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THE AMBER WITCH.

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THE

AMBER WITCH;

The most interesting Trial for Witchcraft ever known.

EDITED FROM A DEFECTIVE MANUSCRIPT OF HER FATHER,

ABRAHAM SCHWEIDLER,

PASTOR OF COSEROW, IN USEDOM.

BY

W. MEINHOLD,

DOCTOR OF DIVINITY, AND PASTOR, ETC.

"Ordinary minds make every thing in the trials of witchcraft to be the work of imagination. But he who has read many such trials finds that impossible."—JEAN PAUL.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN,

BY

E. A. FRIEDLÆNDER,

LONDON:
H. G. CLARKE AND CO., 66, OLD BAILEY

1844.

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PREFACE.

In submitting to the public this deeply affecting and very romantic trial of witchcraft, which in the foregoing title-page, I have probably not unjustly called "the most interesting hitherto known," I offer in the first place, the following account respecting the history of the manuscript.

In Coserow, upon the Island Usedom, in my former parish and the same, over which upwards of two hundred years ago our venerable author presided, there was under the singers' seat of the parish church, and almost level with the ground, a sort of niche or closet, in this I had often seen a number of written papers lying about, which on account of my short-sightedness, and the darkness of the place, I took for old hymn-books. One day however, when engaged in instructing the children at the church, I was seeking for a

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paper-mark in the catechism of one of the boys, and not being able to find it immediately, my old Sexton, more than eighty years of age, (who was called Appelmann, but altogether unlike his namesake in our biography, and although poor was yet a very excellent man), went under the choir and returned with a folio book, which I had never seen before, and out of which he without any more ado, tore a strip of paper and handed it to me. I immediately laid hold of the book, and I cannot say whether after a few minutes I was more astonished or provoked at the treasure I had found. This manuscript bound in pig's-leather was not only defective at the beginning and at the end, but, I am sorry to say, there were also in the middle here and there some leaves torn out. I gave the old man such a sound talking to, as I had never done before; but he excused himself by saying that one of my predecessors had given him the manuscript for waste paper, as it had been lying about since time immemorial, and that he had often been at a loss for a little paper to wrap round the altar-tapers, etc. The gray headed half-blind pastor must have taken it for old church-accounts, which were of course no longer of any use.*

Scarcely arrived at home I set about deciphering

* In the original a few accounts in fact occur which at first sight might very easily lead to this error, and the handwriting

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my new found treasure, and after I had with much difficulty read through the book, I was powerfully excited by the matters recorded therein.

I soon felt the want of more light respecting the nature and circumstances of these trials for witchcraft, and indeed respecting the whole period, in which such proceedings took place. But the more I read of these truly astonishing histories, the more I became lost in amazement, and neither the trivial *Beeker* (*Die bezauberte Welt*, the enchanted world), nor the more cautious *Horst* (*Zauber-bibliothek;* magic-library) and other works of the kind to which I had referred, were able to relieve my embarrassment but only served to increase it.

There runs not merely so deep a demoniac feature through most of these shuddering histories as fills the attentive reader with horror and dismay; but even the eternal and unchangeable laws which govern our feelings and actions, are also frequently interrupted in such a violent manner as to bring the understanding in the proper sense of the word to a stand still; as for instance, in one of the original trials, which a legal friend in our province had picked up, the relation is found, that a mother, after she had already endured the rack, par-

moreover is very difficult to read, and in several parts turned quite yellow and rotten.

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taken of the Sacrament, and was about mounting the scaffold, so greatly set aside all maternal feeling, as to feel herself in conscience bound to accuse her only tenderly beloved daughter, a girl of fifteen years, against whom nobody cherished any suspicion, of being also a witch, in order, as she said, to save her poor soul. The court justly astonished at this probably unparallelled case, caused her state of health to be investigated by ministers and the physicians, whose original testimonies are still found among the legal documents, and report favourable throughout. The unfortunate daughter who singularly enough was called *Wise* Elizabeth Hegel, was in consequence of this maternal declaration really executed.*

It is by no means sufficient to explain these phenomena according to the notions of the most modern times, as of the nature of animal magnetism. How, for instance, would this account for the deep, demoniac nature of old Lise Kolken, which is incomprehensible, and renders it quite clear, that the old pastor in spite of the horrible deception played upon him and his daughter, remained as firm in his belief of the existence of witchcraft as in that of the gospel.

