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**CHRISTIAN WOLF,  
A TRUE STORY  
(1818)**

TRANSCRIPTION BY  
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(Pages 679-689)

CHRISTIAN WOLF,

*A True Story.—From the German.*

THE arts of the surgeon and the physician derive their greatest improvements and discoveries from the beds of the sick and the dying. Physiologists draw their purest lights from the hospital and the madhouse. It becomes the psychologist [sic], the moralist, the legislator, to follow the example, and to study with like zeal dungeons and executions, above all courts of justice the dissecting rooms of guilt.

In the whole history of mankind, there is no chapter more abounding in instruction, both for the heart and the intellect, than that which contains the annals of their transgressions. In every great offence some great power is set in motion; and that machinery which escapes observation in the dim light of ordinary transactions, when its operations are commanded by some stronger passion, gains from their influence the distinctness of colossal magnitude. The delicate observer, who understands the mechanism of our nature, and knows how far we may venture to reason by analogy from one man to another—from great guilt to small—may learn much from contemplating these terrible displays.

By those who study the hearts of men, at least as many points of likeness as of contrast will be discovered. The same inclination or passion may display itself in a thousand different forms and fashions, produce a thousand apparently irreconcilable phenomena, be found mixed up in the texture of a thousand characters, apparently of the most opposite conformation. Two men may, both in action and character, be essentially kindred to each other, and yet neither of them for a moment suspect the resemblance. Should men, like other departments of the kingdom of nature, be at any time so fortunate as to find a Linnaeus<sup>1</sup>, one who should classify them according to tendencies and inclinations, how would individuals stare at the result of his labours? how<sup>i</sup>, for example, should we be astonished to find some quiet paltry shopkeeper arranged under the same head with a Borgia, just as we find the edible and the poisonous heads of Fungus classed together in the manuals of Botany?

Nothing can be more useless, more absurd, than the manner in which history is commonly written. Between the strong and excited passions of the men of whom we read, and the calm meditative state of mind in which we read of them, there exists little sympathy. The gulf between the historical subject and the reader is so wide, that things which ought to excite in our breasts emotions of a very different character, are passed by with a far-off shudder of unconcern. We shake the head coldly when the heart (680) should be alive and trembling. We contemplate the unhappy being who, in the moment of conceiving, planning, executing, expiating his guilt, was still a man like ourselves, as if he were some creature whose blood flowed not with the same pulses, whose passions obeyed not the same law with ours. We are little interested in his fortunes, for all sympathy with the fate of our neighbour arises from some remote

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Linnaeus is famous for his work in Taxonomy, the science of identifying, naming and classifying organisms in the 1750s <https://www.linnean.org/education-resources/who-was-linnaeus>.

Note that all non-author footnotes are signaled with numbers.

belief in the possibility of its becoming one day our own; and we are very far, in instances such as these, from desiring to claim any such connexion. It is thus that the instruction is lost, and that what might have been a school of wisdom becomes merely a pastime for our curiosity.

We are more interested in discovering how a man came to will and conceive a crime, than how he perpetrated it. His thoughts concern us more than his deeds, and the sources of the former much more than the consequences of the latter. Men have scrutinized the depths of Vesuvius, in order to learn the cause of its burning: why is it that moral attract less attention than physical phenomena? why is it that we are contented to observe nothing in the human volcano but its eruption?

How many a maiden might have preserved her innocent pride, had she learned to view with somewhat less of horror and of hatred her fallen sisters, and to regard their experience as something that might be useful to herself. How many a careless man might save himself from ruin, would he condescend to hear and study the history of the prodigal, whom folly has already made a beggar! If from contemplating the slow progress of vice, we derive no other lesson, we must at least learn to be less confident in ourselves, and less intolerant towards others.

Whether the offender, of whom I am about to speak, had lost all claim to our sympathy, I shall leave my reader to decide for himself. What we think of him can give himself no trouble; his blood has already flowed upon the scaffold.

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Christian Wolf was the son of an innkeeper at Bielsdorf who, after the death of his father, continued till his 20th year to assist his mother in the management of the house. The inn was a poor one, and Wolf had many idle hours. Even before he left school he was regarded as an idle loose lad; the girls complained of his rudeness, and the boys, when detected in any mischief, were sure to give up him as the ringleader. Nature had neglected his person. His figure was small and unpromising; his hair was of a coarse greasy black; his nose was flat; and his upper lip, originally too thick, and twisted aside by a kick from a horse, was such as to disgust the women, and furnish a perpetual subject of jesting to the men. The contempt showered upon his person was the first thing which wounded his pride, and turned a portion of his blood to gall.

