

Who Was Kaspar Hauser?

© Dr M D Magee

Contents Updated: Thursday, May 10, 2001

A Mysterious Youth

In May 1828, a youth was seen staggering along the streets of Nuremburg dressed in peasant clothes and seeming bewildered enough to attract attention. He seemed drunk, but in fact he did not know how to use his legs, but wobbled on them as if for the first time, unsure where to place them next. He carried a note written by a labourer saying he had been given charge of him on 7 October 1812 and had undertaken to teach him reading, writing and the Christian religion but had kept him confined. Another letter from the boy's mother said he had been born on 30 April 1812, that his name was Kaspar and that his father, a cavalry officer in the 6th Nuremburg regiment was dead. She said he wanted to be a horse rider like his father. (One of the questions asked of him was, "Where is your passport?")

A townsman took him to the regiment and he was placed in the tower for observation. He appeared to be about the age given in the letters, sixteen or seventeen years old, although he was only four feet nine inches tall and underdeveloped. His wisdom teeth had not yet shown. And it was perfectly obvious that his feet had never seen a pair of shoes.

Since that day, Kaspar Hauser has been the subject of over three thousand books and fourteen thousand articles. Kaspar had spent most of his life, probably fourteen years, in a tiny dark dungeon with an earthen floor and low wooden ceiling. He had a hole in his breeches to permit defecation, and two wooden horses and a wooden dog to play with. He later said:

The idea never occurred to me to want to stand up,

because he could not. He ate bread and water twice a day, placed beside him by his gaoler. He saw no daylight, heard no footsteps, no voice, or animal cry, until the day an unknown man brought him into the world and abandoned him to the streets of a city.

He instantly became famous. People came from far and wide to stare. The interest lay in Kaspar's mental and moral condition. What, after such an ordeal, would he be like? Mostly, just as one might expect. His vocabulary was limited to about fifty words. Any food apart from bread and water made him sick, both strong light and loud noises caused him visible pain, and the smell of a rose was to him a vile stench. He was at first so frightened of people that he asked Andreas Hiltel, the man assigned to look after him, if his two-year-old daughter would hurt him. Thereafter, when he met a new person he studied the eyes, nose, forehead and mouth with great attention before slotting them together to make a whole that he would never forget. When he fell asleep not even thunder would wake him. He thought the person he saw in a mirror must be hiding behind it.

Uncorrupted by the World

Other aspects of his character were more surprising. When he saw the stars for the first time he fell into a rapture from which it was difficult to dislodge him. Given a new toy horse to play with, he spent hours alone, stroking it and gazing at it. His understanding of cause and effect, of motive, was nil. In the words of his first biographer Anselm von Feuerbach, "A sheet of paper that the wind carried off had run away from the table."

Unable to bear cruelty, be it visited upon other people, animals, or insects, he seemed morally secure and uncontaminated, a child of nature who had yet to learn how human beings treat one another on a social level. His winning smile was absolutely genuine. "He had nothing false in him," said Hiltel. Here was the dream of the child uncorrupted by the world.

His development over the coming months would lend weight to this. He proved to be intelligent and quick to learn, as well as sweet-natured. But the complications and frailties of human life eventually seeped into him, and he himself admitted that, in some ways, he had been happier in the dungeon.

Following a proclamation by the Mayor of Nuremberg, Feuerbach paid a visit to the child, which so moved him that he determined to write his biography. This has never been out of print in Germany since its publication in 1832. Feuerbach had him removed from the tower and sent to live with Georg Friedrich Daumer, a kindly man who was tutor to Hegel's children.

Daumer was soon won over by Kaspar, taught him to read, draw, play the piano and chess, and think allusively. He developed into a young man of ability and charm.

Then the 4th Earl of Stanhope, the British historian, sent money for Kaspar's upkeep and demanded he be considered his legal guardian. He announced that he would adopt the boy and take him to live at Chevening Castle in Kent—while mysteriously failing to mention this in his voluminous letters to wife and children. Stanhope had Kaspar removed from Daumer's care and placed with a sadistic, narrow-minded schoolteacher, Johann Georg Meyer, who broke his spirit by refusing to believe a word he said. Was this a plot to get rid of him?

