

**THE SUNKEN BELL: A
FAIRY PLAY IN
FIVE ACTS; WITH A
CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

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The sunken bell: a fairy play in five acts; with a critical analysis by Gerhart Hauptmann & Frank Chouteau Brown

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GERHART HAUPTMANN & FRANK CHOUTEAU BROWN

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THE
SUNKEN
BELL

A FAIRY PLAY
IN FIVE ACTS

BY

GERHART HAUPTMANN

FREELY RENDERED
INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

CHARLES HENRY MELTZER

WITH A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

BY

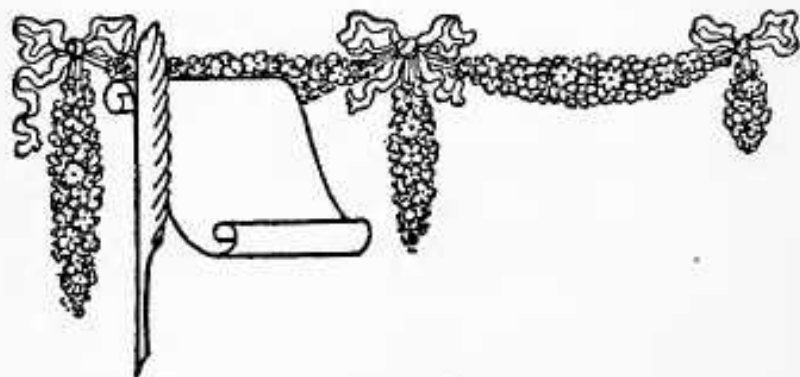
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1914

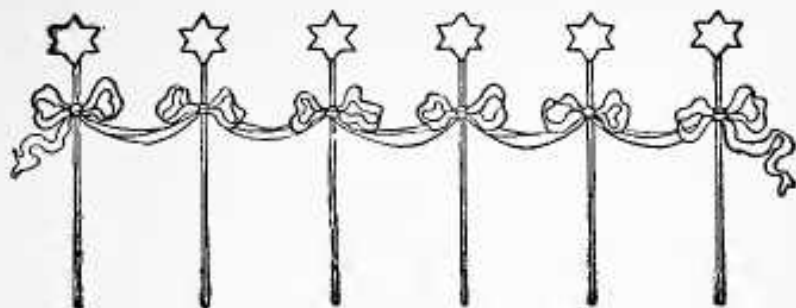
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F O R E W O R D



FIVE years ago, when Gerhart Hauptmann was on a visit to this country, it was my privilege to be associated with him in the memorable production of his "Hannele." I met him for the first time at a little country inn (at Meriden, Connecticut). Instead of the aggressive, self-confident man I had fancied him, I saw a student—almost an ascetic. His boyish air and shrinking gravity were curiously at variance with the great will-power betokened by his set though tortured lips and the experience in his pale and weary eyes. He had a smooth face, a high forehead, crowned with short and careless hair, a well-shaped, sensitive nose. If I had passed him in the street I might have set him down as a fervid young curate, or a seminarist. A painful, introspective, haunted earnestness was stamped upon his face—the face of a thinker, a dreamer, a genius.

Although Hauptmann was then hardly known to most of us, the announcement that "Hannele" was to be performed at the Fifth Avenue Theatre stirred up a storm. Frank bigots, sham philanthropists, hack writers, and political quacks, all of a sudden became filled with pious fears as to the supposed tendencies and teachings of this "Hannele." In the name of religion, they

banded themselves into a League of Ignorance, to prevent, by open action and by secret tricks, the production of what they stupidly and ignorantly proclaimed a blasphemous play. Hauptmann, who had neither invited nor desired the performance of his "dream poem," was dragged into the controversy. The newspapers took sides. At the solicitation of Commodore Elbridge T. Gerry, a Tammany Mayor forbade the appearance of the young actress who had been engaged to impersonate Hannele; while the author, the lessees of the Fifth Avenue Theatre, and the writer of these lines, who had put the drama into English, were threatened with imprisonment. The warfare waged so bitterly against the Théâtre-Libre in France and the Freie-Bühne in Germany had, by some miracle, spread to America. And the attack on the free stage was met here as it had been met abroad. Some hundreds of literary and critical people were bidden to a private representation of the much talked-of play. Next morning the papers, with a few impenitent exceptions, published eulogies of "Hannele." No one was arrested. And the public performance took place.