He was resolved to gain what was every where denied him; his passions were strong enough; and he soon persuaded himself that he was in love. The girl he selected treated him coldly, and he had reason to fear that his rivals were happier than himself. Yet the maiden was poor; and what was refused to his vows might perhaps be granted to his gifts; but he was himself needy, and his vanity soon threw away the little he gained from his share in the profits of the Sun. Too idle and too ignorant to think of supporting his extravagance by speculation; too proud to descend from *Mine Host* into a plain peasant, he saw only one way to escape from his difficulties—a way to which thousands before and after him have had recourse—theft. Bielsdorf is, as you know, situated on the edge of the forest; Wolf commenced deer-stealer and poured the gains of his boldness into the lap of his mistress.

Among Hannah's lovers was one of the forester's men, Robert Horn. This man soon observed the advantage which Wolf had gained over her, by means of his presents, and set himself to detect the sources of so much liberality. He began to frequent the Sun; he drank there early and late; and sharpened as his eyes were both by jealousy and poverty, it was not long before he discovered whence all the money came. Not many months before this time a severe edict had been published against all trespassers on the forest laws. Horn was indefatigable in watching the secret motions of his rival, and at last he was so fortunate as to detect him in the very fact. Wolf was tried, and found guilty; and the (681) fine which he paid in order to avoid the statutory punishment amounted to the sum-total of his property.

Horn triumphed. His rival was driven from the field, for Hannah had no notion of a beggar for a lover. Wolf well new his enemy, and he knew that his enemy was the happy possessor of his Hannah. Pride, jealousy, rage, were all in arms within him; hunger set the wide world before him, but passion and revenge held him fast at Bielsdorf. A second time he became a deer-stealer, and a second time, by the redoubled vigilance of Robert Horn, was he detected in the trespass. This time he experienced the full severity of the law; he had no money to pay a fine, and was sent straightway to the house of chastisement.

The year of punishment drew near its close, and found his passion increased by absence, his confidence buoyant under all the pressure of his calamities. The moment his freedom was given to him, he hastened to Bielsdorf, to throw himself at the feet of Hannah. He appears, and is avoided by every one. The force of necessity at last humbles his pride, and overcomes his delicacy. He begs from the wealthy of the place; he offers himself as a day-labourer to the farmers, but they despise his slim figure, and do not stop for a moment to compare him with his sturdier competitors. He makes a last attempt. One situation is yet vacant—the last of honest occupations. He offers himself as herdsman of the swine upon the town's common; but even here he is rejected; no man will trust any thing to the jail-bird. Meeting with contempt from every eye, chased with scorn from one door to another, he becomes yet the third time a deer-stealer, and for the third time his unhappy star places him in the power of his enemy.

This double backsliding goes against him at the judgement-seat; for every judge can look into the book of the law, but few into the soul of the culprit. The forest edict requires an exemplary punishment, and Wolf is condemned to be branded on the back with the mark of the gallows, and to three years hard labour in the fortress.

This period also went by, and he once more dropt his chains; but he was no longer the same man that entered the fortress. Here began a new epoch in the life of Wolf. You shall guess the state of his mind from his own words to his Confessor.

"I went into the fortress," said he, "an offender, but I came out of it a villain. I had still had something in the world that was dear to me, and my pride had not totally sunk under my shame. But here I was thrown into the company of three and twenty

convicts; of these, two were murderers\*, the rest were all notorious thieves and vagabonds. They jeered at me if I spake [sic] of God; they taught me to utter blasphemies against the Redeemer. They sung [sic] songs whose atrocity at first horrified me, but which I, a shamefaced fool, soon learned to echo. No day passed over, wherein I did not hear the recital of some profligate life, the triumphant history of some rascal, the concoction of some audacious villainy. At first I avoided as much as I could these men, and their discourses. But my labour was hard and tyrannical, and in my hours of repose I could not bear to be left alone, without one face to look upon. The jailors had refused me the company of my dog, so I needed that of men, and for this I was obliged to pay by the sacrifice of whatever good there remained within me. By degrees I grew accustomed to every thing; and in the last quarter of my confinement I surpassed even my teachers.

“From this time I thirsted after freedom, after revenge, with a burning thirst. All men had injured me, for all were better and happier than I. I gnashed my fetters with my teeth, when the glorious sun rose up above the battlements of my prison, for a wide prospect doubles the hell of duration. The free wind that whistled through the loop-holes of my turret, and the swallow that poised itself upon the grating of my window, seemed to be mocking me with the view of their liberty; and that rendered my misery more bitter. It was then that I vowed eternal glowing hatred to (682) every thing that bears the image of man—and I have kept my vow.

