

**POEMS AND  
BALLADS  
OF HEINRICH HEINE**

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Poems and ballads of Heinrich Heine by Heinrich Heine & Emma Lazarus

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## HEINRICH HEINE.

(BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.)

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HARRY HEINE, as he was originally named, was born in Düsseldorf on the Rhine, December 13th, 1799. His father was a well-to-do Jewish merchant ; and his mother, the daughter of the famous physician and Aulic Counlor Von Gelderu, was, according to her son, a "*femme distinguée*." His early childhood fell in the days of the occupation of Düsseldorf by the French revolutionary troops ; and, in the opinion of his biographer Strodtmann, the influence of the French rule, thus brought directly to bear upon the formation of his character, can scarcely be exaggerated. His education was begun at the Franciscan monastery of the Jesuits at Düsseldorf, where the

teachers were mostly French priests ; and his religious instruction was at the same time carried on in a private Jewish school. His principal companions were Jewish children, and he was brought up with a rigid adherence to the Hebrew faith. Thus in the very seed-time of his mental development were simultaneously sown the germs of that Gallic liveliness and mobility which pre-eminently distinguish him among German authors, and also of his ineradicable sympathy with things Jewish, and his inveterate antagonism to the principles and results of Christianity.

As the medical profession was in those days the only one open to Jews in Germany, the boy Heine was destined for a commercial career ; and in 1815 his father took him to Frankfort to establish him in a banking-house. But a brief trial proved that he was utterly unsuited to the situation, and after two months he was back again in Düsseldorf. Three years later he went to Hamburg, and made another attempt to adopt a mercantile pursuit under the auspices of his uncle, the wealthy banker Solomon Heine. The millionaire, however, was very soon convinced that the "fool of a boy" would

never be fit for a counting-house, and declared himself willing to furnish his nephew with the means for a three years' course at the university, in order to obtain a doctor's degree and practice law in Hamburg. It was well-known that this would necessitate Harry's adoption of Christianity; but his proselytism did not strike those whom it most nearly concerned in the same way as it has impressed the world. So far from this being the case, he wrote in 1823 to his friend Moser: "Here the question of baptism enters; none of my family is opposed to it except myself; but this *myself* is of a peculiar nature. With my mode of thinking, you can imagine that the mere act of baptism is indifferent to me; that even symbolically I do not consider it of any importance, and that I shall only dedicate myself more entirely to upholding the rights of my unhappy brethren. But, nevertheless, I find it beneath my dignity and a taint upon my honor, to allow myself to be baptized in order to hold office in Prussia. I understand very well the Psalmist's words: 'Good God, give me my daily bread, that I may not blaspheme thy name!'"

The uncle's offer was accepted. In 1819 Harry Heine

entered the university of Bonn. During his stay in Hamburg began his unrequited passion for a cousin who lived in that city—a passion which inspired a large portion of his poetry, and indeed gave the keynote to his whole tone and spirit. He sings so many different versions of the same story of disappointment, that it is impossible to ascertain, with all his frank and passionate confidences, the true course of the affair. After a few months at Bonn, he removed to the university of Göttingen, which he left in 1822 for Berlin. There is no other period in the poet's career on which it is so pleasant to linger as on the two years of his residence in the Prussian capital. In his first prose work, the *Letters from Berlin*, published in the *Rhenish-Westphalian Indicator*, he has painted a vivid picture of the life and gayety of the city during its most brilliant season. "At the last rout I was particularly gay, I was so beside myself, that I really do not know why I did not walk on my head. If my most mortal enemy had crossed my path, I should have said to him, To-morrow we will kill each other, but to-night I will cordially cover you with kisses. *Tu es beau, tu es charmant! Tu es l'objet de ma*



*flamme je l'adore, ma belle!* these were the words my lips repeated instinctively a hundred times; and I pressed everybody's hand, and I took off my hat gracefully to everybody, and all the men returned my civilities. Only one German youth played the boor, and railed against what he called my aping the manners of the foreign Babylon; and growled out in his old Teutonic, beer-drinking bass voice, 'At a *cherman* masquerade, a *Cherman* should speak *Cherman*.' Oh German youth! how thy words strike me as not only silly, but almost blasphemous at such moments, when my soul lovingly embraces the entire universe, when I would fain joyfully embrace Russians and Turks, and throw myself in tears on the breast of my brother the enslaved African!"

The doors of the most delightful, intellectual society of Germany were opened to the handsome young poet, who is described in a contemporary sketch as "beardless, blonde and pale, without any prominent feature in his face, but of so peculiar a stamp that he attracted the attention at once, and was not readily forgotten."

The daughter of Elise von Hohenhausen, the translator of Byron, has given us a charming sketch of her

mother's Thursday evening receptions, which Heine regularly attended, and where he read aloud the unpublished manuscripts of his *Lyrical Intermezzo*, and his tragedies, *Almansor* and *Ratcliffe*. "He was obliged to submit," writes Mlle. von Hohenhausen, "to many a harsh criticism, to much severe censure; above all, he was subjected to a great deal of chaffing about his poetic sentimentality, which a few years later awakened so warm a response in the hearts of German youth. The poem, ending, *Zu deinen süßen Füßen* ('At thy sweet feet'), met with such laughing opposition, that he omitted it from the published edition. Opinions of his talents were various; a small minority had any suspicion of his future undisputed poetical fame. Elise von Hohenhausen, who gave him the name of the German Byron, met with many contradictions. This recognition, however, assured her an imperishable gratitude on Heine's part."

Not only his social and intellectual faculties found abundant stimulus in this bracing atmosphere, but his moral convictions were directed and strengthened by the philosophy and personal influence of Hegel, and his sympathies with his own race were aroused to enthusi-

astic activity by the intelligent Jews who were at that time laboring in Berlin for the advancement of their oppressed brethren. In 1819 had been formed the "Society for the Culture and Improvement of the Jews," which, though centered in Berlin, counted members all over Prussia, as well as in Vienna, Copenhagen, and New York. Heine joined it in 1822, and became one of its most influential members. In the educational establishment of the *Verein*, he gave for several months three hours of historical instruction a week. He frankly confessed that he, the "born enemy of all positive religions," was no enthusiast for the Hebrew faith, but he was none the less eager to proclaim himself an enthusiast for the rights of the Jews and their civil equality.

During his brief visit to Frankfort, he had had personal experience of the degrading conditions to which his people were subjected.

The contrast between his choice of residence for twenty-five years in Paris, and the tenacity with which Goethe clung to his home, is not as strongly marked as the contrast between the relative positions in Frankfort of these two men. Goethe, the grandson of the honored