



THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF JOHANNES
JÄGER, WIKO FELLOW
JOHANNES JÄGER

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To the Right Honorable Mr. Giuliani,
I humbly beg, that you will honour this report, by taking it – (not under your Protection, – it must protect itself) – into due consideration. If I am ever told, it has made you smile; or can conceive it has beguiled you of one moment’s pain – I shall think myself happy; – perhaps much happier than any one that I have read or heard of.

I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me. Had they duly consider’d how much depended upon what they were then doing; – had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly, – I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that in which the reader is likely to see me.

People may laugh as they will – but the case was this. It had ever been the custom of the family, and by length of time was almost become a matter of common right, that the

eldest son of it should have free ingress, egress, and regress into foreign parts, – not only for the sake of bettering his own private parts, by the benefit of exercise and change of so much air – but simply for the mere delectation of his fancy, by the feather put into his cap, of having been abroad. And t’was thus, I embarked on my journey – many a fortnight ago.

’Tis a long journey, Sir – unless a man has great business, – and great business was what I thought I had. And the truth of the story was as follows: I never could enter a department or meeting, but caught the attention of both old and young. As my movement was not of the quickest, I had generally time enough upon my hands to make my observations, – to hear the groans of the serious, – and the laughter of the light-hearted; all which I bore with excellent tranquillity. ’Tis known by the name of perseverance in a good cause – and of obstinacy in a bad one.

– De gustibus non est disputandum; – that is, there is no disputing against hobby-horses; and for my part, I seldom do; nor could I with any sort of grace, had I been an enemy to them at the bottom; for happening, at certain intervals and changes of the moon, to be both fidler and painter, according as the fly stings. So long as a man rides his hobby-horse peaceably and quietly along the King’s highway, and neither compels you or me to get up behind him – pray, Sir, what have either you or I to do with it?

Of all the cants which are canted in this canting world, – though the cant of hypocrites may be the worst, – the cant of criticism is the most tormenting! Poor devil, I was sadly tired with my journey!

But endless is the search of truth. The desire of knowledge, like the thirst of riches, increases ever with the acquisition of it. The more thoughts occurred to me about spending a year at Wiko, the more I took a liking to it! The more I drank from the sweet fountain of science, the greater was the heat and impatience of my thirst.

Now or never was the time: I conveyed the story of my life’s journey to the Wiko – O, Sir, the story will make your heart bleed, – as it has made mine a thousand times; – but it is too long to be told now; – your Honour shall hear it from first to last some day; – but the short of the story is this ... Thou hast said enough, Yogi, – quoth the Wiko admissions office – I like thy project mightily. –

Therefore, my dear friend and companion, if you should think me somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out – bear with me, – and let me go on, and tell my story my own way: – Or, if I should seem now and then to trifle upon the road, – or should sometimes put on a fool’s cap with a bell to it, for a moment or two as we pass along, – don’t fly off, – but rather courteously give me credit for a little more wisdom

than appears upon my outside; – and as we jog on, either laugh with me, or at me, or in short do any thing, – only keep your temper.

And thus I arrived at Wiko. Ho! 'twas the time of salads – and conversations. Man is a creature born to habitudes. The day had been sultry – the evening was delicious – the wine was generous. Thrice happy times!

There is a fatality attends the actions of some men: Order them as they will, they pass thro' a certain medium, which so twists and refracts them from their true directions – that, with all the titles to praise which a rectitude of heart can give, the doers of them are nevertheless forced to live and die without it. –

This requires explanation: in a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, – and at the same time. Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; – & they are the life, the soul of reading and working; – take them out of this report for instance, – you might as well take the report along with them.

Which leads me to the affair of work in progress – but, by what chain of ideas – I leave as a legacy in mort-main to Prudes and Tartufs, to enjoy and make the most of. It no way alters my prospect – write and work as I will, and rush as I may into the middle of things, as Horace advises – I shall never overtake myself whipp'd and driven to the last pinch; at the worst I shall have one day the start of my pen – and one day is enough for two paper manuscripts – and two paper manuscripts will be enough for one year.

The truth is, – I am not a wise man; – and besides am a mortal of so little consequence in the world, it is not much matter what I do: so I seldom fret or fume at all about it. And lo! – all of a sudden, the change was quick as lightning. A new, – quite unexpected, professional prospect hath come along.

I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month. To understand what time is a right, without which we never can comprehend infinity, insomuch as one is a portion of the other – we ought seriously to sit down and consider what idea it is we have of duration, so as to give a satisfactory account how we came by it. Truth be told, I believe in my conscience I intercept many a thought which heaven intended for another man. And thus, my Wiko year had passed.

Lord! said my mother, what is all this story about? – A Cock and a Bull – And one of the best of its kind I ever heard.

The Author (with apologies to Laurence Sterne)