But the community was not yet ripe for works so strange, and deep, and true, as Hauptmann's dream-poem. "Hannele" failed. Something, however, had been accomplished. A stone had been cast into the theatrical pond, and interest in the new movement which was informing an old art with truth and life had been violently, perhaps too violently, quickened. The production of "Die Weber" ("The Weavers"), at the Irving Place Theatre, soon after renewed and strengthened the impression made by "Hannele." An earlier play, "Vor Sonnenaufgang" ("Before Sunrise"), which had established Hauptmann's reputation in Germany, had already been seen here, at the Thalia Theatre, but had passed almost unnoticed. Ere long, another work by the young master will be presented on the American boards, in English.

That work is the fairy play called "Die versunkene Glocke," of which "The Sunken Bell" is a confessedly free, but, I would fain hope, not unfaithful English transcript.

"Die versunkene Glocke" is the ninth of the ten plays that Gerhart Hauptmann has thus far thought worth preserving. His latest drama, "Fuhrmann Henschel," was interpreted at the Irving Place Theatre only a few weeks ago. His earlier works (in order of succession) are "Vor Sonnenaufgang" ("Before Sunrise"), "Das Friedensfest" ("The Family Festival"), "Einsame Menschen" ("Lonely Lives"), "Die Weber" ("The Weavers"), "College Crampton" ("Our Colleague Crampton"), "Der Biberpelz" ("The Fur Coat"), "Hannele," now known as "Hannele's Himmelfahrt," ("The Assumption of Hannele"), and "Florian Geyer." All have been written, published, and performed within one decade. And each, in its own way, is notable. This, surely, is a great record for a man so young as Hauptmann. At thirty-six—he was born at Ober Salzburg, in Silesia, on the fifteenth of November, 1862—he has wrought wonders.

Unlike some men who have grown famous, in his childhood the future author of "The Sunken Bell" gave little promise. A dreamer from his nursery up, he lounged through school, winning faint praise and but few laurels from his teachers, who seem to have regarded him as hopelessly lazy and by no means brilliant. His father (a substantial innkeeper) no doubt agreed with them. But Carl, young Gerhart's brother, had more faith in the strange, wayward youth who showed so little interest in his books and so much passionate fondness for nature. He saw, or he divined, more than his elders. Years later, when he received a copy of "Vor Sonnenaufgang," he knew that he had not misplaced his confidence. After reading the play, he sent Gerhart a rather remarkable message, congratulating him on having

taken "the first step towards immortality." And it is immortality—no less—that we, who admire Gerhart Hauptmann, believe reserved for him. We see, or we fancy that we see, in the young poet-dramatist, the gift of genius. We hold him to be a legitimate successor of Goethe, and we regard him as the completer of Henrik Ibsen. We hail him as akin to the grand Russian, Tolstói. We feel that he has inherited something—nay, much—of Shakespeare. Even as those writers, he has digged into the soul of humanity. He has probed its sorrow and its joy, its good and its evil, its hope and its despair. And out of all these things he has made plays, like unto no other plays of this our day; plays that may anger or perplex and startle some, but which, once seen, will never be forgotten. His insight into the dark mysteries of the heart is deep, his sympathy with all his kind is wide, his art rings true. Yet Ibsen himself has hardly been more combated, and hated, and decried, than Gerhart Hauptmann. Some have professed to take him for an atheist. Others have called him a nihilist. But he is neither. He is only a great artist, a true poet, and—a dramatist. Long before the appearance of "Vor Sonnenaufgang" he described his aims:

Dir nur gehorch ich, reiner Trieb der Seele!
 Des sei mein Zeuge, Geist des Ideales,
 Das keine Rücksicht eitler Art mich bindet.
 Ich kann nicht singen wie die Philomele.
 Ich bin ein Sänger jenes düstern Tales,
 Wo alles Edle beim Ergreifen schwindet.

Du aber, Volk der ruhelosen Bürger,
 Du armes Volk, zu dem ich selbst mich zähle,
 Das sei mir ferne, dass ich deiner fluche!
 Durch deine Reihen gehen tausend Würger,
 Und dass ich dich, ein neuer Würger, quäle,
 Verhüt es Gott, den ich noch immer suche!

At school he was not happy. Nor was it till he went to the University of Jena with his brother Carl that he found the companionship he needed for the unfolding of his genius. At Jena, to his sorrow, he became steeped in the prevalent Darwinism of his fellow students. But his