“My first thought, after I was set at liberty, was once more my native town. I had no hope of happiness there, but I had the dear hope of revenge. My heart beat quick and high against my bosom, when I beheld, afar off, the spire arising from out the trees. It was no longer that innocent hearty expectation which preceded my first return. The recollection of all the misery, of all the persecution I had experienced there, aroused my faculties from a terrible dead slumber of sullenness, set all my wounds a-bleeding, every nerve a-jarring within me. I redoubled my pace—I longed to startle my enemies by the horror of my aspect—I thirsted after new contempts as much as I had ever shuddered at the old.

“The clocks were striking the hour of vespers as I reached the market-place. The crowd was rushing to the church-door. I was immediately recognized; every man that knew me shrunk from meeting me. Of old I had loved the little children, and even now, seeking in their innocence a refuge from the scorn of others, I threw a small piece of money to the first I saw. The boy stared at me for a moment, and then dashed the coin at my face. Had my blood boiled less furiously, I might have recollected that I still wore my prison beard, and that that was enough to account for the terror of the infant. But my bad heart had blinded my reason, and tears, tears such as I had never wept, leaped down my cheeks.

“‘The child,’ said I to myself, half aloud, ‘knows not who I am, nor whence I came, and yet he avoids me like a beast of prey. Am I then marked upon the forehead like Cain, or have I ceased to be like a man, since all men spurn me?’ The aversion of

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\* In some parts of Germany no man can suffer the last severity of the law, unless he confess his guilt. The clearest evidence is not received as an equivalent. Even murderers have right to this indulgence, if indeed (considering what they suffer in lieu of immediate death) indulgence it may be called.

the child tortured me more than all my three years slavery, and I could not accuse him of hating me.

“I sat down in a wood-yard over against the church; what my wishes were I know not; but I remember it as wormwood to my spirit, that none of my old acquaintances should have vouchsafed me a greeting—no, not one. When the yard was locked up, I unwillingly departed to seek a lodging; in turning the corner of a street, I ran against my Hannah: ‘Mine host of the Sun,’ cried she, and opened her arms as if to embrace me—‘You here again, my dear Wolf, God be thanked for your return!’ Hunger and wretchedness were expressed in her scanty raiment; a shameful disease had marred her countenance; her whole appearance told me what a wretched creature she had become. I saw two or three dragoons laughing at her from a window, and turned my back, with a laugh louder than theirs, upon the soldiers’ trull. It did me good to find that there was something yet lower in the scale of life than myself. I had never loved her.

“My mother was dead. My small house had been sold to pay my creditors. I asked nothing more. I drew near to no man. All the world fled from me like a pestilence, but I had at last forgotten shame. Formerly I hated the sight of men, because their contempt was unsufferable on me. Now I threw myself in the way, and found a savage delight in scattering horror around me. I had nothing more to lose, why then should I conceal myself? Men expected no good from me, why should they have any? I was made to bear the punishment of sins I had never committed. My infamy was a capital, the interest of which was not easy to be exhausted [sic].

“The whole earth was before me; in some remote province I might perhaps have sustained the character of an honest man, but I had lost the desire of being, nay, even of seeming such. Contempt and shame had taken from me even this last relick [sic] of myself,—my resource, now that I had no honour, was to learn to do without it. Had my vanity and pride survived my infamy, I must have died by my own hand.

“What I was to do, I myself knew not. I was determined, however, to do evil; of so much I have some dark recollection. I was resolved to see the worst of my destiny. The laws, said I to myself, are benefits to the world, it is fit that I should offend them; formerly I had sinned from levity and necessity, but I now sinned from free choice, and for my pleasure.

“My first step was to the woods. The chase had by degrees become to me as a passion; I thirsted, like a lover, after thick brakes and headlong leaps, and the mad delight of rushing (683) along the bare earth beneath the pines. Besides, I must live. But these were not all. I hated the prince who had published the forest edict, and I believed, that in injuring him, I should only exercise my natural right of retaliation. The chance of being taken no longer troubled me, for now I had a bullet for my discoverer, and I well knew the certainty of my aim. I slew every animal that came near me, the greater part of them rotted where they died; for I neither had the power, nor the wish, to sell more than a few of them beyond the barriers. Myself lived wretchedly; except on powder and shot, I expended nothing. My devastations were dreadful, but no suspicion pursued me. My appearance was too poor to excite any, and my name had long since been forgotten.

