

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

## Kaspar Hauser

Since the days of The Man with the Iron Mask, no mystery as excited such curiosity in Europe as the appearance and death of Kaspar Hauser. The literature on the subject has grown to the size of a small library; but the truth has not yet been discovered. To some Hauser is a common swindler; to others he is a poor imbecile; and to the people of his time he was a kidnapped prince.

In the afternoon of Whitmonday, 1828, when most of the good people of Nuremberg were enjoying the holiday in the country, and old burgher, who was taking his afternoon stroll, noticed in a deserted square of the town a young fellow in peasant's dress who was trying to walk toward him; but evidently he could not stand upright or control his movements. As the burgher approached him the young fellow held out a letter to him, saying, "Show where the letter belongs." The letter was addressed to Captain von Wesenich of the Sixth Calvary Regiment. The burgher accompanied young man to the Captain's house, rang the bell, and walked away. To the servant who opened the door the boy handed the letter, saying "would be a rider like my father." The servant question him, but could get no other answer from the boy, who repeated his first sentence over and over again like a parrot. He seemed very weak and tired, and crying, pointed to his feet. The Captain was not at home and a servant offered the boy some meat and beer. He had barely touched it, however, when he spit it out in trembling and fear, as if it were poison. He was then offered some bread and water which he devoured greedily. The servant concluded that he must be an idiot and took him to the stable where he went to sleep. When the captain came home, the boy was brought before him, and repeated the few words he had uttered before; but did not seem to understand anything that was said to him or the meaning of his words. He was taken to the police station where the same questions and answers were repeated. He was apparently sixteen or seventeen years of age; but his manner was that of a child of two. Finally paper and ink were put before him, and now the first ray of intelligence appeared upon his face. He seized the pen and wrote repeatedly in a firm hand "Kaspar Hauser." When urged to write something more he began to cry and uttered a half-dozen words about being a rider, which seemed to constitute his whole vocabulary. Finally he was taken to prison and the superintendent was given orders to watch him carefully and find out whether he was shamming. He played with the little children of the superintendent and seemed amiable and gentle, but so timid that he was afraid of a baby. His body was well formed with the exception of his legs, which were bent in a peculiar way. His hands and feet were very small, and the skin so soft that it was very evident that he had never used them. In fact, he had to be taught to walk and to use his fingers. He called all human beings "boy," and all animals "horse." This induced one of the constables to give him a little wooden horse. This seemed to cause him the greatest happiness. He covered the horse with ribbons, and played with it by the hour without paying any attention to anything else.

The letter addressed without naming him to the captain of the 6th Cavalry Regiment which Kaspar held in his hand when he first appeared in Nuremberg, runs as follows: "From a place near the Bavarian frontier endless frontier which shall be nameless. 1828 'I send you a boy who wishes faithfully to serve his King. He was left in my house October 9th 1812, and I am myself a poor day laborer who have also ten children, and enough to do to maintain my own family. The mother of the child put him in my house for the sake of having him brought up; but I have never been able to discover who his mother is, and I have kept the fact that he was in my house the secret. I have given him a Christian education, but he has never been out of my house, and he neither knows the name of my house nor where it is. I have already taught him to read and write; and he writes my handwriting exactly as I do. Good Mr. Captain, you need not try him; he does not know the place where I am. I took him away in the middle of the night, and he knows not the way home. I did not sign my name, for I might be punished. He has not a [kreutger] of money, because I have none myself. If you do not keep him, you may get rid of him.'" With this letter, which was written in German characters, the following note written in Latin characters, but evidently by the same hand was enclosed. "The child is already baptized. You must give him a surname yourself. You must educate the child. His father was in the Cavalry. When he is seventeen years old send him to Nuremberg to the 6th Cavalry for there his father also was. I ask for his education until he is seventeen years old. He was born on the 30th of April, 1812. I am a poor girl, and cannot support him. His father is dead."

His face, when he first appeared in Nuremberg was almost without expression; but in a few months it had altered almost beyond recognition. His countenance gained expression and animation, and the prominent lower features of his face receded more and more. For a long time after his arrival he could not go up or down stairs, without assistance; and he had to be taught like a baby to walk. The surprise occasioned by Kaspar Hauser's first appearance soon settled down into the form of a dark and horrible enigma to explain which various conjectures were resorted to. By no means an idiot or madman, he was so mild, obedient, and good tempered that no one could regard him as a Savage; and yet he was so totally unacquainted with the most common objects, and he showed such an indifference to all the usual customs and necessities of life and at the same time he evidenced such extraordinary peculiarities in all the characteristics of his moral, mental, and physical existence, as seem to leave no other choice than either to regard him as an inhabitant of some other planet, miraculously transferred to the earth, or some one who had been born and bred underground; and who, now that he had arrived at the age of maturity, had for the first time ascended to the surface of the earth and beheld the light of the sun. In a very few days after his arrival, Kaspar was no longer considered as a prisoner, but as a forsaken and neglected child who needed to be cared for and educated. He was admitted to the family of the prison-keeper, and became the companion and playmate of his little children. He became one of the curiosities of the town, and crowds of people came to see him among others a Professor Damner who took it upon himself to educate Kaspar. The boy showed an active mind and a wonderful memory; and it was not long before he learned in some degree to express his thoughts and to give the following recollections of his former life.

