

**BOHEMIAN
LEGENDS
AND OTHER POEMS**

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Bohemian Legends and Other Poems by F. P. Kopta

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SECOND EDITION

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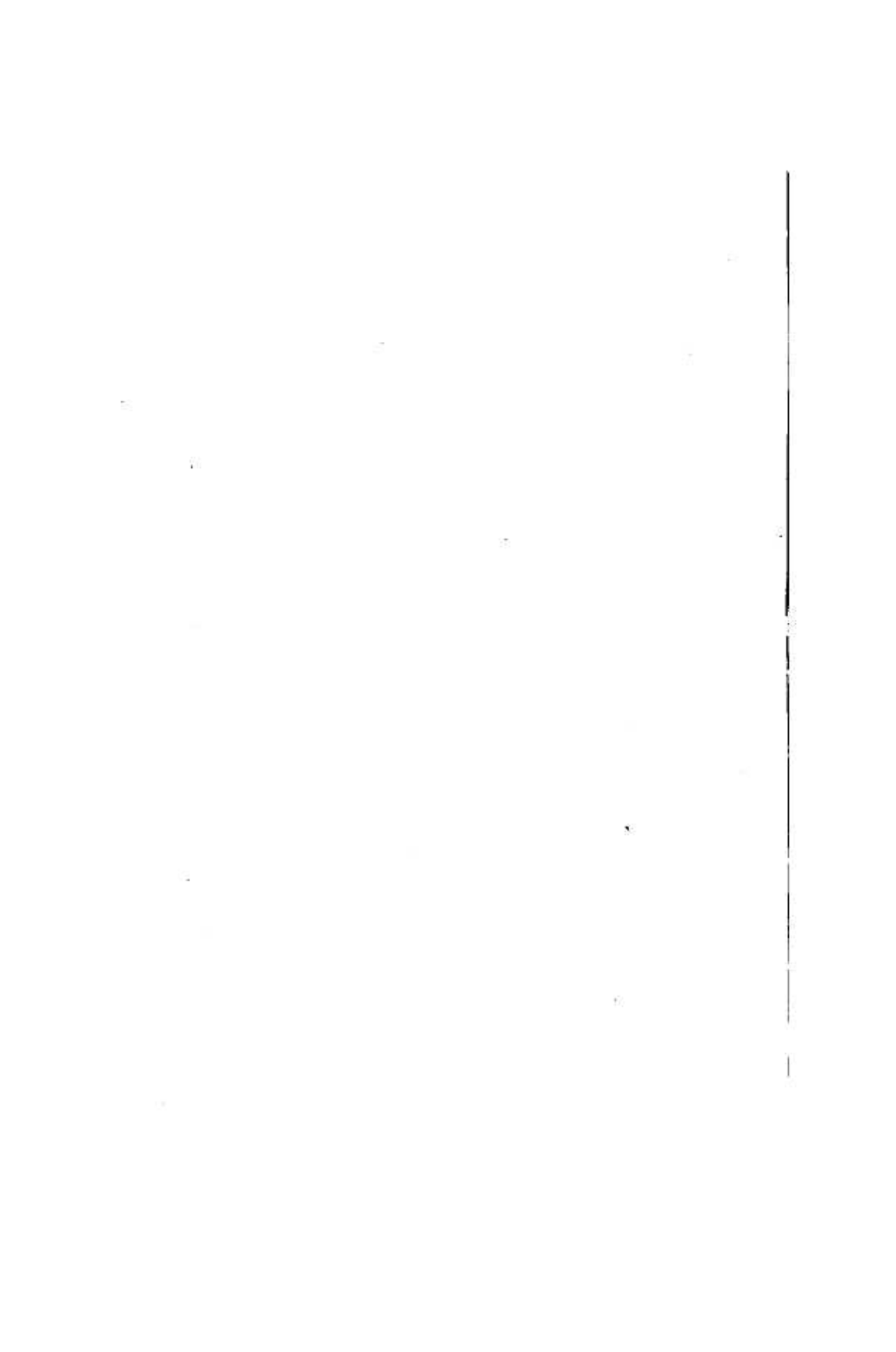
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DEDICATED
TO
VOJTA NÁPRSTEK, ESQ.,

CHIEF OF THE CITY COUNSEL OF PRAGUE.

