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A PRIMER
OF
GERMAN LITERATURE

BY

HELEN S. CONANT

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PREFACE.

THIS little volume aims at nothing more ambitious than to give an outline of the growth of German literature; but while it may serve as an introduction to a more intimate acquaintance with the subject, the author hopes that readers who, without the leisure to pursue the study in larger works, may wish to know something of the men and women whose genius has illuminated the intellectual progress of Germany, may find this Primer sufficiently comprehensive to satisfy that desire.

The author is gratified to learn from her publishers that a sixth edition of this Primer has been called for, and has sought, by a thorough revision, to make it worthy of continued approval for the object for which it was prepared.

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THE GÖTTINGEN HAINBUND.

In 1770 a young student of Göttingen, named **Heinrich Boie**, published the first number of the *Musen-Almanach*, a journal destined to become famous through the contributions of Goethe and Schiller.

Friedrich Gotter was associated with Boie in this publication, and Wieland was

the most important contributor. Literary differences arose; a rival paper, the *German Museum*, was started at Leipzig. Wieland withdrew his support from the *Almanach*, and Gotter soon followed his example. Boie, seeking for a new associate, became connected with Bürger, who brought with him the support and influence of other young poets. In this way a circle of young men gathered at Göttingen of similar tastes and aims. Their pattern and idol was Klopstock, and they bound themselves in solemn union to support his school of poetry. The Hainbund, the last of the poetic guilds of Germany, was formed in a manner characteristic of the sentimental tastes of these youths. On a moonlight evening they assembled under a clump of oak-trees in an open field, and, joining hands, pledged themselves to support patriotic poetry, and always to act honestly toward each other in matters of literary criticism. They concluded the ceremony by crowning themselves with oak-leaves after the manner of the early Nurembergers.

The Hainbund produced no poets of much note. The best among them was **Gottfried August Bürger** (1748-'94), whose ballads and lyrics are excellent.

Bürger's life was unhappy. He was three times married. His second wife, celebrated as "Molly" in his poems, and to whom he was deeply attached, lived only a year after her marriage with the poet. After her death Bürger was entrapped into a third marriage with a designing, frivolous woman, by whom the remainder of his life was made miserable. During his latter years he was professor at the University of Göttingen.

Bürger's ambition was to be known as a poet of the people, and he succeeded in making himself popular for a time, but Schiller's scathing criticism of his poetry was a death-blow from which he never recovered. The best of his ballads are "Leonora," "The Wild Huntsman," "The Emperor and the Abbot," and the "Song of the Brave Man," the first two of which were well paraphrased by Sir Walter Scott.

"The Wild Huntsman" is one of Bürger's strongest ballads. It is the story of a wicked count who went hunting one Sunday morning when the church-bells were calling the faithful to prayer. He stormed through the fields with his hunters, treading down the poor man's grain and scattering peaceful herds. The good angel at his right hand urges him in vain to turn back.

He follows the counsels of the demon at his left, and sweeps forward in his mad career. He suddenly finds himself surrounded by a hellish pack, with whom he is condemned to hunt forever. These are the closing stanzas:

He flies, he scours thro' wood and plain :
 He shrieks and cries, and aye looks back :
 Thro' the wide world he flies amain,
 Follow and rave the infernal pack ;
 By day to earth's deep caverns keeping,
 High through the air when men are sleeping.

He glares behind him as he flies,
 Harried and driven like the wind ;
 Still on the hell-hounds fixed his eyes,
 Urged madly onward by the fiend ;
 Must see their red throats fiercely gaping,
 Must hear the gnashing and the snapping.

'Twas thus the Magic Hunt began,
 Which will endure till Judgment-day ;
 Full oft by night some outlawed man
 Pales as it scours athwart his way :
 And many a huntsman may behold it—
 But none so daring to have told it !

Johann Heinrich Voss (1751–1826) was the best scholar among the members of the Hainbund. He did good service by his translation of Homer and Virgil, but, as an original poet, he never rose above a dull mediocrity. He wrote songs, and a long idyl in hexameter called “Luise,” tedious, didac-

tic, and wanting in poetic sentiment. Goethe characterizes his poems as "quiet, contemplative, revealing the great culture of their author."

Among other members of the Hainbund may be mentioned Ludwig Hölty, a popular song-writer, Johann Miller, and the brothers Christian and Friedrich Leopold, Counts of Stolberg, the younger of which was the greatest genius, and would have accomplished much good work had he not allowed his intellect to waste itself in extravagant ravings on freedom and freethinking.

Claudius (1740-1815).—Another poet belonging to this same school, although not an actual member of the Hainbund, was Matthias Claudius, who wrote under the *nom de plume* of "Asmus." He was a friend of Herder's, who loved his simplicity and earnest moral nature. His childlike piety is reflected in his "Peasant's Evening Song" and the "Evening Hymn;" while his sparkling fancy overflows in such poems as "Urian's Journey around the World," many short fables in verse, and his famous "Rhine-wine Song," which is still a popular song among German students. The following verses are translated from it:

With garlands trim the bright and brimming glasses,
And drain, with hearty mirth !

Ay, comrades, here's a vintage that surpasses
All other wines on earth !

* * * * *

The Rhine ! the Rhine ! thereon our vineyards flourish,
God bless our noble Rhine !

They grow for us upon its banks, and nourish
This heart-rejoicing wine !

Then drink it off, and drink that happy morrows
May on our pathway shine !—

And if we meet a man oppressed with sorrows
We'll cheer him with our wine.