"He neither knows who he is, nor where his home is. It was only at Nuremberg that he

came into the world. Here he first learned that besides himself and the man with whom he had always been, there existed other men and other creatures. So long as he can recollect, he had always lived in a hole, where he had always sat upon the ground with bare feet, and clothed only in a shirt and a pair of breeches. In his hole he never heard a sound, never saw the heavens, never knew the difference between day and night. Whenever he awoke from sleep he found a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water beside him. Sometimes the water had a bad taste. Whenever this was the case, he could no longer keep his eyes open, but was compelled to fall asleep; and when he afterwards awoke he found that he had a clean shirt on, and at his nails had been cut. To test him on this point he was given some water mixed with opium. He immediately exclaimed: 'That is like the water I sometimes got in my prison.' He never saw the face of the man who took care of him. In his hole he had two wooden horses and some ribbons. To play with them was his sole occupation. He had no recollection of ever having been in a different situation or in another place. The man with whom he had always been never did him any harm. Yet one day, shortly before he was taken away when he had been running his horse too hard, and had made too much noise, the man came down and struck him on the arm with a stick which caused a wound which he had on him when he came to Nuremberg. About the same time the man once came into his prison, placed a small table over his feet, and spread something white upon it, which he now knows to have been paper. He then came behind him, took hold of his hand and moved it backwards and forwards on the paper with a thing he had stuck between his fingers. He was mightily pleased when he saw the black figures which began to appear upon the white paper. When he felt that his hand was free, and that the man was gone from him, he was so much pleased with his new discovery that he could never grow tired of drawing these figures repeatedly upon the paper. It was thus he was taught to write his name. Another time the men came again, and placed him on his feet, and endeavored to teach him to walk. Finally the man appeared again; placed Kaspar's hands over his shoulders, tied them fast, and thus carried him on his back out of his prison. He could give no account of his journey except that the man continually repeated to him the few words he knew when he first came to Nuremberg."

Before Kaspar had been in Nuremberg a month he was visited by one of Germany's greatest criminal lawyers, von Fauerbach. When questioned by him, he appeared by no means satisfied with his life in this world; he longed to go back to the man with whom he had always been. He had never suffered so much from headache, and had never been teased so much since he was in the world. In July Kaspar was released from prison and committed to the domestic care of Professor Damner, who now took upon himself the entire care for Kaspar's education. Here he first slept in a bed; and he said it was the only pleasant thing he had met with in the world. The mere odor of meat and liquor was sufficient to make him ill; but gradually as he learned to eat meat and live like the people about him, his mental activity, which at first had been marvelous, was greatly diminished. For months after his first arrival his eyes gave him constant trouble in daylight, but at night he could distinguish the color of objects that no one else could see. In the summer of 1829 his education was so far advanced that he announced his intention of writing himself an account of his life. The story that he was thus employed soon became public; and it is highly probable that it occasioned the catastrophe which soon after it was circulated in the month of October, 1829, was intended to bring his short life to a tragic end.

Kaspar Hauser had become a dangerous burden to his keepers. He had grown up to be a young man. He was becoming restless, sometimes making a noise; and it was necessary to get rid of him; and so he was sent to Nuremberg. It was intended that he should disappear there, either as an idiot and some institution, or as a soldier. Contrary to expectation, he became the object of universal attention. The public journals of every capital in Europe were full of him. The development of his mind was everywhere spoken of; and now he was going to write a history of his life. His former keepers must feel very uneasy at hearing of this intended autobiography. His murder therefore became an act of self-defense. On the 20th of October 1829, he was found by Mrs. Damner in the cellar of their house with a severe wound in his forehead, and was covered with blood. He said that while he was sitting on a step in the hall, a man whose face was blackened, or covered with a black silk handkerchief, had suddenly approached him and struck him with a knife as he ducked his head to evade the blow. He had fainted, and when he came to fled into the cellar in his terror. The assassin disappeared, and no trace of him could be found anywhere. In May 1831, Lord Stanhope appeared in Nuremberg, manifested great interest in Kaspar, and asked permission from the authorities to adopt him. He had been in Nuremberg before, at the time of the attempted assassination; but at that time seemed to take no interest in the young victim. His influence on young Kaspar seems to have been for the worse; so much so that his Guardian insisted on Kaspar's being removed to another place; and in November 1831 Lord Stanhope brought him to Professor Meyer in Ausbach. There he remained until December, 1833, when Lord Stanhope was to come for him, and take him with him to England. On December 14th 1833, as Kaspar was on his way home for dinner, he was stopped by a stranger, who told him that he would tell him whose parents were if he would go with him to the public garden. By agreement Kaspar met him there at three in the afternoon; and after swearing him to secrecy, the stranger took a small note-book out of his pocket, saying, "This contains the evidence: take it." And as Kaspar put out his hand the stranger dropped the note-book. Kaspar stooped to pick it up, and at the same moment felt a knife enter his side. How he reached home he could not tell, but although mortally wounded, he was able to give a vague account of what had happened to him. The note-book was found in the public garden. It contained nothing but a piece of paper on which was written "Huser can tell you what I look like, and where I am from. I come from the Bavarian frontier. My name is M. L. O." On the 18th of December 1833, Kaspar Hauser succumbed to his wound, forgiving his assassin before he died. The King of Bavaria offered 10,000 florins for the discovery of the murderer; but from that day to this the mystery of life and death of Kaspar Hauser has remained unsolved.

