

**HEATH'S MODERN LANGUAGE
SERIES. ROMEO UND JULIA
AUF DEM DORFE. EDITED WITH
NOTES AND VOCABULARY**

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GOTTFRIED KELLER & W. A. ADAMS

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Gottfried Keller.

Heath's Modern Language Series

Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe

1811

Gottfried Keller

1877

EDITED WITH NOTES AND VOCABULARY

BY

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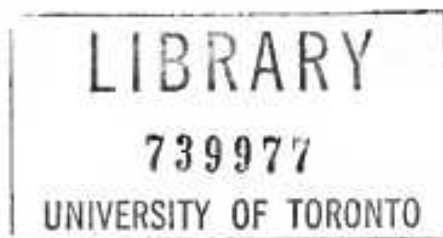
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INTRODUCTION

THERE are readers of German who do not know of Gottfried Keller; to others he is merely a name; others both know and prize him. The last class is daily growing in number.

Keller is neither a Shakespeare nor a Goethe. Neither as a poet nor as a man is he great as, in the history of literature, some half-dozen men have been great. Yet in his distinctive field he reigns supreme — in German literature at least.

His fame will endure because he is a portrayer of life as it is, and that too, in an idealistic manner. His feet are always firmly planted on Mother Earth, however high his thought may soar. With him there is no dangling in mid-air. Another reason is that Keller is a true artist. Success with his pen followed failure with his brush. Like many another artistic soul he groped about in the dark for some time before he found full expression for his creative genius. Love of beauty, a sense of form and proportion, a talent for description, a conception of life as an artistic whole, and skill in its portrayal proclaim him an artist. If the artistic lives, the best of Keller's work must live. There is also found in his writings abundant evidence of a sturdy, original type of mind. He saw the world through his own eyes, and just because of this and because he saw something new in things, there will always be those who will wish to know what it was he saw.

Gottfried Keller was born in Zürich, Switzerland, July 19th, 1819. His father, a turner by trade, died when Gottfried was

five. He was a man of more than ordinary skill as a craftsman, was much interested in matters of education, and had a marked artistic turn of mind. From him, rather than from the mother, Gottfried inherited his love of the Beautiful. The mother was good, sensible, mentally alert, very economical by instinct and by training, and the soul of self-sacrifice.

In his boyhood Keller attended the so-called "Poor-school," also the *Landknaben-Institut*, and later, while attending the manual training school in Zürich, was undeservedly expelled. In general, his early school advantages were fairly good.

Even as a young boy he was serious and reserved — almost painfully so. However, he gave early evidence of the kind of material he was made of. When only twelve he wrote puppet plays. An early fondness for color also manifested itself, which later on made him decide to become a landscape painter. After indifferent progress with local artists he spent two and a half years (his twentieth to his twenty-second year) in Munich studying painting — landscape painting, in particular — though not enrolled as a regular student.

The Munich years were filled with much uneasiness and little enjoyment. Lack of money, illness, discouragement, the nagging thought that his poor mother was furnishing him funds, that his study was of a dilettante character, and that his mode of life was irregular, fed his discontent. Leaving Munich, he next spent six years at home in Zürich. There, as well, he was largely dependent upon his mother's purse, as his landscapes brought him little. Indeed, almost until his thirtieth year he continued, as he puts it, "to stretch his legs under his mother's table."* As the months rolled by, his discontent grew into bitterness of soul.

During these years poetry began to bud and blossom within him. As a poet he cannot be ranked high, though not a few

* *Bächtold I*, 275. The best biography of Keller is:—Gottfried Keller's *Leben. Seine Briefe und Tagebücher*, von Jakob Bächtold. 3 volumes.

of the poems in the two small volumes he wrote are of distinctive merit, as might be inferred from the fact that the Swiss National Hymn was written by him. Yet Keller the poet is justly less famous than Keller the story-writer.

His poetry, however, did not bring him peace. He was unsettled and dissatisfied, and began to spend considerable time over wine and beer. His first love affair had ended unhappily and brought him bitter disappointment. His religious views became of an advanced type and he took the field against political indifference. Into this Keller entered with his whole soul. "I am no friend of the new-fashioned way of doing things by halves," he writes.

Although now almost thirty years of age, he conceived the desire to continue his interrupted studies, and was given a traveling scholarship of eight hundred francs by the city of Zürich. He went to the University of Heidelberg, where he remained one and a half years. There he carefully studied the drama from Lessing down and busied himself with dramatic plans.

The Heidelberg period proved to be an important one for Keller. A belated traveler quickens his pace. Keller now had the opportunity to make up for some of the so-called "lost years" by studying at a university. In earlier years he had read omnivorously, now he began to read and to think more systematically. Many of his religious views were changed by contact with the free-thought of Feuerbach. His literary plan at this period was to give up the writing of poetry and novels, and to turn to the drama.

Keller was beginning to feel what in later life he felt most emphatically, that Germany, rather than his native Switzerland, was his intellectual fatherland. Accordingly, instead of returning to Zürich, he went from Heidelberg to Berlin. He went for one year and remained nearly six. While there, he was unhappy, taciturn, undecided, acted under compulsion — a

characteristic trait of the man—, was as ever a rather poor manager in money matters, yet withal the soul of honesty and uprightness.

He went to Berlin to study the theatre, also to finish several plays and to get some of his work put on the stage. But the Berlin stage was poor at that time and disappointed him. Still, he attended the theatre regularly and gained much in critical judgment. The rest of his time was spent in private study and in writing.

He worked away at *Der grüne Heinrich*—an autobiographical novel—but it dragged. It was easy for him on the other hand to pen short stories, and seven of the eleven stories in the collection *Die Leute von Seldwyla* were written. He was “discovered” by the novelist Bertold Auerbach, who in 1856 referred to these stories as “ein helles Sommerbuch.” Still, five years had passed and no play had been finished; furthermore, little progress had been made upon *Der grüne Heinrich*. This novel—autobiographical in its nature, as was said above—has marked interest for the student of Keller, and has parts which are poetic and powerful; but taken as a whole it does not stand the supreme test of such a work. It lacks unity. Keller could forge with great skill the various parts of a great work, but weld them together into one grand whole he could not. He was unable to portray the sweep of large action. He was lacking in dramatic instinct.

At this time his cloudy sky was brightened by the offer of a permanent salaried position as professor of belles-lettres at Zürich. He refused it, however, because he felt that he was not sufficiently familiar with the subject at first hand. Peddling other people's impressions was an impossibility with him.

Thirty-six years old, he now returns home “rich in culture and in knowledge of the world, but poor in the dramatic laurels for which he had gone to Berlin.” And yet literary results had