“This life continued for several months. —One morning, according to my custom, I had pursued a stag for many miles through the wood. For two hours I had in vain exerted every nerve, and at last I had begun to despair of my booty, when, all at once, I perceived the stately animal exactly at the proper distance for my gun,—my finger was already on the trigger, when, of a sudden, my eye was caught with the appearance of a hat, lying a few paces before me on the ground. I looked more closely, and perceived the huntsman, Robert Horn, lurking behind a massy oak, and taking deliberate aim at the very stag I had been pursuing—at the sight a deadly coldness crept through my limbs. Here was the man I hated above all living things; here he was, and within reach of my bullet. At this moment, it seemed to me as if the whole world were at the muzzle [sic] of my piece, as if the wrath and hatred of a thousand lives were all quivering in the finger that should give the murderous pressure. A dark fearful unseen hand was upon me; the finger of my destiny pointed irrevocably to the black moment. My arm shook as if with an ague, while I lifted my gun—my teeth chattered—my breath stood motionless in my lungs. For a minute the barrel hung uncertain between the man and the stag—a minute—and another—and yet one more. Conscience and revenge struggled fiercely within me, but the demon triumphed, and the huntsman fell dead upon the ground.

“My courage fell with him—*Murderer!*—I stammered the word slowly. The wood was silent as a church-yard, distinctly did I hear it—*Murderer!* —As I drew near, the man yielded up his spirit. Long stood I speechless by the corpse; at last I forced a wild laugh, and cried, ‘no more tales from the wood now, my friend!’ I drew him into the thicket with his face upwards! The eyes stood stiff, and staring upon me. I was serious enough, and silent too. The feeling of solitude began to press grievously upon my soul.

“Up till this time I had been accustomed to rail at the over severity of my destiny; now I had done something which was not yet punished. An hour before, no man could have persuaded me that there existed a being more wretched than myself. Now I began to envy myself for what even then I had been.

“The ideas of God’s justice never came into my mind; but I remember a bewildered vision of ropes, and swords, and the dying agonies of a child-murderess, which I had witnessed when a boy. A certain dim and fearful idea lay upon my thoughts that my life was forfeit. I cannot recollect every thing, I wished that Horn were yet alive. I forced myself to call up all the evil the dead man had done when in life, but my memory was sadly gone. Scarcely could I recollect one of all those thousand circumstances, which a quarter of an hour before had been suffered to blow my wrath into phrenzy. Could not conceive how or why I had become a murderer.

“I was still standing beside the corpse, —I might have stood there forever, —when I heard the crack of a whip, and the creaking of a fruit waggon passing through the wood. The spot where I had done the deed was scarcely a hundred yards from the great path. I must look to my safety.

“I bounded like a wild deer into the depths of the wood; but while I was in my race, it struck me that the deceased used to have a watch. In order to pass the barriers, I had need of money, and yet scarcely could I muster up courage to approach

the place of blood. Then I thought for a moment of the devil, and, I believe, confusedly, of the omnipresence of God. I called up all my boldness, and strode towards the spot, resolved to dare earth (684) and hell to the combat. I found what I had expected, and a dollar or two besides, in a green silk purse. At first I took all, but a sudden thought seized me. —It was neither that I feared, nor that I was ashamed to add another crime to murder. Nevertheless, so it was, I threw back the watch and half the silver. I wished to consider myself as the personal enemy, not as the robber of the slain.

“Again I rushed towards the depths of the forest. I knew that the wood extended for four German miles\* northwards, and there bordered upon the frontier. Till the sun was high in heaven I ran on breathless. The swiftness of my flight had weakened the force of my conscience, but the moment I laid myself down upon the grass, it awoke in all its vigour. A thousand dismal forms floated before my eyes; a thousand knives of despair and agony were in my breast. Between a life of restless fear, and a violent death, the alternative was fearful, but choose I must. I had not the heart to leave the world by self-murder, yet scarcely could I bear the idea of remaining in it. Hesitating between the certain miseries of life, and the untried terrors of eternity, alike unwilling to live and to die, the sixth hour of my flight passed over my head — an hour full of wretchedness, such as no man can utter, such as God himself in mercy will spare to me—even to me, upon the scaffold.

“Again I started on my feet. I drew my hat over my eyes, as if not being able to look lifeless nature in the face, and was rushing instinctively along the line of a small foot-path, which drew me into the very heart of the wilderness, when a rough stern voice immediately in front of me cried, ‘Halt!’ The voice was close to me, for I had forgotten myself, and had never looked a yard before me during the whole race. I lifted my eyes, and saw a tall savage-looking man advancing towards me, with a ponderous club in his hand. His figure was of gigantic size, so at least I thought, on my first alarm; his skin was of a dark mulatto yellow, in which the white of his fierce eyes stood fearfully prominent. Instead of a girdle, he had a piece of sail-cloth twisted over his green woollen coat, and in it I saw a broad bare butcher’s knife, and a pistol. The summons was repeated, and a strong arm held me fast. The sound of a human voice had terrified me, —but the sight of an evil-doer gave me heart again. In my condition, I had reason to fear a good man, but none at all to tremble before a ruffian.