Was he a common swindler? This was the view taken of him by Lord Stanhope in an account he published not long after Hauser's death in reply to the attack made upon him in Germany where the idea had grown up that Kaspar Hauser was the rightful heir of the Grand Duchy of Baden, and the nephew of the Empress of Russia and the Queen of Bavaria, who had been kidnapped in his early childhood in order that the succession to the throne might pass to the younger branch of the house; and that Earl Stanhope was the agent of this younger branch, and had adopted Kaspar only for the purpose of removing him from Germany. The general reputation of the English Lord was bad. He had no property in England or Germany, but was supplied with funds by South German Banking Houses. But if Kaspar Hauser was not a swindler, and it seems impossible that a boy of

fifteen should have been able to deceive everyone with whom he came in contact for nearly six years, – Who was he?

Twenty years after Kaspar 's death there was found among the papers of the above-mentioned Judge Feuerbach a brief which he had written for the Queen of Bavaria in answer to the question who was Kaspar Hauser? He attempted in this argument to establish the following conclusions: 1. Kaspar is not an illegitimate but a legitimate child, for if the sole object was to keep the birth of an illegitimate child a secret, there were far easier and less dangerous ways than his imprisonment for sixteen years. The higher the rank of his parents, the easier it would be to do this; while if he had been of low birth and illegitimate it would not have been worth anyone's while to take such care of him for sixteen years. 2. The persons involved in the crime committed against Kaspar Hauser must have had extraordinary means at their command or it would not have been possible to keep him imprisoned for so long and then after the attempt to assassinate him failed to suppress all traces which might lead to a discovery of the crime. 3. The attempts to assassinate him prove that great interests depend on his life and death. 4. Neither hatred nor revenge could be the cause of the imprisonment and assassination of this innocent child. There remains only one reason – self-interest. His imprisonment was necessary to secure to others the inheritance of rights that rightfully belong to Kaspar. His assassination became necessary to secure them in the rights which they had usurped. 5. The fact that he is a person of high rank is proved by the dreams he had when he first came to Nuremberg. These dreams were the recollections of his earliest childhood, coming back to him with the awakening of his intelligence, and describing things and events which he could not have seen at Nuremberg. He says that in one of these dreams he was in a large house; and then gives a description of a palace and the life of the young Prince. Finally, in answer to the question To what family does Kaspar Hauser belong? There is only one family in Europe to whom suspicion points; and that is the house of Baden. The papers found on Kaspar stated that he was born in 1812 and died suddenly. The young Prince of Baden was born in 1812, and died suddenly in October 1812, – the very time the keeper said Kaspar was left with his keeper. The circumstances of his death were peculiar. The Prince was a strong, healthy child, and was left in the morning by his nurse apparently well. In the afternoon when she returned, she and the mother were refused admittance to the child's room because it was ill. In a little while they were told that the prince was dead; but neither mother nor nurse were allowed to see the body of the child, which was interred privately. By the death of the young Prince, the succession to the crown passed to another branch of the family.

In personal appearance Kaspar Hauser bore a wonderful resemblance to the picture of the mother of this young Prince of Baden; and for thirty years after his death public interest was excited by the appearance from time to time of some new contributions, containing some new clue to the solution of the mystery of his life without ever, however, putting the question at rest. Finally in 1875 the Baden government for the first time allowed the publication of the official record of the death and autopsy of the young Prince of Baden in 1812 for the purpose of proving that the theory that Kaspar Hauser and the young Prince were identical had no foundation in fact. But the very fact that these records had been in existence for over fifty years, and that the government had never published them until those who could dispute their authenticity were dead, only served to confirm the

belief of those who are inclined to the Feuerbach theory that Kaspar Hauser was the rightful heir to the throne of Baden.

After all that has been written about it, the Kaspar Hauser mystery remains as great as it was on the day when he first appeared in the world.

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[Editor's Note: Hauser's name is variously spelled in this paper: Casper, Caspar, and Kaspar]

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