

**"GREAT WRITERS."
LIFE OF
HEINRICH HEINE**

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"Great Writers." Life of Heinrich Heine by William Sharp

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WILLIAM SHARP

**"GREAT WRITERS."
LIFE OF
HEINRICH HEINE**

"Great Writers."

EDITED BY

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LIFE OF HEINE.

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LIFE
OF
HEINRICH HEINE

BY
WILLIAM SHARP

LONDON
WALTER SCOTT, 24 WARWICK LANE
NEW YORK: THOMAS WHITTAKER
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1888

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE comparatively recent publication of Heine's fragmentary Memoirs—not those which he himself tells us he destroyed, but the biographical record which, rather more than a year before his death, he commenced at the instigation of a friend—has thrown a flood of light not only upon the childhood of the poet, but upon the influences which moulded him and the sources to which we may trace certain idiosyncrasies of his genius. In 1867 his enthusiastic biographer, Adolf Strodtmann,* brought together all the then available material relative to the boyhood of Heine, and it was taken for granted that nothing had escaped the industry of his research. Moreover, Heine has himself through out his writings been so prolific of hints and statements concerning his early life that even without the new light of the Memoirs there was no poverty of detail. But in these late "Confessions" we learn for the first time what were the most immediate and most potent factors in the

* From whose "Heine's Leben und Werke" Mr. Stigand's and other briefer accounts in English derive their *data*.

mental and, to some extent, spiritual development of the poet whose extraordinarily complex genius has been to many the source of as much confusion as of intellectual stimulus, of as much bewilderment as charm.

Heine was born on the eve of the nineteenth century, and if we glance no further back than the decade preceding his birth, it will easily be seen at what a crucial period in European history he first saw the light. The long despotism which had held the greater part of the Continent in bondage was rapidly undergoing disintegration, not, as history has proved, to the triumph of democratic freedom, but more or less in that direction.

The nearer we are to history the more impressive are its superficial aspects, and, though the sensibility of childhood to purely extraneous influences must necessarily be very limited, they may be far from impotent in degree. Before his tenth year Heine was a practically imperceptive onlooker amid great events; indeed it may be said that the Spirit of Revolution breathed upon him from his very birth. The first French Empire had been founded, the famous Code Napoleon promulgated. 1806 saw the dissolution of the inchoate German Empire, and the founding of the Rhine Confederation. Battle after battle had quelled the most militant of the German States. The violation of national rights had become the order of the day. Finland was divorced from Sweden; the Tyrol was subdued; Spain had been overrun; and Holland was annexed. The one bright outlook for humanity amid all this bloodshed and bloodthirst, this insane violence and criminal debauchery of potentates, this scornful rape of the liberties of the people, was the

abolition of the traffic in slaves. It was a slight thing to bleeding Europe, but it brought comfort to many brave souls, appearing, as it did, as a rainbow above the blood-red horizon of the immediate future. Patriots could not but dream that a greater abolition of even more ignominious slavery would follow in time, and among these dreamers were none more ardent than the oppressed Jews of Central Europe. Heine was a little seven-year-old Jew when the slave-trade was proclaimed illegal, and even then, as we now know, he was aware that the stain of Israel was deeper than that which was the inheritance of the children of Esau.

Although at the time only in his twelfth year, Heine was not too young to be deeply impressed by the news of the disastrous ending of the French Invasion of Russia. The flames of burning Moscow cast so fierce a gleam across all Europe, from the Volga to the sea-quays of the Loire, that even in the humble town of Düsseldorf there was a little Jewish schoolboy who trembled when he heard of the thousands dying daily amidst the snows, and whose heart was filled with awe at the thought of the silent brooding emperor riding solitarily on his white horse, a more vivid and terrible reality than that other Rider upon a white steed drawn by good Master Albrecht Dürer nigh upon three centuries gone by, which often the little Heinrich had looked at fearfully in his uncle's print collection. One of the most touching passages in the "Reisebilder" is that describing the return march through Düsseldorf of a miserable remnant of one of Napoleon's crack regiments of Grenadiers, and how among them young Heine recognized the French