
Dietegen (German Edition)

Keller Gottfried

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Dietegen.

Novelle von Gottfried Keller.

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

GOTTFRIED KELLER, the author of *Dietegen*, was born at Glattfelden near Zurich, July 19, 1819. Upon his mother devolved the care of bringing up and educating the boy, his father having died when Keller was still a child. With great self-denial she managed to let her son have a thorough education in the schools of his native town and, since the boy showed taste and talent for painting, to put him under the instruction of local artists in Zurich. Then, though suffering actual want herself, she got together money enough to send him to Munich, the centre of German art, to complete his art studies. Keller, however, had overestimated his talents in art and had chosen this calling without being fully clear in his own mind as to the real bent of his genius. Furthermore, being irresolute by nature and made still more so by doubts as to the wisdom of his choice, he could not put his heart and soul into his work. So he squandered his time in idle dallying and neglected all his opportunities, returning home, after an absence of three years, broken in spirit and with none of his ambitious hopes realized. He tried to take a new start and actually began work upon several large paintings, but to no purpose; in his distracted state of mind he could accomplish nothing. He gradually drifted into writing poetry, and when, in 1845, his first published poems attracted favorable attention, it came to him like a revelation that he had finally found his vocation, that he should henceforth devote himself to literature. The story of these early years with their sad experiences and bitter disappointments he has told in his first

novel (*Der Grüne Heinrich*, 1854), which contains the "Confessions" of the author under the pseudonym of 'Heinrich Lee.'

The following year (1846) he published his first volume of poems, which were well received. Two years later the city of Zurich granted him a public scholarship to enable him to continue at Heidelberg and Berlin the studies he had begun at the University in his native city. After an absence of seven years, in which there appeared from his pen a second volume of poems and the novel above-mentioned, he returned home to settle. He was appointed secretary of the Canton of Zurich, remaining in office from 1861 to 1876, when he resigned to resume his literary labors, which had practically rested during his official career. In quiet retirement he devoted himself to literary work with rapidly spreading fame until his death, July 15, 1890.

Keller was well advanced in years and in his literary career before receiving the recognition which his genius deserved. Apart from the fact that he began his career as an author rather late and that he never was a prolific writer, the strong individuality and the peculiarly original style that marked his earlier works could not find favor amongst the larger public. These productions were received enthusiastically by only a small circle; the masses were unable to fully enter into their spirit and appreciate their power. The novelist Auerbach was the first important critic to discover and to herald the rise of this new literary light; other writers were slow to see that there had indeed risen in Keller a star of the first magnitude. In South Germany through Auerbach's and Friedrich Vischer's support he became a popular novelist, but it was not until the publication of his *Sieben Legenden* (1872) that Keller obtained full recognition in Northern Germany. Perhaps even to-day he cannot be called a popular novelist in the ordinary acceptance of the term, though the number of his admirers with all classes is growing steadily. The German critics all agree in

giving Keller a high place amongst German novelists, while those of the "inner circle," including the very highest authorities in German literature, are more than extravagant in their praises of "Meister Gottfried." Paul Heyse in a sonnet proclaims him "a Shakspeare of the novel"; another critic is continually comparing him to the great dramatist; a third would make the appreciation of Keller the test of literary taste and judgment. Keller's versatility in the creation of new plots and new types; his wonderful delineation of human nature; his keen psychical analysis of childhood and womanhood; his power of clear description, which reveals the painter; his simple and agreeable style; his command of the German language which has called out the greatest admiration from all critics for its nicety, its poetical qualities and rhythmical flow; his charming satirical wit and humor, now trifling, now serious, at times grotesque; the optimistic spirit running through all his works in spite of their realism; all these qualities combine to place Keller in the foremost ranks of German novelists, though not, perhaps, to raise him above all others.

As a poet Keller does not rank so highly. His powers are epic and idyllic rather than dramatic and lyrical. His poetry possesses all the virtues of his prose, but it lacks the one essential, poetic fire. His fame must rest upon his novels.

The story *Dietegen* is one of a collection of short village tales (modeled after Auerbach's *Dorfgeschichten*, though intensely realistic), published in two volumes under the name, *Die Leute von Seldwyla*. They are disconnected stories having only the scene of action in common, an imaginary Swiss town Seldwyla by name. *Dietegen* is considered one of the best of Keller's short novels and shows all the excellences and peculiarities of the author's style. The plot is interesting, novel and well developed. The language is carefully and nicely used, simple, poetical, though never rising to great force, and containing enough dialectical forms to

give a local flavor. Every character in the story is clearly and well drawn, true to life though occasionally exaggerated; each person representing a distinct, original type. The analysis of the gradual development of the heroine from early childhood through girlhood into womanhood, a transformation in the school of self-caused misfortune from an imperious little tyrant into the sweet unselfish woman of her later life, shows a master's power of observation and an insight into female character at all periods of life. The descriptions in the story bear witness to the author's careful observation and talent for reproducing realistic pictures from life and nature, whether an elaborate and highly colored painting, as that of the strange town of Ruechenstein with its eccentric inhabitants, or the merest sketch made with a few strokes of the pen, as that of the last scene in the small Italian churchyard. And through the entire story runs a vein of delicious, optimistic humor, perhaps the chief characteristic of the author. For of his character may be said what he says of his heroine's picture:* "It shows a certain deep spirit of seriousness, through which there blossoms a shrewd and gentle humor."

