



***JOSEPH VICTOR  
VON SCHEFFEL***

***GAUDEAMUS!  
HUMOROUS  
POEMS***

**Joseph Victor von Scheffel**

# **Gaudeamus! Humorous Poems**

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# TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

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This volume contains the greater portion of the poems which constitute the *Gaudeamus*--'Let us be jolly'--of Joseph Victor Scheffel, who is at present the most popular poet in Germany. Without being presented as such, these ballads, though complete in themselves, form in their connection a droll history of the world and of humanity--advancing from the early outburst of Granite and Basalt, through the boulder of Gneiss to the Ichthyosaurus and Megatherium. Man then appears as a dweller in the pre-historic Swiss-Lacustrine-dwelling on poles, where he bitterly bewails the misfortune of being a pioneer of civilization, and as one born before the invention of modern comforts.

'In stocks I would gladly grow wealthy,  
But exchange is not yet understood:  
A good glass of beer would be healthy,  
But never a drop has been brewed.'

The Early Phœnician is set forth in a droll song (originally published under the title of *Jonah*) which describes the disasters that befell a guest who could not pay his bill,--presented in arrow-head or cuneiform characters on six tiles. The old Etruscan era and that of the ancient German are also painted in a style which, could the truth be known, would probably be found as genially true to life as it is to the world-old, infinite spirit of Humour, which moved man in the

same measure in ancient Egypt as in modern England. In these, as in his serious poems of a more ambitious nature, Joseph Victor Scheffel manifests a remarkable insight into the inner real life of the past. Like a geologist, or poet, he infers from trivial relics the probable feelings and habits of obscure beings or races, or at least imagines them, and assimilates them to modern usages with rare tact. These ballads have been printed, sung, and imitated in Germany of late years to a great extent. Scheffel has in fact founded a school of humorous poetry--that of the burlesque-scientific and historical--which, though by no means pretentious, has at least made the world laugh heartily. I sincerely trust that the following translations will induce the reader to become familiar with the original.

I have omitted a few poems from the *Gaudeamus*, as deficient in the peculiar spirit of *fun* which characterises all that are here given; but should the public manifest its approbation of this work, they may be found in another edition. In their place I have given translations of a number of eccentric German-student songs of the new school, nearly all of which have found their way into the popular German song-books of late years.

CHARLES G. LELAND.

*London, October, 1871.*

# **JOSEPH VICTOR SCHEFFEL.**

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# **AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR.**

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*Joseph Victor Scheffel* was born in the year 1826, at Karlsruhe, in Baden, where his father, a veteran officer, had taken up his residence. He received his first instruction in the 'Lyceum' of his native place, a high school which enjoyed at the time a splendid reputation, and was considered the best in the Grand Duchy of Baden. Whatever may have been said against one or the other of the professors, the majority were remarkable men, knowing how to awaken the mental activity of their pupils. The social life of the 'Lyceists' was free from ordinary constraints; and the merry youths enjoyed many privileges, which at other places were strictly reserved for University students.

Nor did they lack any opportunities for intellectual improvement in the capital of Baden. The theatre was then excellent, and the 'Lyceists' visited it regularly. Even politics agitated the mind of this young generation. It must be remembered that thirty years ago Baden was the focus of political life, to which the eyes of every German patriot was directed; and although Mannheim was the seat of the agitation, the chamber united at Karlsruhe a number of



men, whose names will ever be held in respect in Baden: Itzstein, Welcker, Bassermann, Hecker, Mathy, Soiron.

Joseph Victor passed with all the honours, and as one of the best pupils, all the classes of the Lyceum, and then devoted himself to the study of law at the University of Heidelberg. There he joined a so-called academical society of progress, without, however, taking part in the Baden revolution, which drove so many of his comrades into exile.

After having passed the Government examination we find our young poet as '*Rechtspraktikant*' (practitioner of law) in the little town of Säckingen. Well might the little provincial place appear dull to a student coming from the liveliest university of Germany. Still the splendid scenery of the environs of Säckingen compensated for many shortcomings. With the numerous friends he won there, Scheffel made frequent excursions through the valleys which stretch in all directions from the Feldberg and the Rhine. He proved to be a bold and even reckless swimmer, passing many a time through the bridge of Säckingen, saluting the bystanders as he accomplished this daring feat.

