

**PETER SCHLEMIHL; THE
STORY WITHOUT AN
END; HYMNS TO NIGHT**

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Peter Schlemihl; The story without an end; Hymns to night by Adelbert Chamisso & Carodé & Novalis

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ADELBERT CHAMISSO & CARODÉ & NOVALIS

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PETER SCHLEMIHL,

THE STORY WITHOUT AN END.

HYMNS TO NIGHT.

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INTRODUCTION.

“PETER SCHLEMML,” one of the pleasantest fancies of the days when Germany delighted in romance, was first published in 1814, and was especially naturalised in England by association with the genius of George Cruikshank, who enriched a translation of it with some of his happiest work as an illustrator. An account of the book and its author is here reprinted at the end of the tale, as originally given by the translator. To this account one or two notes may be added. Louis Charles Adelaïde de Chamisso de Boncourt was born on the 27th of January, 1781, at the Château of Boncourt, in Champagne, which he made the subject of one of his most beautiful lyrics. He belonged to a family faithful to Louis XVI., that fled to Würzburg from the fury of the French Revolution. Thus he was taken to Germany a child of nine, and was left there when the family, with other emigrants, returned to France in 1801. At fifteen he had Teutonised his name to Adelbert von Chamisso, and was appointed page to the Queen of Prussia. In the war that came afterwards, for a very short

time he bore arms against the French, but being one of a garrison taken in the captured fort of Hamlin, he and his comrades had to pledge their honour that they would not again bear arms against France during that war. After the war he visited France. His parents then were dead, and though he stayed in France some years, he wrote from France to a friend, "I am German heart and soul, and cannot feel at home here." He wandered irresolutely, then became Professor of Literature in a gymnasium in La Vendée. Still he was restless. In 1812 he set off for a walk in Switzerland, returned to Germany, and took to the study of anatomy. In 1813, Napoleon's expedition to Russia and the peril to France from legions marching upon Paris caused to Chamisso suffering and confusion of mind.

It is often said that his sense of isolation between interests of the land of his forefathers and the land of his adoption makes itself felt through all the wild playfulness of "Peter Schlemihl," which was at this time written, when Chamisso's age was about thirty-two. A letter of his to the Councillor Trinius, in Petersburg, tells how he came to write it. He had lost on a pedestrian tour his hat, his knapsack, his gloves, and his pocket handkerchief—the chief movables about him. His friend Fouqué asked him whether he

hadn't also lost his shadow? The friends pleased their fancies in imagining what would have happened to him if he had. Not long afterwards he was reading in *La Fontaine* of a polite man who drew out of his pocket whatever was asked for. Chamisso thought, He will be bringing out next a coach and horses. Out of these hints came the fancy of "Peter Schlemihl, the Shadowless Man. In all thought that goes with invention of a poet, there are depths as well as shallows, and the reader may get now and then a peep into the depths. He may find, if he will, in a man's shadow that outward expression of himself which shows that he has been touched, like others, by the light of heaven. But essentially the story is a poet's whim. Later writings of Chamisso proved him to be one of the best lyric poets of the romance school of his time, entirely German in his tone of thought. His best poem, "Salas y Gomez," describes the feeling of a solitary on a sea-girt rock, living on eggs of the numberless sea-birds until old age, when a ship is in sight, and passes him, and his last agony of despair is followed by a triumph in the strength of God.

"Alone and world-forsaken let me die;
Thy Grace is all my wealth, for all my loss:
On my bleached bones out of the southern sky
Thy Love will look down from the starry cross."

The "Story Without an End"—a story of the endless beauty of Creation—is from a writer who has no name on the rolls of fame. The little piece has been made famous among us by the good will of Sarah Austin. The child who enjoyed it, and for whom she made the delicate translation which here follows next after Chamisso's "Peter Schlemihl," was that only daughter who became Lady Duff-Gordon, and with whom we have made acquaintance in this Library as the translator of "The Amber Witch."

To make up the tale of pages in this little book without breaking its uniformity, I have added a translation of the "Hymns to Night" of Novalis. It is a translation made by myself seven-and-forty years ago, and printed in a student's magazine that I then edited. "Novalis" was the name assumed by a poet, Friedrich von Hardenberg, who died on the 25th March, 1801, aged twenty-nine. He was bred among the Moravian brethren, and then sent to the University of Jena. Two years after his marriage to a young wife, Sophie von Kühn, she died. That was in 1797. At the same time he lost a brother who was very dear to him. It was then—four years before his own death—that he wrote his "Hymns to Night."

H. M.