

A TRANSLATION OF EMIL RITTERSHAUS'S "WESTFALENLIED"

BY NORMAN BARRY

Apart from an imposing bronze statue* in his hometown of Barmen, Emil Rittershaus is nowadays, if at all, only remembered for a poem he composed in 1869. It should be noted parenthetically that Rittershaus himself suspected that much of his poetry would be short-lived. He realized that his widespread popularity throughout the German Empire was in many respects due to his talent as a public speaker.

An exception to Rittershaus's prophecy is his "Song of Westphalia." It might more appropriately be rendered as "The National Anthem of Westphalia." It was written in the town of Iserlohn, about 18 miles east of Düsseldorf, at the Post Inn. The chimes of Iserlohn at the Unnaer Platz [Unna Square] located only a stone's throw from the Post Inn play the melody of Rittershaus's poem every day at noontime. With regard to "national anthems," it should be pointed out that Rittershaus corresponded for years with a good friend, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, the poet who composed the German National Anthem while in Helgoland in 1841.

Unfortunately, the "Westfalenlied" has apparently never been translated into English. As an attempt to make the poem accessible to an English-speaking audience, a poetic translation has been ventured upon. Although some images have necessarily been replaced so as to maintain the general "melody" of the song, it is hoped that such literary "license" will not be regarded as literary "mutilation."

A second reason for the translation is Rittershaus's later relation to Ada Linden. Both Ada Linden (whose actual name was Luise Förster) and Emil Rittershaus were Westphalians. His third stanza exalts the caliber of women in Westphalia. Sadly, this third stanza has been deleted for nearly a century due to giggling girls with blushing faces who might think the poem hopelessly out of date.

"The Song of Westphalia ["Westfalenlied"], which has been set to music by at least six different composers since 1869, contains the homey expression "Grüß' dich Gott, Westfalenland!" (line 9 *and* the concluding line). On the one hand, this simply means "Hello, Westphalia!". However, "God's saving grace" seems vaguely implicit. The reason for calling attention to this expression, which this translator has with no sense of compunction simply "swept under the rug," is that Rittershaus originally entitled the poem "Grüß' dich Gott, Westfalenland!" rather than "Westfalenlied."

The honesty and lack of superficiality of Westphalian men and the faithfulness and sincerity of Westphalian women make up the heart and soul of the poem. The reference to mining in the first stanza reminds us of the fact that Ada Linden's father, whom she lost while only a small child, had also been a deputy superintendent at a Westphalian mine. Whether the "herds" in the first stanza refer to grazing cattle, flocks of sheep or playful goats is also a moot question – Ada Linden as a child did look after some frolicking goats. The poem exalts the sterling character of Westphalians and the geography that has moulded them and the traditions they have clung to. Despite some backbiting comments on a supposedly old-fashioned view of what makes a woman desirable, its success in engendering a sense of pride in Westphalia has – throughout the years – remained largely unchallenged.

*A picture of the statue: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Emil_Rittershaus

On the same page, the tombstone of Emil and Hedwig Rittershaus is depicted. It bears the inscription:

“Die Liebe hoeret nimmer auf,” or “Love never dies.” Hedwig Rittershaus bore her husband seven children, one of whom died in childbirth.

**THE SONG OF WESTPHALIA
(1869)**

BY

**EMIL RITTERSHAUS
(1834 – 1897)**

Let your praise ring out to the Majestic Rhine,
For from her banks the grape does grow,
Her hills bring forth iron from every mine,
There my mother’s lullaby was sung long ago.

Upon the rocky hilltops the fir trees stand,
In the green valley herds of cattle graze
Whilst guardians of farmhouse and the land
The oaks their branches to the heavens raise.

Here is the cradle where my life began:
Westphalia, to thee my heart returns again and again!

Here sweet speeches are out of place,
And pretty words are not our style;
With a pretense of a warm embrace
And fraternal kiss we do not beguile.

If you want to test our soil beneath your feet,
Then search our hearts for hidden conceit —
Then look us straight in the eye!
There you will see — a Westphalian cannot lie!

Westphalian men do not mess
With childish games and childishness.

And our womenfolk, a Westphalian maid,
With eyes as blue as heaven’s deepest hue,
She does not weave the intrigues of a jade
To spend a coquettish hour pretending to be true.

In her soul a gentle angel holds sway
Both by night and by day;
Faithful in sweetest bliss and in direst pain
And even till death her true heart will reign. —

A man will feel like an earl
Whose arm can clasp a Westphalian girl!

May God protect thee, o’ soil so red,
Teutonic land where the legends of Wittekind thrive;
Till my body be rendered unto dust among the dead,
I from my homeland my greatest pleasure derive!

O’ Westphalia, land of the Mark,
Strong as your oak where sings the lark;
Even pale lips of the dying bless thee -
In the final hour, one last soliloquy!

Land between the Rhine and Weser streams,
Westphalia, I greet thee – o’ land of my dreams!

TRANSLATED BY NORMAN BARRY
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