“‘Whom have we here?’ said the apparition.

“‘Such another as yourself,’ was my answer—‘that is, if your looks don’t belie you.’

“‘There is no passage this way. Whom seek ye here?’

“‘By what right do you ask?’ returned I boldly. The man considered me leisurely twice, from the feet up to the head. It seemed as if he were comparing my figure with his own, and my answer with my figure—

“‘You speak as stoutly as a beggar,’ said he at last.

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\* Nearly twenty, English measure.

“That may be—I was one yesterday.’

“The man smiled—‘One would swear,’ cried he, ‘you were not much better than one to-day.’

“Something worse, friend—I must on.’

“Softly, friend. What hurries you? Is your time so very precious?’

“I considered with myself for a moment. I know not how the words came to the tip of my tongue. ‘Life is short,’ said I at last, ‘and hell is eternal.’

“He looked steadily upon me. ‘May I be d—d’ said he, ‘if you have not rubbed shoulders with the gallows ere now.

“It may be so. Farewell, till we meet again comrade.’

“‘Stop comrade,’ shouted the man: He pulled a tin flask from his pouch, took a hearty pull of it, and handed it to me. My flight and my anguish had exhausted my strength, and all this day nothing had passed my lips. Already I was afraid I might faint in the wilderness, for there was no place of refreshment within many miles of me. Judge how gladly I accepted his offer. New strength rushed with the liquor into my limbs—with that, fresh courage into my heart, and hope and love of life. I began to believe that I might not be forever wretched, such power was in the welcome draught. There was something pleasant in finding myself with a creature of my own stamp. In the state in which I was, I (685) would have pledged a devil, that I might once more have a companion.

“The man stretched himself on the grass. I did the like. ‘Your drink has done me good,’ said I, ‘we must get better acquainted.’

“He struck his flint, and lighted his pipe. ‘Are you old in the trade,’ said I.

“He looked sternly at me, —‘What would you say, friend?’ ‘Has *that* often been bloody,’ said I, pointing to the knife in his girdle.

“‘Who art thou?’ cried he fiercely, and threw down his pipe. ‘A murderer, friend, like yourself—but only a beginner.’ He took up his pipe again.

“‘Your home is not hereabouts?’-said he, after a pause.

“‘Some three miles off,’ said I; ‘did you ever hear of the landlord of the Sun at Bielsdorf?’

“The man sprung up like one possessed—‘What! The poacher Wolf?’ cried he hastily.

“‘The same.’

“‘Welcome! Comrade, welcome!’ and give me a shake of thy hand; this is good, mine host of the Sun. Year and day have I sought for thee. I know thee well. I know all. I have long reckoned upon thee, Wolf.’

“‘Reckoned on me?—and wherefore?’

“‘The whole country is full of you, man; you have had enemies, Wolf; you have been hardly dealt with. You have been made a sacrifice. Your treatment has been shameful.’

“‘The man waxed warm—‘What! Because you shot a pair of boars or stags it may be, that the prince feeds here on our acorns; was that a reason for chasing you from house and hold, confining you three years in the castle, and making a beggar of you. Is it come to this, that a man is of less worth than a hare? Are we nothing better than the beasts of the field, brother? And can Wolf endure it? I can’t.’

“‘Who can alter these things?’

“‘Ha! That we shall presently see—but tell me, whence come you, and what are you about?’

“‘I told him my whole story. He would not hear me to an end, but leaped up, and dragged me along with him. ‘Come, mine host of the Sun,’ said he, ‘*now* you are ripe, *now* I have you. I shall look for honour from you, Wolf! —follow me.’

“‘Whither will you lead me?’

“‘Ask no questions. Follow.’ And he pulled me like a giant.

“‘We had advanced some quarter of a mile. The road was becoming every step more thick, wild, and impassable. Neither of us spoke a word. I was roused from my reverie by the whistle of my guide. I looked up, and perceived that we were standing on the edge of a rock, which hung over a deep dark ravine. A second whistle answered from the root of the precipice, and a ladder rose, as if of its own motion, from below. My guide stepped upon it, and desired me to await his return. ‘I must first tie up the hounds,’ said he; ‘you are a stranger here, and the beasts would tear you in pieces.’