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INTRODUCTION

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

BOHEMIAN literature is hardly known; indeed, many people do not even know that such a literature exists at all. Of late some praiseworthy efforts have been made by Mr. Wratislaw, M.A. (late fellow of Christ College, Cambridge), and some French writers, to rescue from oblivion at least something of Bohemian literature. In his own words (*Literature of Bohemia*, George Bell Co. 1878), he says: "And at the present time the people of Great Britain are for the most part in a similar state of ignorance with regard to the literature of Bohemia, scarcely believing indeed that it has any literature at all, and utterly at a loss to account for that great intellectual and religious revolution, which, in the beginning of the fifteenth century, shook the power of Rome to its foundation, and animated a Slavonic people of only four millions to maintain successfully a single-handed conflict against the Papacy and the German empire for full two hundred years. And if it yielded at length to overwhelming numbers and weight, it was not until it had been undermined for nearly a century by the crafty and cruel policy of scions of the Hapsburg dynasty upon its throne. * * * It is a very unfortunate circumstance that so much of Bohemian literature has been lost, or rather ruthlessly destroyed by the emissaries and agents of the Church of Rome. * * * It mattered little to such barbarians whether any work that fell into their clutches was of Catholic or Protestant

tendency, if it were but in the detested Bohemian tongue, and one Jesuit boasted on his death-bed that he had destroyed with his own hands no less than sixty thousand volumes in that language." I would also mention a very valuable collection of translations made from the Bohemian by the celebrated English linguist, Dr. John Bowring (*Výbor z básnictví Českého*, *Cheslovak Anthology*). Being a history of the poetical literature of Bohemia, with translations by Dr. John Bowring (London, 1832: Rowland Hunter). He also in his introduction explains why Bohemia has so little literature, and also, in a way, why it never can have. Writing of the battle of *Bílá Hora*, he says: "Though the battle of the White Mountain, in 1620, was fatal only to the reformers of Bohemia, yet its consequences were terrible to the whole Bohemian people. Civil war in its worse shape devastated the land, and so fierce were its visitations that the Jesuit Balbin, in one of his letters, expresses his surprise that after so many proscriptions, exiles, flights, and suffering, a single inhabitant should remain. The language of Bohemia was abandoned—its literature fell into decay. The taint of heresy had so deeply stained the works of more than two centuries, that they were all recklessly condemned to the flames. Banishment was the portion of the most illustrious among the Bohemians, and equal, undistinguishing malediction pursued everything which bore a Slavonian character. Legends of the saints, trumpery discussions about trumpery dogmas—and all those streams of pitiful and useless learning, in which civil and religious despotism seek to engage and exhaust inquiry, were poured over Bohemia." * * * "An ingenious criticism on the popular poetry of the Bohemians may be seen in the *Prague Monthly Periodical* (August, 1827), written by M. Müller, the æsthetic professor, in that capital. There is truth in the observa-

tion, that history and heroism have furnished few subjects for the Bohemian national songs, and, he says, is the more remarkable when they are compared or contrasted with those of other Slavonian races, especially the Servian and the Russian. But how should such songs exist—or rather if they ever existed, how should they be long preserved in a state of society where no man dares to be a Bohemian? That freedom of thought and expression which opens to the poet the great expanse of space and time—the whole field of the past and the future—which allows him to revel in all that is delightful in recollection, and in all that is beautiful in anticipation—is denied to the minstrel of Bohemia. He may neither record the struggles of his ancestors for liberty, nor dream of the day when self-government shall give to his country whatever of happiness she is capable of enjoying. Love, of all the passions which he is permitted to sing, is that which allows the widest scope to his imagination—and love is the ever-ruling subject of his verse. And surely their popular poets have treated this subject with exquisite tenderness and effect." These are the opinions and words of two Englishmen, who trod before me the thorny path of Bohemian literature. Had their works been published in Austria, the same fate that met my book, "*Bohemian Legends and Ballads*," would have met them. They would have been confiscated. Dr. John Bowring, speaking of poor Hanka, says: "It is to be hoped that no impediment will be thrown in his way, which one cannot but fear, from the arbitrary suppression of the fifth volume of his collection. It is not much to allow, that those who have no hope of the future may be permitted to indulge in the memories of the past." This sin I committed, and so my poor little book was confiscated. I can only say that the pub-