

**SELECTIONS FROM
P.K. ROSEGGER'S
WALDHEIMAT**

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Selections from P.K. Rosegger's Waldheimat by Peter Rosegger & Laurence Fossler

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PETER ROSEGGER & LAURENCE FOSSLER

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P. K. ROSEGGGER'S

Waldheimat

WITH INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	v
LIST OF ROSEGGER'S WORKS	x
Vorwort	1
Ulm's Vaterwort	3
Wie der Meisenfepp gestorben ist	11
Auf der Nacht	23
Als ich das erste Mal auf dem Dampfwagen saß	32
Als die hellen Nächte waren	42
Als ich der Müller war	49
Robinson in der Schneidertenkchen	58
Als ich das erste Mal Komödie spielte	75
NOTES	87

INTRODUCTION.

OF late years there have been put into the hands of our American students many excellent modern texts to supplement, if not supplant, the older classics in the earlier stages of the study of German. There are many strong reasons in favor of this movement, which, however, need not be insisted on here. In presenting the following selections from Rosegger's *Waldheimat*, the editor feels persuaded that he introduces an artist of exceptional charm and power, simple yet strong and transcendently skillful in his diction. Rosegger is unhampered by what the Germans denominate "tendenziöse Richtung." His art is directed simply and solely to the portrayal and the interpretation of the life about him, and he accomplishes his task with all the self-confidence and certainty of the born genius. His is a healthy, sympathizing, genial nature, rooted and nourished in the traditions of the past. He occasionally jibes good-humoredly at that past, yet never ungratefully. He is a lover of nature; his native mountains and mountaineers — the one in a garb of larches and firs, and the other in the *Loden* (coarse woolen cloth) — never weary him nor us. A true poet, he penetrates to the inner core of life

and effects his unavowed and, perhaps, unconscious purpose to quicken the reader to the sentiment of human solidarity and brotherhood.

The objections that might be urged against Rosegger's writings, that they are local or provincial, are, in reality, high praise. For, as just stated, the substratum of his art is human nature, common to all of us. It is only the setting, the framework which is to be characterized as "local" or provincial. And through this the American student catches glimpses of Old World life amounting, veritably, to a revelation. Similarly to Berthold Auerbach in his *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten* or to Fritz Reuter, in his stories of Mecklenburg life, our author has struck a chord, responded to by readers everywhere. Just as the painter with brush and pigment reproduces the ideals of his innermost consciousness, so the poet or novelist is at his best when he gives forth the precipitate, so to speak, of his own life experiences. It must be admitted that, in thus circumscribing himself, the artist narrows his field, but he gains a directness and an intensity wholly peculiar and true. Nor does such restriction detract from the general acceptability of his art. For the mind of the reader delights in discovering universality under the guise of individuality. This is largely the secret of literary excellence. That which distinguishes the writer of *Dorfgeschichten* from his more ambitious co-laborer in other literary fields is rather the choice of subject, and the purpose to illustrate a common human nature in the lowlier walks of life.

PETRI KETTENFEIER ROSEGGER was born on July 31, 1843, at Alpel near Krieglach, Steiermark (Styria). His parents were in somewhat straightened circumstances, scarce able to wrench even comparative prosperity from their small acres. His mother, the daughter of a charcoal burner, herself an expert in her father's occupation, was a truly poetic, healthy soul, endowed with generous impulses and ardent sympathies. In tracing Rosegger's ancestry one is involuntarily reminded of Goethe's characterization of *his* mother:

"Vom Mütterchen [hab ich] die Frohnatur
Und Lust zu fabulieren."

Our author, speaking of his mother, says: "Das Beste in mir — ich habe es von ihr. Sie hatte in sich eine ganze Welt voll Poesie." He remembers with gratitude and relates with pride the pleasurable rewards he was wont to receive from her in his boyhood — some song sung, or story told, to brighten his young life. The future poet's early experiences and observations were cultivated and fostered by this guardian angel and he was thus enabled to rise somewhat out of his narrow and narrowing surroundings. At the age of seventeen, in 1860, he was apprenticed to a tailor (cf. "Mein Meister — der Natz," p. 58) and not until 1865 were the possibilities of education placed within his reach. During the four years of his apprenticeship, he worked, as he tells us in the preface to *Waldheimat*, in sixty-seven different houses. In Austria it is still the

custom for tradespeople to pass from house to house, install themselves for days or weeks as members of the family and there and then to make the family's supply of shoes or clothing or other articles. These sixty-seven houses were the high-school in which Rosegger learned to know the peasantry which furnish the material for his art and the source of his inspiration.

About Christmas, 1864, Dr. A. V. Svoboda, the editor of the *Tagespost* in Graz, to whom the young writer had submitted some of his work, interested himself in the young nature-poet and, with the assistance of other friends, notably of Franz Dawidowsky, the director or head-master of the academy at Graz, Rosegger was enabled to enter upon a course of study in the institution mentioned. So meagre had been his opportunities, that his private tutor was obliged to give him preparatory instruction in orthography and arithmetic.

Rosegger's literary career since 1869, has been signally successful. As already stated, his writings are largely the reflections of his own experiences, somehow generalized and idealized, yet engrafted upon a most stubborn realism. He runs through the entire gamut of our emotions. At times he exhibits the most exquisite pathos, at others the kindest, cheeriest humor; now rises before him the awfulness of a soul's agony, now the grandeur of the unchained, devastating elements. But whatever be the situation, he touches the popular heart. Says Bornmüller: "His [Rosegger's] writings have awakened everywhere the