KELLER'S WORKS.

1846.	Gedichte.
1851.	Neuere Gedichte.
1853-1854.	Der grüne Heinrich.
1856.	Die Leute von Seldwylä. Erster Teil.
1872.	Sieben Legenden. (Short stories in style of legends.)
1874.	Die Leute von Seldwylä. Zweiter Teil.
1878.	Züricher Novellen. (Short stories.)
1879.	Der grüne Heinrich. (Revised.)
1882.	Das Singsgedicht. (Short Stories.)
1883.	Gesammelte Gedichte.
1886.	Martin Salander. (A political novel.)
1889.	Gesammelte Werke. (Revised; in ten volumes.)

* Page 75, line 5.

Die Regen.

An den Nordabhängen jener Hügel und Wälder, an welchen südlich Seldwyla liegt, florierte noch gegen das Ende des fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts die Stadt Ruedenstein im kühlen Schatten. Grau und finster war das gedrängte Korpus ihrer Mauern und Türme, schlecht und recht die Rät' und Bürger der Stadt, aber streng und mürrisch, und ihre Nationalbeschäftigung bestand in Ausübung der obrigkeitlichen Autorität, in Handhabung von Recht und Gesetz, Mandat und Verordnung, in Erlaß und

1. 2. Seldwyla. The name of an imaginary town, supposed to be in Switzerland. It is the scene of action of the series of stories contained in Keller's *Die Leute von Seldwyla* and is described by him in the Introduction as follows: Seldwyla bedeutet nach der älteren Sprache einen sonnigen Ort, und so ist auch in der That die kleine Stadt dieses Namens gelegen irgendwo in der Schweiz. Sie steckt noch in den alten gleichen Ringmauern und Türmen, wie vor dreihundert Jahren und ist also immer das gleiche Nest. . . Aber schön ist sie gelegen mitten in grünen Bergen, die nach der Mittagsseite zu offen sind, so daß wohl die Sonne herein kann, aber kein rauhes Lüftchen. Deswegen gedeiht auch ein ziemlich guter Wein rings um die alte Stadtmauer, während höher hinauf an den Bergen unabsehbare Waldungen sich hinziehen.

1. 3. Ruedenstein. Likewise an imaginary town, the name signifying a "rough rocky place" (Modern German, Rauenstein), by its very name strongly contrasted with its neighboring rival Seldwyla.

1. 4. Korpus. Equivalent to Körper.

1. 5. schlecht. In its old signification of *smooth, plain, straightforward*, as seen in *schlicht*. Compare similar meaning in *schlechterdinge*, page 9, line 4; *schlechtes Blech*, page 10, line 25; *schlechtweg*, page 15, line 8.

1. 8. Recht und Gesetz, *justice and law*, the latter referring to the special acts or laws to enforce the former.

Vollzug. Ihr höchster Stolz war der Besitz eines eigenen Blutbannes, groß und dick, den sie im Verlauf der Zeiten aus verschiedenen zerstreuten Blutgerichten von Kaiser und Reich so eifrig und opferfreudig an sich gebracht und abgerundet hatten, wie
 5 andere Städte ihre Seelenfreiheit und irdisches Gut. Auf den Felsvorsprüngen rings um die Stadt ragten Galgen, Räder und Nichtstätten mannigfacher Art, das Rathaus hing voll eiserner Ketten mit Halsringen, eiserne Käfige hingen auf den Türmen, und hölzerne Drehmaschinen, worin die Weiber gedrickt wurden,
 10 gab es an allen Straßenecken. Selbst an dem dunkelblauen Flusse, der die Stadt bespülte, waren verschiedene Stationen errichtet, wo die Übelthäter ertränkt oder geschwemmt wurden, mit zusammengebundenen Füßen oder in Säcken, je nach der feineren Unterscheidung des Urteils.

15 Die Ruechensteiner waren nun nicht etwa eiserne, robuste und schreckhafte Gestalten, wie man aus ihren Neigungen hätte schließen können; sondern es war ein Schlag Leute von ganz gewöhnlichem, philisterhaftem Aussehen, mit runden Bäuchen und dünnen Beinen, nur daß sie durchweg lange gelbe Nasen

1. 2. Blutbann, *penal code*.

1. 3. Blutgericht. About the same as Blutbann, though relating rather to the individual laws and decisions in criminal matters.

1. 3. Kaiser und Reich. The official designation of the chief authority in "The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation," to which Switzerland belonged nominally till 1648, though practically independent since 1499.

1. 9. Drehmaschinen. A kind of cage in which delinquents were exposed to view and which were so arranged that the prisoners were obliged to keep turning them (drillen).

1. 12. Geschwemmt. Cf. note on page 4, line 1.

1. 15. etwa, *foorsooth*.

1. 17. Schlag, *stamp*, taken from coining; also in Geschlecht.

1. 18. philisterhaft, *uncultured, commonplace*. The word has been introduced into English by Matthew Arnold in the form *philistine*. (For the exact meaning see the Introduction to his "Celtic Literature" and his essay on Heinrich Heine.)