“‘Then I was *alone* upon the rock, and I well knew that I was *alone*. The carelessness of my guide did not escape my attention. With a single touch of my hand I could pull up the ladder, and my flight was secured. I confess that I saw this—I began to shudder at the precipice below me, and to think of that depth from which there is no redemption. I resolved upon flight—I put my hand to the ladder, but then came there to my ear, as if with the laughter of devils, ‘What can a murderer do?’ and my arm dropt powerless by my side. My reckoning was complete. Murder lay like a rock behind me, and barred all retreat for ever. At this moment my guide re-appeared and bade me come down. I had no longer any choice—I obeyed him.

“‘A few yards from the foot of the precipice the ground widened a little, and some huts became visible. In the midst of these there was a little piece of smooth turf, and there about eighteen or twenty figures lay scattered around a coal-fire. ‘Here, comrades,’ cried my guide, leading me into the centre of the group; ‘here, get up and bid the landlord welcome.’

“‘Welcome, good landlord,’ cried all at once, and crowded around me, men and women. Shall I confess it? Their joy appeared hearty and honest: confidence and

respect was in every countenance; one took me by the hand, another by the cloak; — my reception was such as might have been expected by some old and valued friend. Our (686) arrival had interrupted their repast—we joined it, and I was compelled to pledge my new friends in a bumper. The meal consisted of game of all kinds; and the bottle, filled with good Rhenish<sup>2</sup>, was not allowed to rest for an instant. The company seemed to be full of affection towards each other, and of good-will towards me.

“They had made me to sit down between two women, and this seemed to be considered as a place of honour. I expected to find these the refuse of their sex, but how great was my astonishment, when I perceived, under their coarse garments, two of the most beautiful females I have ever seen. Margaret, the elder and handsomer of the two, was addressed by the name of Miss, and might be five-and-twenty. Her language was free, and her looks were still more eloquent. Mary, the younger, was married, but her husband had treated her cruelly and deserted her. Her features were perhaps prettier, but she was pale and thin, and less striking, on the whole, than her fiery neighbour. They both endeavoured to please me. Margaret was the beauty, but my heart was taken with the womanly gentle Mary.

“‘Brother Wolf,’ cried my guide, ‘you see how we live here—with us every day is alike—Is it not so, comrades?’

“‘Every day like the present,’ cried they all.

“‘If you like our way of life,’ continued the man, ‘strike in, be one of us—be our captain. I bear the dignity for the present, but I will yield it to Wolf. Say I right, comrades?’—A hearty ‘Yes, yes,’ was the answer.

“My brain was on fire, wine and passion had inflamed my blood. The world had thrown me out like a leper—here were brotherly welcome, good cheer, and *honour!* Whatever choice I might make, I knew death was before me; but here at least I might sell my life dearly. Women had till now spurned me,—the smiles of Mary were nectar to my soul. ‘I remain with you, comrades,’ cried I, loudly and firmly, stepping into the midst of the band—‘I remain with you, my good friends, provided you give me my pretty neighbour.’ —They all consented to gratify my wish, and I sat down contented, lord of a strumpet, and captain of a banditti.”

The following part of the history I shall entirely omit, for there is no instruction in that which is purely disgusting. The unhappy, sunk to this hopeless depth, was obliged to partake in all the routine of wickedness; but he was never guilty of a second murder; so at least he swore solemnly upon the scaffold.

The fame of this man spread, in a short time, through the whole province. The highways were unsafe—nocturnal robberies alarmed the citizens—the name of Christian Wolf became the terror of old and young—justice set every device at work to ensnare him—and a premium was set upon his head. Yet he was fortunate enough to escape every attempt against his person, and crafty enough to convert the superstition of the peasantry into an engine of defence. It was universally given out that Wolf was

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<sup>3</sup> A high-quality German wine from the Rheinhessen region <http://www.germany.travel/es/ciudades-turismo-cultural/comer-y-beber/vinos-alemanes/rheinhessen.html>

in league with the devil—that his whole band were wizards. The province is a remote and ignorant one, and no man was very willing to come to close quarters with the ally of the apostate.