In the office of his court, located in an old convent of nuns, Scheffel found a number of old documents and MSS., and there his first poem was written, based on one of them: '*Der Trompeter von Säckingen. Ein Sang vom Oberrhein.*'

The success of this first production was complete. It was published at the time when the 'incense perfume of the pious soul,' as Scheffel calls the poems of Oskar von Redwitz, had its firmest hold on the misguided taste of the public. In comparison with this sickly, effeminate poetry, the simple, natural, and yet intensely poetic production of

Scheffel afforded something like the enjoyment of fresh mountain air after that of a hot-house. It is true, Scheffel was at first entirely ignored by the Berlin and Leipzig critics who assume to sit in judgment over modern German literature (he has, up to the present day, not even found a place in Brockhaus's *Conversations-Lexicon*), but the unsophisticated public recognized the kernel of pure poetry in Scheffel's unpretentious verses; and his 'Trompeter' is at present the most popular poem in Germany. Its story is told with extreme simplicity and humour, in blank trochees with interspersed rhymed poems; it leads us to the forest-town of Säckingen during the second half of the 17th century, and into the neighbouring castle of a baron, whose only daughter is wooed and, at last, won by a young musician, a merry youth, who had been expelled from the University of Heidelberg on account of his noisy behaviour.

Nothing can be more humorous than the account of the ex-student's life at Heidelberg, of his duels and his libations beneath the big tun of the castle,

Bei dem Wunder unserer Tage,  
Bei dem Kunstwerk deutschen Denkens,  
Bei dem Heidelberger Fass,

or the historical episode of the foundation of Säckingen by Saint Fridolin, an Irish apostle, sent by Chlodwig with the following message to convert the Allemannic Germans:

Hatt' sonst nicht die grösste Vorlieb  
Für die Kutten, für die Heil'gen,  
Aber seit mir die verfluchten

Scharfen Alemannenspiesse  
Allzunah um's Ohr gepfiffen,  
Seit der schweren Schlacht bei Zülpich,  
Bin ich and'rer Ansicht worden,  
--Noth lehrt auch die Könige beten.  
Schutz drum geb' ich, wo ihr hinzieht.  
Und empfehl' hauptsächlich Euch am  
Oberrhein die Alemannen.  
Diese haben schwere Schädel,  
Diese sind noch trotz'ge Heiden,  
Macht mir diese fromm und artig--

or the meditations of the cat of the castle, which, as  
silent witness of the caresses of the two lovers, thus broods  
over the enigma of the kiss:

Warum küssen sich die Menschen?  
S'ist nicht Hass, sie beissen sich nicht,  
Hunger nicht, sie fressen sich nicht.  
S'kann auch kein zweckloser blinder  
Unverstand sein, denn sie sind sonst  
Klug und selbstbewusst im Handeln;  
Warum, also, frag' umsonst ich,  
Warum küssen sich die Menschen?  
Warum meistens nur die Jüngern?  
Warum diese meist im Frühling?  
Ueber diese Punkte werd' ich  
Morgen auf des Daches Giebel  
Etwas naher meditiren.

In the delineations of the various characters of the 'Trompeter' Scheffel exhibits a gift of true poetical conception, a warmth of feeling, and a power of description, equalled by few of our modern poets; indeed, the characters rise before our mind with such truthfulness, as the idealized types of the people in that corner of Germany, that one might almost believe one had met all of them during one's wanderings in the Black Forest, whether it be Werner, the merry trumpeter, or the crusty old baron, or Anton, the respectable 'Hausknecht.'

Scheffel did not remain long in Säckingen. He quitted the Government service, and, after passing some time in travels in South Germany, settled at Donaueschingen as Keeper of the Archives of Prince Fürstenberg. This town is likewise exceedingly small, the environs are bare and not to be compared with the romantic scenery of the Upper Rhine; but at the court of the refined princes of Fürstenberg there were at all times remarkable men, and the library afforded, in MSS. and documents, ample means for the study of Old German history, language, and literature.

To this study Scheffel now devoted himself, and, in combining his qualities as a poet with that of an historian, created his famous novel Ekkehard. Based chiefly on the Chronicles of the Monastery of St. Gallen, it gives us a faithful picture of the social life in South Western Germany--the most ancient seat and nucleus of German civilization during the tenth century,--in retaining and reproducing all the naïveté, freshness, and simple-minded views which are the charms of these celebrated chronicles, whilst the poet's figures are marked with that distinct individuality which