean pony which he rode, and the grotesque choice of his attire, in which his taste had probably been less consulted than the chronology of his thefts, contrasted singularly enough with a face over which so many raging passions were spread, like mangled corpses on a field of battle. The collector was struck by the sight of this strange wanderer. He had grown grey at the toll-bar, and by attending to his office for forty years had become an infallible physiognomist of all the vagabonds about. The falcon-glance of this investigator did not miss its man on this occasion. He at once fastened the town-gate, and asked the rider for his passport while he secured his bridle. Wolf was prepared for chances of this kind, and actually had with him a passport, which he had taken shortly before while plundering a merchant. This single voucher, however, did not suffice to counteract the observation of forty years, and to move the oracle of the toll-bar to a recantation. He trusted his eyes more than the paper, and Wolf was obliged to follow him to the office of the bailiff.



The superior of the office examined the passport and declared it correct. He was an ardent lover of news, and it was his delight to chatter over the newspaper by his bottle. The passport told him that the bearer had come straight from those foreign countries, where the theatre of the war was situated. He hoped to get private intelligence from the stranger, and sent back a secretary with the passport to invite him to partake of a bottle of wine.

In the meanwhile the "Host of the Sun" was standing in front of the office, and the whimsical spectacle had assembled the rabble of the town in throngs. The people whispered into one another's ears, pointed at the horse and rider, till at last the insolence of the mob increased to a loud tumult. The horse, at which every one pointed, was unluckily a stolen one, and Wolf fancied that it had been described in placards and was recognised. The unexpected hospitality of the superior confirmed his suspicion. He now considered it certain that the falsity of his passport was discovered, and that the invitation was only a snare to catch him alive and without resistance. His bad conscience besotted him, so he clapped spurs to his horse and rode off without giving a reply.

This sudden flight was the signal for an uproar.

"A thief!" cried all; and off they flew after him. To the rider it was a matter of life and death; he had already the start, his followers panted breathlessly, and he seemed to be on the point of escape. But a heavy hand pressed invisibly towards him, the watch of his destiny had run down, the inexorable Nemesis detained her debtor. The street to which he trusted had no outlet, and he was forced to turn back towards his persecutors.

The noise of this event had in the meanwhile set the whole town in an uproar; throng pressed on throng, all the streets were lined, and a host of enemies were marching towards him. He showed a pistol, the mob receded, and he would have made a way through the crowd by force. "A shot from this," said he, "for the mad fool who detains me." A general pause was dictated by fear, when at last, a bold journeyman blacksmith darted on his arm from behind, caught the finger with which the insane man was about to fire, and forced it out of joint. The pistol fell, the disarmed man was pulled from his horse, and dragged to the office in triumph.

"Who are you?" asked the judge in a somewhat brutal tone.

"A man who is resolved to answer no question until it is put more courteously."

"Who are you?"

"That which I represented myself to be. I have travelled all through Germany, and never found impudence at home, anywhere but here."

"Your speedy flight renders you very suspicious. Why did you fly?"

"Because I was tired of being the laughing-stock of your rabble."

"You threatened to fire."

"My pistol was not loaded."

The weapon was examined, and, true enough, it contained no bullet.

"Why did you secretly carry arms?"

"Because I have with me articles of value, and because I have been warned against a certain 'Host of the Sun,' who is said to be roving about these parts."

"Your replies argue much for your audacity, but little for the goodness of your cause. I will give you till to-morrow to discover the truth to me."

"I shall abide by what I have already said."

"Let him be conducted to the tower."

"To the tower? I hope, Herr Superior, that there is still justice in this country. I shall require satisfaction."

"I will give it you as soon as you are acquitted."

The next morning the superior reflected that the stranger might be innocent after all; a dictatorial address could effect nothing with his obstinacy, and it might, perhaps, be better to treat him with respect and moderation. He collected the jury of the place, and had the prisoner brought forward.

"Forgive me for the first outbreak, sir, if I accosted you somewhat hardly yesterday."

"Very readily, if you treat me thus."

"Our laws are severe, and your affair made a noise. I cannot release you without committing a breach of duty. Appearance is against you, and I wish you would say something, by which it might be refuted."

"What, if I know nothing?"

"Then I must lay the case before the government, and you will, in the meanwhile, remain closely confined."

"And then?"

"Then you run the risk of being flogged over the border as a vagrant, or, if mercy is shown, of being placed among the recruits."

He was silent for some minutes, and appeared to be undergoing a severe contest, then he suddenly turned to the judge.

"Can I be alone with you for a quarter of an hour?"

The jury cast ambiguous glances at one another, but withdrew at a commanding sign from their head.

"Now, what do you want?"

"Your demeanour of yesterday, Herr Superior, would never have brought me to a confession, for I set force at defiance. The moderation with which you have treated me to-day has given me confidence and respect for you. I think that you are an honourable man."

"What have you to say to me?"

"I see that you are an honourable man; I have long wished for a man like you. Give me, I pray, your right hand."

"To what end?"

"That head is gray and reverend. You have been long in the world--have felt many sorrows--is it not so? And have become more humane."

"Sir, to what does this tend?"

"You are now distant by only one step from eternity--soon, soon will you need mercy from God. You will not deny it to man. Do you suspect nothing? With whom do you suppose you are speaking?"

"What do you mean? You terrify me."

"If you do not already suspect--write to your prince how you found me, and that I myself of my free choice was my own betrayer--that God will be merciful unto him as he now shows mercy unto me. Entreat for me, old man, and then let a tear fall on your report: I am--the 'Host of the Sun.'"