The earlier centuries of the middle age knew little or

* This trial likewise I intend yet to publish, because of its uncommon psychological interest.

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nothing of witches. The crime of witchery where once it occurred was punished with lenity. Thus, for instance, the council of Ancyra (314) made the whole punishment of those women to consist in mere excommunication from Christian fellowship; the West-Gothas punished them with scourging, and Charles the Great, on the advice of his bishops, caused them to be kept in prison until they did sincere penance.* Only a short time before the reformation, Ignatius VIII. laments that the complaints of all Christendom about the nuisance of these women were becoming so generally clamorous, and to such a degree, that some most decided step must be taken against them; and at the end of 1489, he caused the most notorious Witch-hammer *(malleus malleficarum)* to be prepared, according to which inquisition was made not only in all Catholic, but especially also in Protestant Christendom, which in all respects abominated everything savouring of Catholicism; and, in fact, with such fanatic zeal that the Protestants far outrivalled the Catholics in cruelty, until on the part of the Catholics, the noble Jesuit, J. Spee, and on that of the Protestants, although not until seventy years later, the excellent Thomasius, gradually put a check to this nuisance.

* Horst's *Zauberbibliothek.*

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After a close investigation of the subject of witchcraft, I soon perceived, that among all these somewhat daring, adventurous histories, not one would excel in lively interest my "Amber-Witch," and I determined to throw its fates into the form of a novel. Luckily, however, I soon said to myself: "Why should I do so? Is not the history itself the most interesting novel? Leave it perfectly in its original form; throw out what to the present reader no longer is of any interest, or is otherwise generally known, and though indeed you may not be able to restore the missing commencement and the missing end, see if the context will render it possible for you to supply the missing leaves from the middle, and then go on in the same strain and language of your ancient biographer, so that at least the difference of the representation and the insertions made do not immediately strike the eye.

This, then, with much trouble, and after many fruitless attempts, I have done, but silently pass over the places in which the scenes have taken place, in order not to cloud the interest of the greatest number of my readers. For to criticism, which, however, has never attained to a more admirable height than in our time, such a confession would here be perfectly superfluous, since without this it will very easily distinguish

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where Pastor Schweidler and where Pastor Meinhold* is the speaker.

Of that, however, which I have omitted, I owe the public a more particular notice. To these pertain:

1. Long prayers, in as much as they were not distinguished by Christian unction.

2. Generally known histories of the thirty years war.

3. Miraculous signs in the clouds, said to have happened here and there, and which other writers of Pomerania on this age of terror also report; as, for instance, Micraelius;† such statements, however, as stood in connection with the whole; for instance, the cross upon the Streckelberg, and, therefore, I have of course let them remain.

4. The specification of the whole income of the church of Coserow before and during the reign of terror of the thirty years war.

5. The account of the number of dwellings which after the devastation of the enemy had remained standing in every village belonging to the parish.

6. The statement of the places whither this or that member of the church had emigrated.

* There were already preliminary specimens in the Christoterpe, 1841 and 1842.

† Of ancient Pomerania.

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7. A ground plan and a description of the old parsonage, etc.

In the language, too, I have taken the liberty of here and there making a few alterations, my author himself not being very consistent in language and orthography. The latter I have retained, with but few exceptions.

And now I submit to the gentle reader this work, glowing with the fire of heaven and of hell.

MEINHOLD.

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THE AMBER WITCH.

INTRODUCTION.

The descent of our biographer cannot, on account of the beginning of his work being lost, be any longer determined with accuracy. At all events, he appears not to have been a Pomeranian; for at one time he speaks of Silesia, where he had been in his youth; then he mentions far-dispersed relatives, not only in Hamburg and Cologne, but even in Antwerp, and betrays principally by his Southern German language his foreign origin. I have remarked especially the expressions, such as *eim* for *einem;* and the peculiar derivation of many adjectives, viz.: *tanein* from *Tanne; seidin* from *Seide;* a kind of dialect, which, as far as I know, has never been used in Pomerania, but rather in Swabia. Yet at the period of the composition of his work, he must have already lived a long time in Pomerania, because he still more frequently intermixes low German expressions, *(platt deutsche)* in every respect, just as native Pomeranian writers of that time were wont to do.

As, according to his own statements on various occasions, he is of ancient and noble descent, it is probable that some further particulars may be found in the records of the nobles of the seventeenth century, respecting the family of the Schweidlers, and conse-

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