

Hermann Hesse

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HERMANN HESSE

Seltsam, im Nebel zu wandern!
Einsam ist jeder Busch und Stein,
Kein Baum sieht den andern,
Jeder ist allein.

Voll von Freunden war mir die Welt,
Als noch mein Leben licht war;
Nun da der Nebel fällt,
Ist keiner mehr sichtbar.

Wahrlich, keiner ist weise,
Der nicht das Dunkel kennt,
Das unentrinnbar und leise
Von allen ihn trennt.

Seltsam, im Nebel zu wandern!
Leben ist Einsamsein.
Kein Mensch kennt den andern,
Jeder ist allein.

On 11th August the novelist and poet Hermann Hesse was put to rest at the churchyard of Sant Abbondio at Montagnola-Gentilino — to rest where three of his friends are already at peace, the writer Hugo Ball and his wife and the conductor Bruno Walter. His widow, two of his sons and many friends and relatives from Germany and Switzerland followed the coffin. Music by Palestrina and Mendelssohn introduced the service, and a number of notable personalities expressed appreciation of the deceased.

The telegram which the President of the Confederation Paul Chaudet sent Hesse's widow expressed the feeling of all who mourn the death of this great writer. "We, too, owe him lasting gratitude for his life's work in which he knew how to form the essential spiritual values of Europe and Asia, of past and present, into a valid synthesis, marked by his strong personality. Through this he has given support and strength to many in these days of stress and strain."

Hermann Hesse, also known under the pen-name of Hermann Lauscher, was born at Calw in Wuerttemberg (Germany) on 2nd July 1877, the son of a missionary of Estonian origin. His mother, the widow of an Indian missionary, was a great lover of poetry and music. When Hermann Hesse was four years old the family moved to Basle where he spent his first school years. Later they returned to Calw and in 1891 he entered the evangelical seminary (Klosterseminar) of Maulbronn. He was most unhappy there and left after seven months of inner conflict and severe punishment. But the more liberal college (Gymnasium) at Cannstatt produced similar results, and after more changes and escapades he managed to persevere for eighteen months at a machine workshop and tower-clock factory. At the age of 18 he joined a bookshop at Tuebingen as an apprentice. After four years he went to Basle as a bookseller's assistant.

That is where he began his literary career as a journalist and reviewer. He loved walking and travelling and started studying the old Italian art of novel writing. He wrote his first poetry and the biographies of Boccaccio and Francis of Assisi. The well-known publisher Samuel Fischer asked him for more manuscripts and this was most reassuring to Hesse who was still suffering from the unhappy experiences and failures during adolescence. In

1904 he wrote his first novel "Peter Camenzind" which was a great success.

Of Hesse's many works limited space allows only a few to be mentioned. He wrote novels and tales, poetry and essays, even fairy stories. The fruit of two years of philosophical studies and meditation in the East appeared in several of his volumes, chiefly in "Siddhartha" (1922). His second successful novel was "Rosshalde", and he produced a volume of tales "Klingsors letzter Sommer", the novel about a tramp "Knulp". The story of a childhood he wrote under a pen-name and it was this book which left such a deep impression on the young generation returning from the First World War. "Der Steppenwolf" dates from 1927 and "Narziss und Goldmund" from 1930, both typical examples of his art. Specially the latter shows Hesse's feelings for the romantic side of nature.

During the Nazi Regime he published several volumes, notably "Kleine Welt" (1933) and "Vom Baum des Lebens" (1934), as well as essays and poetry. In the Third Reich reprints of his works were prohibited in Germany.

In 1943 his long novel in two volumes "Das Glasperlenspiel" was published. In it he takes up his basic theme of man's education and self-determination. Eleven years he had worked on it, and it can be regarded as his *Magnum Opus* for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946.

After the war he wrote "Schön ist die Jugend", "Dank an Goethe", a volume of contemplations "the European" and a collection of studies "War and Peace".

As early as 1936 Hesse was awarded the Gottfried Keller Prize, and ten years later the Goethe Prize of Frankfurt a/M. He was made an honorary citizen of his place of origin, Calw, on his 70th birthday, at the same time as Berne University conferred an honorary degree on him. Braunschweig awarded him the Wilhelm Raabe Prize in 1950, and five years later he received the Order of Merit, and the Peace Prize of the German Book Publishers. Finally, on his recent 85th birthday Montagnola made him an honorary citizen. For over forty years he had been resident there.

Swiss citizen of long standing, he was, so "The Times" claims in his obituary, still intensely German in his mental make-up, though he had been an outsider even in Germany, "withholding himself from literary cliques and movements". "The Times" also stated that Hermann Hesse commanded a larger public in Germany than perhaps any other contemporary writer. But also in "The Times" a friend writes "Was he so German in spirit? We always thought that his qualities were essentially Swiss with their awareness of several nationalities within one border and a concept of neutrality that is not quite the same as pacifism."

Hesse was widely travelled and counted amongst his friends many eminent personalities, such as Romain Rolland and Thomas Mann. He was also a landscape painter, and all his life he had helped refugees. As a man he was gay and extremely kindhearted. I possess his idyllic essay "Stunden im Garten" (1936). It is one of my favourites. I find his gaiety, his kindness, his philosophical musings, his great patience and his love of nature in it — anything more peaceful is hard to come by. I have just re-read it — it seems right that Hesse's remains should rest near his garden in that part of our country which he loved so much.

Mariann.
(Partly based on reports
from A.T.S.)