A Lost Prince?

Who was he? Why the pressing need to rid the world of this stranger? Was the reason dynastic? Jeffrey Masson's theory (*Lost Prince: The Unsolved Mystery of Kaspar Hauser*) is that he was rightfully the Prince of Baden, son of the Grand Duke Charles of Baden by his first wife. The wife of the founder of the dynasty shut him away in the dungeon so that her own son could succeed—as he did.

The theory was formulated originally by Daumier and Feuerbach themselves. They alleged that the Duke's morganatic wife, the countess of Hochberg had him kidnapped in October 1812 to favour her own son. In 1875, the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung* published the official record of the baptism, post-mortem examination and burial of the supposed prince. This child was therefore assumed to have been substituted for the true and healthy heir, Kaspar. By substituting a sickly baby for the poor Prince, its early death officially left the way for her own son to succeed. The Grand Duke himself died at thirty three, claiming that he and both his sons had been poisoned. He did not know that one of them languished in a hole in the floor of one of his castles. The Prince's gaoler must have set him loose from remorse.

E E Evans reviewed all this in *The Story of Kaspar Hauser from Authentic*

Records in 1892. Andrew Lang, the compiler of myths and fairy tales, gave an account of the mystery in *Historical Mysteries*, 1904, in which he concluded that Kaspar was possibly mentally sick, being an "ambulatory automatist," someone liable to wander off and mistake their own identity, but was more inclined to think he was a fraud, and the "authentic records" "worthless and impudent rubbish."

The evidence is substantial, but is it sufficient? All the dates fit, odd asides in letters survive, and Kaspar's own memory may be said to corroborate it. In 1829, he made a watercolor drawing of a strange plant. Not until nearly a century later, in 1924, did someone stumble across a hidden dungeon in a castle near Nuremberg called Pilsach, in the course of renovations.

It matched in every particular the dungeon described by Kaspar, including a large iron window frame in the shape of that plant. Much later, in 1982, new owners discovered a small, white wooden horse, matching the horse Kaspar had described as his plaything.

The revelation of his true identity would have been catastrophic for the House of Baden. The naïve Kaspar, who was succeeding in life as a clerk, was lured to a garden in Ansbach by a man who said he had news of his mother and stabbed in the chest. When he staggered home, the dreadful Meyer accused him of playing up and said he would beat him for his lies. If there was a wound, then it must have been self-inflicted. The young man turned his face to the wall and died.

Masson points the finger very firmly at Lord Stanhope, who was in the pay of the Baden family, as having arranged the murder.

J A L Singh in *Wolf Children and Feral Man*, 1966 gave another account. Jakob Wassermann wrote a novel, *Caspar Hauser*, translated into English in 1928. Peter Handke wrote a play *Kaspar*, translated in 1970.

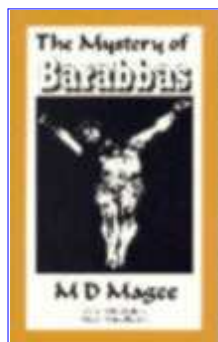
**Support independent publishers and writers snubbed by big
retailers**

**Ask your public library to order these books
Available through all good bookshops**

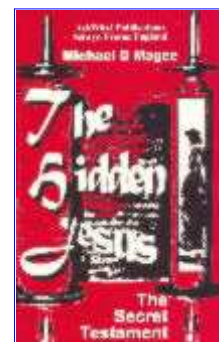
AskWhy! Publications



**Who Lies Sleeping?
The Dinosaur Heritage
and the Extinction of
Man**
ISBN 0-9521913-0-X
£7.99



**The Mystery of Barabbas.
Exploring the Origins of a
Pagan Religion**
ISBN 0-9521913-1-8 £9.99



**The Hidden Jesus.
The Secret Testament
Revealed**
ISBN 0-9521913-2-6
£12.99

© All rights reserved