

The Dog and the Assassin

by Mrs. C.A. Soule

While traveling in 1857, through the beautiful city of Leipzig, I observed, about half a league from the gate of the town, a few rods from the highway, a wheel and the bones of a chained corpse exposed to the gaze of every passer.

The following is the history of that criminal, as I learned it from the lips of the Judge who conducted the trial, and condemned him to be broken alive:

A German butcher being benighted in the midst of a forest, lost his way, and while endeavoring to gain the road was attacked by a highwaymen. He was on horseback and accompanied by a large dog. One of the robbers seized the horse by the bridle, while the two others dragged the butcher from his saddle and felled him. The dog immediately leaped upon one of them and strangled him; but the other wounded the animal so severely that he rushed into the woods uttering the most fearful howls. The butcher, who by this time had disengaged himself from the grasp of the second robber, drew his knife and killed him. But at the same moment he received a shot from the third, he who had just wounded the dog, and falling, was dispatched by the thief, who found upon him a large sum of gold, a silver watch and a few other articles of value. He plundered the corpse, leaped upon the horse and fled.

The next morning two wood cutters happening in that path, were surprised to find three dead bodies and a large dog who seemed to be guarding them. They examined them and endeavored to restore life, but in vain.

One of them dressed the wounds of the dog, gave him some food and sought some water for him, while the other hastened to the nearest village to inform the magistrate of the discovery. The officer accompanied by several attendants, was soon on the spot; a surgeon examined the wounds of the three bodies; they drew up a verbal process and interred them.

The dog had dragged himself, in the course of the night, when all was quiet, to the corpse of his master, where he was found the next morning. He allowed his new friends to dress his wounds, as if foreseeing that he must consent to live that he might one day avenge the murder; he ate and drank, but would not leave the spot.

He looked on quietly as they dug the grave, and allowed them to bury the bodies; but as soon as the turf was replaced, he stretched himself upon it, howled mournfully, and resisted all efforts of the bystanders to induce him to move. He snapped at all who came near him, except the woodman who had tended him. He bore his caresses, but no sooner did the man attempt to take his paws to remove him from the grave than he gnashed his teeth, and would have wounded him severely if he had not quickly fled. Every one admired the fidelity of the dog, and when the woodman offered to carry him food and drink every day, that he might not perish, the magistrate proposed taking up a collection to remunerate the man, who was poor and the father of a large

family. With difficulty he was induced to accept the money, but he finally did, and from that moment burdened himself with the care of his new pensioner.

The details of this horrible event were published in the principal journals of the country. J. Meyer, a brother of the butcher, reading sometime afterwards the advertisement of the magistrate, hastened instantly to his presence, saying he had fears which he believed now only too well founded, that his brother had fallen into the hands of robbers, as he had left home with a large sum of gold for the purchase of beeves, and was not heard from. His suspicions were only too sadly confirmed when the magistrate related to him the conduct of a dog, which he described. Mr. Meyer, accompanied by the officer and several others, repaired to the grave. As soon as the dog perceived his master's brother, he howled, lapped his hands and evinced other demonstrations of joy. By different parts of his dress, Mr. Meyer recognized the body of his brother when they disinterred it. The absence of the gold and the watch, the wounds of the butcher and his dog, those of the two other bodies, together with the disappearance of the horse, convinced the magistrate and the witnesses that the deceased had not only been assassinated by two, but also by one or several others who had fled with the horse and plunder.

Having obtained permission, Mr. Meyer removed his brother's corpse to a native village, and interred it in the adjoining cemetery. The faithful dog followed the body, but by degrees became attached to his new master.

Every effort was made by the most diligent search and the offer of immense rewards to discover the assassins. But in vain, the horrible tragedy remained an enigma.

Two years had passed away, and all hopes of solving the mystery vanished, when Mr. Meyer received a letter urging him to repair without delay to Leipzig to close the eyes of his maternal uncle, who desired to see him before he died. He immediately hastened thither accompanied by his brother's dog, who was his companion at all times. He arrived too late. His relative had deceased the previous evening, bequeathing him a large fortune. He found the city crowded; it being the season of the great fair held regularly there twice a year.

While walking one morning on the public square, attended as usual by his dog, he was astonished to behold the animal leap forward like a flash. He dashed upon the crowd and leaped furiously upon an elegantly dressed young man who was seated in the centre of the square, upon an elevated platform erected for the use of those spectators who desired more conveniently to witness the show. He held him by throat with so firm a grasp that he would soon have strangled him had no assistance been rendered. They immediately chained the dog, and thinking of course he must be mad, strove to kill him. Mr. Meyer rushed through the crowd and arrived in time to rescue his faithful friend, calling eagerly in the meantime upon the bystanders to arrest the man, for he believed his dog recognized in him the murderer of his brother.

Before he had time to explain himself the young man, profiting by the tumult, escaped. For some moments they thought Meyer himself mad, and he had great difficulty in persuading these who had bound the dog, that the faithful creature was not in the least dangerous, and begged earnestly of them to release him that he might pursue the assassin. He spoke in so convincing a manner that his hearers finally felt persuaded of the truth of his assertions, and restored the dog to his

freedom, who joyously bounded to his master, leaped about him for a few times and hastened way.

He divided the crowd and was soon upon the enemy's track. The police, which on these occasions were very active and prompt, were immediately informed of this extraordinary event, and a number were soon in pursuit.

The dog became in a few moments the object of public curiosity, and every one drew back to give him room. Business was suspended, and crowds collected in groups conversing of nothing but the dog and the murder which had been committed two years before.

After half an hour's expectation, a general rush indicated that the search was over. The man had stretched himself upon the ground under the heavy folds of a double tent, and believed himself hidden. But in spite of his fancied security, the avenger had attacked him, and leaping upon him he bit him, tore his garments, and would have killed him upon the spot had not assistance rushed to his rescue.

He was immediately arrested, and led with Mr. Meyer and the dog, then carefully bound, before the judge who hardly knew what to think of so extraordinary an affair. Meyer related all that happened two years before, and insisted upon the imprisonment of the man, declaring that he was the murderer of his brother, for the dog could not be deceived.

During all this time it was almost impossible to hold the animal, who seemed determined to attack the prisoner. Upon interrogating the latter, the Judge was not satisfied with his replies and ordered him to be searched. There was found upon him a large sum of gold, jewels, and five watches, four gold, while the fifth was an old silver one, but of little consequence. As soon as Meyer saw the last, he declared it to be the same his brother wore the day he left home, and the description of his watch published months previously, corroborated his assertions. The robber never dared expose it for fear that it would lead to his detection, as he was well aware that it had been described very minutely in all the principal journals in Germany.

In short, after the most minute and convincing legal proceedings of eight months, the murderer was condemned to be broken alive, and his corpse to remain chained upon the wheel as an example to others. On the night preceding his execution, he confessed among other crimes up till then he always denied, that he was the murderer of Meyer's brother. He gave them all the details above related, and declared that he always believed that the cursed dog died of his wounds. "Had it not been for him," he repeated several times, "I should not have been here. Nothing else could have discovered me, for I had killed the horse and buried him, with all that he wore."

He expired on the wheel, and his was the corpse which I beheld before entering the city of Leipzig.

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