

LINDEN BLOSSOMS

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Linden Blossoms by Jeffrey D. Hrbek

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JEFFREY D. HRBEK

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BLOSSOMS**



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BY
JEFFREY D. HRBEK

With a Foreword by Prof. C. F. Ansley
Biographical Sketch



The Torch Press
Cedar Rapids, Iowa
1908
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PUBLIC LIBRARY
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FOREWORD

Among those given the degree of Bachelor of Arts by the State University of Iowa in June, 1907, was Jeffrey Dolezal Hrbek. A month later, he was made head of the newly created Department of Slavonic Languages at the University of Nebraska. In September began a career promising rare service to America and to nations of the Old World. In December the hope of this service was ended by death.

The twenty-five years of life had been primarily training and discipline. The work, accepted in true consecration and devotedly planned and prepared, was yet to do; the achievements that would have made a name widely honored were not completed. Yet the full ability was there, the adequacy gained through labor and renunciation, the steadfast purpose, the fine character. The meaning of a life was already clear. The work is imperfect, not the builder; and the builder is more than the work. By those who knew him, he will be held in thankful remembrance. They wish to know him better; and this volume is printed for them.

Jeffrey Hrbek was often asked to permit the publication of a book of his poems, but he always declined. He was modest; as a friend has said, "modest, but willing to try." Without doubt, a longer life would have yielded as one of many fruits a book of poems which would have

represented mature criticism, skill and vision. But, as in life, the promise is in these early verses; and to those who knew the man, they will be welcome and treasured helps to the appreciation of a beautiful and inspiring life.

The poems in this volume contain nothing that was not Jeffrey Hrbek. There is no posing, no phrasing for its own sake, no least impulse to pretence even of depth and maturity that have not come. There is sincerity, the safe foundation of art and life. There is the poet's gift of sympathy, broad, deep and strong; there is the poet's imagination, giving vital form to thought, experience and vision; and there is the poet's speech, genuine, heart-felt, effective. It was not fluency or lustre that made friends hope for him a place among poets. He had spiritual health and the power and the obligation to give it to others.

C. F. ANSLEY.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF JEFFREY DOLEZAL HRBEK

Each year the immigration reports show that hundreds of natives of lovely little Bohemia, geographically the north-west portion of Austria, come to our American shores. That these sturdy, rosy-cheeked sons and daughters of Cech, with their dreamy melancholy and equally characteristic love of music and rhyme, so typical of the Western Slav, are soon incorporated or blended, as it were, into the American nation, has been shown over and over again. The first generation of the Western Slav in America is, as a rule, the strongest testimony of the moulding influence of our public institutions in which the same training is administered alike to the native born American with generations of English speaking ancestors behind him and to the foreigner whose language and national ideals differ in nearly every detail, from those of the land of his adoption. Yet, though the Cech becomes very early an integral part of the great American public, he preserves an individuality which continues essentially distinct—not at all in a political sense, but by reason of the inherited love of song and music and a native dreamy pensiveness inclining to a deep seriousness and an earnest attitude towards life.

The blending of these distinctive marks of the peculiar national sentiment of the Bohemian and of the vigorous character of the western American seems to have been

perfectly accomplished in the subject of this sketch,—born of parents to both of whom the pure qualities of the western Slav had been imparted in an unbroken line for twenty generations and who, when transplanted, adapted themselves to the conditions and ideals of a new and growing country.

On the twenty-first of August, 1882, Jeffrey D. Hrbek, the youngest son of Joseph and Barbara (Dolezal) Hrbek, was born at Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His parents were among the early settlers of Iowa, coming in the early sixties to the valley of the Cedar. Though both of them had been born in the same province (Tábor) in far-off Bohemia, they first met in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where they were married, removing soon to Champagne, Illinois, and later to Cedar Rapids. Joseph Hrbek was active in the national Bohemian life in Cedar Rapids, being one of the organizers and the first president of the Bohemian Reading Society, an association to which some earnest spirits gave their Bohemian collections of books in order to form the nucleus of a larger library. This pioneer organization, instituted in 1868, is still in existence and numbers many hundreds of volumes in its collection.

In 1887 Mrs. Hrbek was left a widow with five children, the youngest being Jeffrey. Even in his early years he displayed unusual powers of mind and a gentleness of spirit that proclaimed the poetic temperament. He attended the schools of his native city where his thoroughness and quick intellect won for him the attention of his instructors both in the public schools and in the private Bohemian schools that he attended, while his personality attracted all schoolmates. In the high school he came under the influence of Miss Mary G. McClenahan, who