

Classic Poetry Series

Peter Rosegger
- poems -

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Peter Rosegger(31 July 1843 – 26 June 1918)

Peter Rosegger was an Austrian poet from the province of Styria. He was a son of a farmer and grew up in the forests and fields. Rosegger (or Rossegger) went on to become a most productive poet and author as well as an insightful teacher and visionary. In his later years, he was honoured by officials from various Austrian universities and the city of Graz (the capital of Styria). He was nearly awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913 and is (at least among the people of Styria) something like a national hero to this day.

Early life

Rosegger was born as the first of seven children of a peasant couple in the village of Alpl, now part of Krieglach, Styria. Since this little village, consisting only of a handful of farms, had neither a church nor a school, he and the other children would have had to walk to the larger village, St. Kathrein, in order to attend either. The way there takes two hours and as a result, Peter had very limited education, largely provided by a wandering teacher who taught him and other children from the region for a year and a half. His physical constitution was not sufficient for him to become a farmer like his father, as he was often sick and rather frail in general. So, he became understudy of a traveling tailor at the age of seventeen.

Success as a writer

His interest in literature prevailed, although he earned little money. He spent what he could afford on books and soon began to write himself. Eventually, he was discovered by the publisher of the Graz-based newspaper, Tagespost, published by Dr. Svoboda. He realized Rosegger's talent as an author and enabled him to attend the Akademie für Handel und Industrie (Academy for Trade and Industries) in Graz. There, Peter von Reininghaus became his mentor. Von Reininghaus was a wealthy and influential industrialist, and Rosegger had a personal friendship with him for the rest of his life. However, he had a hard time studying, as he was not used to attending school regularly, and had little, and fragmentary, knowledge in many disciplines. He left the academy in 1869 at the age of twenty-six.

Soon after that, he was offered a chance to publish his literary works, namely by Gustav Heckenast, who had worked with Adalbert Stifter before. Peter Rosegger accepted, and his first book, Geschichten aus der Steiermark ("Tales from Styria"), was released in 1871. From then on, all of his works were published by

Heckenast. Rosegger changed to a new publisher twice after Heckenast's death, eventually ending up with Ludwig Staackmann, who made him a most generous offer. He had always been very faithful towards his publishers, and the relationship between them was one of friendship and familiarity. Rosegger started to publish Heimgarten in 1876, a monthly journal with articles and stories for the people of the country, whose main representative and interpreter he was.

Character and private life

In 1873, Rosegger married Anna Pichler. They had two children, but the marriage was short - Anna died giving birth in 1875. This affected Peter to a great degree, as is obvious from various letters he wrote to friends in that time. In 1879, Rosegger married again: Anna Knauer, with whom he had three more children and a very harmonious house life. She also cared for him during his many times of sickness. He developed many brilliant and extraordinary ideas from the context of his time, and kept contact with unconventional personalities. Rudolf Falb, the creator of the popular "lunisolar flood theory," was not only his school teacher but remained a life-long friend. Although feeling strongly connected to his rural homelands, he was a liberal thinker with conservative roots. Fascinated by machines and technology, and being a faithful Christian, he showed a sharp eye for the potentials and advantages, as well as for the dangers and downsides of both the church and the economic development of the late 19th century. As an author he aimed to entertain, to teach and also to help. He called for donations publicly at various occasions or used his influence in academic circles, thus contributing to the founding of one school (in Alpl, his home village), the building of two churches (one in Mürzzuschlag and one in St. Kathrein, rebuilt after it burned down) and other benevolent actions.

Honors

In 1903, at his 60th birthday, he was honoured by receiving the "Ehrendoktorwürde" (Doctor honoris causa) of the University of Heidelberg. The University of Vienna and the University of Graz also awarded him with similar decorations, and the German emperor Wilhelm II, as well as the Austrian emperor Franz Josef I of Austria gave Rosegger medals of honour (namely, the "Kronenorden 2. Klasse" and the "Ehrenabzeichen für Kunst und Wissenschaft"). He became citizen of honour in Graz and Vienna, and Franz Josef's successor Karl presented the ex-farmer-boy-now-national-poet with the Franz-Joseph-medal, a high-ranking accolade for an author.

Late life and death

Rosegger, who had been ill frequently and seriously, travelled back to his home in Krieglach in May 1918 in order to die where "the beautiful legend of the forest-farmer boy" had once begun, in the woodlands of the Styrian Alps. His birth house and the former "Forest School" (Waldschule) he helped to found in Alpl in 1902 are museums today. The region where he came from (the mountains of the Fischbacher Alps south of Krieglach and Mürzzuschlag) are now unofficially named "Waldheimat" ("Home in the Forest") after the name he gave it himself. The tourism industry in the region still profits from Rosegger's enduring popularity among readers.

Gedicht Zum Neuen Jahr

Peter Rosegger

Poem For The New Year

Peter Rosegger

The Other, Too, Is You

What once Earth to me presented
she's already asking back;
comes to take what she had granted,
grasping tender speck by speck.

Strange: the more of hurts I carried
the more beauty showed the land;
What I fought for, gains of merit,
softly falling from my hand.

And the lighter I am getting,
the more heavily I walk:
'Can't you, from your moistened setting,
spare me, Earth? I beg you, talk!'

'No, I cannot spare you, Brother,
need you for the other one;
out of you I'll feed the other:
let him also see the sun.

But relax and do not rue:
For the Other, too 'tis You!'

Peter Rosegger