For a full year did Wolf persist in this terrible trade, but at last it began to be intolerable to him. The men at whose head he had placed himself, were not what he had supposed. They had received him at first with an exterior of profusion, but he soon discovered that they had deceived him. Hunger and want appeared in the room of abundance; he was often obliged to venture his life for a booty, which, when won, was scarcely sufficient to support his existence for a single day. The veil of brotherly affection also passed away, and beneath it he found the lurking paltrinesses<sup>3</sup> of thieves and harpies. A large reward had been proclaimed for him that should deliver Wolf alive into the hands of justice—if the discoverer should be one of his own gang, a free pardon was promised in addition—a mighty search for the outcast of the earth! —Wolf was sensible of his danger. The honour of those who were at war with God and man seemed but an insufficient security to his life. From this time his sleep was agony; wherever he was the ghost of suspicion haunted him—pursued his steps—watched his pillow—disturbed his dreams. Long silenced conscience again raised her voice, and slumbering remorse began to awake and mingle her terrors in the universal (687) storm of his bosom. His whole hatred was turned from mankind, and concentrated upon his own head. He forgave all nature, and was inexorable only to himself.

This misery of guilt completed his education, and delivered at last his naturally excellent understanding from its shackles. He now felt how low he had fallen; sadness took the place of phrensy in his bosom. Cold tears and solitary sighs obliterated the past; for him it no more existed. He began to hope that he might yet dare to be a good man, for he felt within himself the awakening power of being such. It may be that Wolf, at this the moment of his greatest degradation, was nearer the right path than he had ever been since he first quitted it.

About this time the seven years' war broke out, and the German Princes were every where making great levies of troops. The unhappy Wolf shaped some slight hope to himself from these circumstances, and at last took courage to pen the following letter to his sovereign.

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“If it be not too much for princely compassion to descend to such as Christian Wolf, give him a hearing. I am a thief and a murderer—the laws condemn me to death—justice has set all her myrmidons in search of me—I beg that I may be permitted to deliver up myself. But I bring, at the same time, a strange petition to the throne. I hate my life, I fear not death, but I cannot bear to die without having lived. I would live, my prince, in order to atone, by my services, for my offences. My execution might be an example to the world, but not an equivalent for my deeds. I hate the

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<sup>3</sup> An unusual plural for paltriness = wretchedness.

wretchedness of guilt, I thirst after virtue. I have shewn<sup>4</sup> my power to do evil—permit me to shew my power to do good.

“I know that I make an unheard of request. My life is forfeit; it may seem absurd for me to state any pretensions to favour. But I appear not in chains and bonds before you—I am still free—and fear is the least among all the motives of my petition.

“It is to mercy that I have fled. I have no claim upon justice—if I had, I should disdain to bring it forward. Yet of one circumstance I might remind my judges—the period of my outrages commenced with that of my degradation. Had their sentence been less severe, perhaps I should have had no occasion to be a supplicant to-day.

“If you give me my life, it shall be dedicated to your service. A single word in the gazette shall bring me immediately to your feet. If otherwise you have determined—let justice do her part—I must do mine.” \* \*

“CHRISTIAN WOLF.”

This petition remained without an answer; so did a second and a third, in which Wolf begged to be permitted to serve as a hussar in the army of the prince. At last, losing all hope of a pardon, he resolved to fly from the country, and die a brave soldier in the service of King Frederick.

He gave his companions the slip, and took to his journey. The first day brought him to a small country town, where he resolved to spend the night.

The circumstances of the times, the commencing war, the recruiting, made the officers at every post doubly vigilant in observing travellers. The gate-keeper of the town had received a particular command to be attentive. The appearance of Wolf had something imposing about it, but, at the same time, swarthy, terrible, and savage. The meagre boney<sup>5</sup> horse he rode, and the grotesque and scanty arrangement of his apparel, formed a strange contrast with a countenance whereon a thousand fierce passions seemed to lie exhausted and congealed, like the dying and dead upon a field of battle. The gate-keeper started at the strange apparition. Forty years of experience had made the man, grown gray<sup>6</sup> in his office, as sharp-sighted as an eagle in detecting offenders. He immediately bolted his gate and demanded the passport of Wolf. The fugitive was however prepared for this accident; and he drew out, without hesitation, a pass which he had taken a few days before from a plundered merchant. Still this solitary evidence was not able entirely to satisfy the scruples of the practised officer. The gate-keeper trusted his own eyes rather than the paper, and Wolf was compelled to follow him to the town-house.

The chief magistrate of the place examined the pass, and declared it to be in every respect what it should be. It happened that this man was a great politician,—his chief pleasure in life consisted in conning<sup>7</sup> over a newspaper, with a bottle of wine

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<sup>5</sup> An archaic verb meaning ‘to show’ used along the text in all its different forms/conjugations  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/shew>

<sup>6</sup> ‘Bony’ meaning: extremely skinny horse.

<sup>7</sup> Referring to the colour grey which portrays the passage of time.

