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HEINE IN AMERICA**

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**H. B. SACHS & MARION DEXTER LEARNED**

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# HEINE IN AMERICA

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of Doctor of Philosophy.*

*By*

H. B. SACHS

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**TO  
MARION DEXTER LEARNED**





## INTRODUCTION.

The spirit of the world  
Beholding the absurdity of men—  
Their vaunts, their feats—let a sardonic smile  
For one short moment wander o'er his lips.  
That smile was Heine!

—*Matthew Arnold.*

In 1826 the first volume of the *Reisebilder* appeared, and Germany realized instantly that it possessed a new great writer of prose. In 1827 came *Das Buch der Lieder*, and Europe possessed a new great poet. Yet, before these facts could be duly recognized and openly acknowledged in England and America, the genius of Heine had to conquer great prejudices. Heine detested the English; he said that he might settle in England if it were not that he would find two things there—coal-smoke and Englishmen, neither of which he could abide. The air of London felt like an oaken cudgel upon his shoulders. His notes on English institutions, literature, the English attitude were insolently malignant. All this was not calculated to endear him to the leaders of English opinion. Consequently we need not be surprised to find eminent critics joining in the general expression of indignation and abhorrence. "Here was a poet," Kingsley said, "who might or might not be a genius, but who was certainly a leper." Men like Carlyle, who were the interpreters of German literature in England, and whose opinions were regarded as authoritative, did not hesitate to pass judgment of condemnation on Heine. "That blackguard Heine" is Carlyle's only reference to Heine. Everything about him proved, in English eyes, detestable. He was a Jew, and a pagan and a skeptic—a truly delicious compound for the Englishman. He had erected an idolatrous Napoleon legend just when the Napoleonic phantom had been laid comfortably to rest. In England it was long before the fascinating genius of Heine made peace with the spirit of the nation. In Clough and Matthew

Arnold we have the first conscious introduction of Heine's influences into English poetry. The school of Pater and Swinburne adopted Heine's modern and yet intense paganism. The memory of Heine thus gradually overcame the bitter prejudices of English readers. The interest in Heine has increased amazingly in England; thanks in the first place to Matthew Arnold's admirable essay,<sup>1</sup> and next to the writers of various magazine articles, which have appeared in England and in America. Special mention must be made of the excellent contributions towards an enlightened estimate of Heine's works by George Eliot,<sup>2</sup> J. D. Lester,<sup>3</sup> and Charles Grant.<sup>4</sup> We cannot overestimate the great influences which these views have had in American criticisms of Heine. In many instances American critics have either quoted, restated with approbation or wholly appropriated the estimates of Arnold and Grant. Matthew Arnold in his remarkable essay on Heine said: "Heine is noteworthy because he is the most important successor and continuator of Goethe in Goethe's most important line of activity—his activity as a soldier in the war of liberation of humanity. . . . Heine is in the European literature of that quarter of a century, which follows the death of Goethe, incomparably the most important spirit." Such an estimate of Heine from England's most distinguished critic could not fail to dominate American criticism on the works of the poet.

Precisely the same prejudices, which existed in England against Heine, appeared in America in a less bitter form. So long as American criticism on German literature was influenced by Gervinus, Menzel and other detractors of Heine, together with the indignation of the Englishmen, we must not expect to find just and sympathetic criticism. Misconceptions, inaccuracies must arise so long as original thought and independent investigations were deemed unnecessary. Longfellow writes an

<sup>1</sup> *Cornhill's Magazine*, Vol. 8, 1863, pp. 233-249. Reprinted in *Essays on Criticism*.

<sup>2</sup> *Westminster Review*, 1856. Reprinted in her essays.

<sup>3</sup> *Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 6, N. S., 1869, pp. 287-303.

<sup>4</sup> *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 38, 1880, pp. 372-395.

essay on Heine repeating the views of depreciative German critics rather than stating his own. All early critics place implicit confidence in the statements and anecdotes of Strodtmann and have no scruples about inserting absurdities attributed to Heine. One reviewer reports Heine as dead in 1849. Almost all critics quote, in order to add authority to their views, a remark of Goethe given in *Eckermann's Conversations*: "One thing is lacking in him—love." The reference, as one of Mr. Storr's<sup>6</sup> reviewers pointed out, is not to Heine, but to Count Platen. How could anyone acquainted with Heine's genius assume that Goethe would give expression to such an absurd opinion? Mr. Storr pleads as an extenuating circumstance that he was misled by Strodtmann.<sup>6</sup> Mr. William Sharp,<sup>7</sup> the author of the best English monograph on Heine, and Matthew Arnold, both in his *Essays on Criticism*, and in his poem *Heine's Grave*, endorse this absurdity.

If the bitterness of the early American reviewers of Heine's works was due to the English influence and the slavish adherence to views of German critics, Heine did not fail to add a provocation by his fierce and withering satire. Not satisfied with his ridicule of the English, Heine made a virulent attack on Americans. In 1830 he writes to his friend Börne from the lonely little island of Heligoland: ". . . or shall I betake myself to America—to that huge region of free men, where the invisible fetters would be more galling to me than the visible ones at home; and where the most odious of all tyrants—the mob—exercises its brutal authority. Thou knowest what I think of this accursed land, which I used to love before I had understood it. And yet my vocation as liberator compels me publicly to praise and extol this country! Oh, you good German peasants, go to America! You will there find neither princes nor nobles; all men are alike there; all are equally

<sup>6</sup> Heine's *Travel Pictures*, translated by Francis Storr. 2d Ed. London, 1895. Preface, 1867-69.

<sup>7</sup> Adolf Strodtmann, *Heinrich Heine's Leben und Werke*. 2 Bds. Berlin, 'Life of Heinrich Heine, by William Sharp. London, 1888.