<sup>7</sup> To persuade by deception <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/conning>

before him. (688) The passport shewed forth that its bearer had come from the very centre of the seat of war. He hoped to draw some private intelligence from the stranger; and the clerk, who brought back the pass, requested Wolf to step in, and take a bottle of Mark-brunner<sup>8</sup> with his master.

Meantime the traveller had remained on horseback at the door of the town-house, and his singular appearance had collected about him half the rabble of the place. They looked at the horse and his rider by turns, —they laughed, —they whispered,—at last it had become a perfect tumult. Unfortunately the animal Wolf rode on was a stolen one, and he immediately began to fancy that it had been described in some of the prints. The unexpected invitation of the magistrate completed his confusion. He took it for granted that the falsity of his pass had been detected, and that the invitation was only a trick for getting hold of him alive. A bad conscience stupified his faculties he clapped spurs to his horse, and galloped off without making any answer to the clerk.

The sudden flight convinced all that had before suspected him. “A thief, a robber!” was the cry, and the whole mob were at his heels. Wolf rode for life and death, and he soon left his pursuers breathless behind. —His deliverance is near; but a heavy hand was upon him—the hour was come—unrelenting destiny was there.

The road he had taken led to no outlet, and Wolf was obliged to turn round upon his pursuers.

The alarm of this incident had, in the mean time, set the whole town into an uproar; every road was blockaded, and a whole host of enemies came forth to receive him. He draws out a pistol; the crowd yields; he begins to make a way for himself through their ranks.

“The first that lays a finger on me—dies,” shouted Wolf, holding out his pistol. Fear produced an universal pause. But a firm old soldier seized him from behind, and mastered the hand which held the weapon. He knocks the pistol from his grasp; the disarmed Wolf is instantly dragged from his horse, and borne in triumph back to the town-house.

“Who are you?” said the magistrate, in a stern and brutal tone.

“One who is resolved to answer no questions, unless they be more civilly put.”

“Who are you, sir?”

“What I said I was. I have travelled through all Germany, and never found oppression till now.”

“Your sudden flight excites suspicion against you. Why fled you?”

“Because I was weary of being mocked by your rabble.”

“You threatened to fire—?”

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<sup>8</sup> German wine.

“My pistol was not loaded.” They examined it and found no ball.

“Why do you carry such weapons?”

“Because I have property with me, and I have heard a great deal of one Wolf that haunts in the woods here.”

“Your answers prove your courage, but not your honesty, friend. I allow you till morning. Perhaps you will then speak the truth.”

“I have already said all.”

“Take him to the tower.”

“To the tower?—I beg you would consider, sir. There is justice in the country, and I will demand satisfaction at your hands.”

“I shall give you satisfaction, friend, so soon as you find justice on your side.”

Next morning the magistrate began to suspect that, after all, the stranger might be an honest man, and that high words might have no effect in making him alter his tone. He was half inclined to think that the best way might be to let him go. He called together the councillors, however, and sent for the prisoner.

“I hope you will forgive us, if we dealt somewhat hardly with you yesterday evening.”

“Most willingly, since you ask me to do so.”

“Our rules are strict, and your conduct gave rise to suspicion. I cannot set you free without departing from my duty. Appearances are against you. I wish you would say something, which might satisfy us on your good character.”

“And if I should say nothing?”

“Then I must send your passport to Munich, and you must remain here till it returns.”

Wolf was silent for a few minutes, and appeared to be much agitated; he then stepped close up to the magistrate.

“Can I be a quarter of an hour alone with you?”

The councillors looked doubtfully (689) at each other; but the magistrate motioned to them, and they withdrew.

“Now, what will you?”

“Your conduct yesterday evening, sir, could never have brought me to your terms, for I despise violence. The manner in which you treat me today has filled me with respect for your character. I believe you to be an honourable man.”—

“What have you to say to me?”

“I see you are an honourable man. I have long wished to meet with such a man. Will you give me your right hand.”

“What will you, stranger”

“Your head is gray and venerable. You have been long in the world—you have had sorrows too—Is it not so? —and they have made you more merciful?”

“Sir, what mean you?”

“You are near to eternity—yourself will soon have need of compassion from God. You will not deny it to man. Am I not right? To whom do you suppose yourself to be speaking?”

“What is this?—you alarm me.

“Do you not guess the truth?—Write to your prince how you found me, and that I have been my own betrayer. May God’s mercy to him be such as his shall be to me. Entreat for me, old man—weep for me—my name is WOLF.”

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<sup>i</sup> All words coming after a question/exclamation mark have been left without capitalisation to be faithful to the original text.