

German Literature in Bessarabia 13—Ferdinand Wagner

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To have a better understanding of the following translation, it would serve you well if you were able to view German Literature in Bessarabia 01—Introduction.

[Note: Comments in square brackets in the document are those of the translator.]

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[Translation Begins]

Ferdinand Wagner

Where the younger representatives of German literature in Bessarabia are compiled—even if in a selection that is more random than exhaustive—the name of Ferdinand Wagner must not be missing. Sarata is his homeland community, where he still lives today and pursues his profession. He, too, came from the Werner School and is a teacher, just as the Werner School and the teaching profession, which in our country belong firmly together, seem to be to a certain extent the prerequisite for any creative and literary activity in the two decades after the World War. The examples of W. Mutschall, who even today, in his 82 years of life, knows how to guide the pen (*Feder*) in a stimulating and skillful way—we also provide proof of this on page 91—and of A. Mauch, whose services to writing in Bessarabia are honored elsewhere in this yearbook, have repeatedly inspired the pupils of the Werner School to new activities. Ferdinand Wagner is above all a storyteller; he collected the traditions and sayings of his homeland and edited and published them in a folksy-informative way. He has developed a very fruitful activity in this field and has by this also earned honest merits for the history of his homeland. In the *Deutschen Zeitung Bessarabiens* (DZB) and the various years of our *Kalender*, as well as in the *Heimat-Kalender* there are many valuable contributions from his pen, from which we present one as follows.

The Legend of the Big Hill

Silent and immovable, the great cannon hill stands on the heights near Brienne, looking far up and down the valley of the Kogálnik; it also overlooks the valley of the Schag. It towers over all the cannon hills in the area, which are scattered here and there in the valley and on the steppe. Many centuries have passed over it. And all these times, every summer, the hot sun burned down on it mercilessly, and countless thunderstorms poured their floods on it. But today it stands as before, mute and immobile, at its height and looks after the travelers.

In the lap of the hill under a vault is buried a very famous hero of ancient times with his life's horse and his whole family and servants. Many weapons, rich gold and silver jewelry and various devices were placed with him in the grave. Even food and drink were placed at their heads. But he finds no rest in his crypt. Of this, every grandmother knows to agree.

When the moon lights up the area at night and floods the plain with its silver, then steppe and valley are silent and nurture in the deep sleep of the night's rest. On the big hill, however, something stirs; shadows flit back and forth; there is soft crunching in the grass. How many people there have been who were frightened when they approached the hill at this time.

When the moon has gone down and the silent stars twinkle over the sleeping world, the top of the hill comes alive. All the inhabitants of the hill then sit around the depression at the top of the hill—all eerie figures—and wag their heads. The most powerful among them, with a huge black moustache, squats in the middle. That is what the girls and boys tell each other on Sunday afternoons.

But if the wind blows through the eerie steppe night and drives the storm clouds in the sky and the witches over the fields, then the hill man becomes wild and angry. He sits down on his horse, his eyes gleam, in his hand he swings his curved saber and his comrades moan miserably. Then unsettled figures rise up from the other cannon hills in the valley and on the steppe all around and sharpen their knives.

It is said that they do not like the fact that the people in the steppe live so peacefully and work so hard. They would much prefer war and famine. But it does not help them. As soon as the day breaks and the farmer goes into the vineyard with the hoe or drives into the field with the plow, the dark spirits disappear back into their gloomy chambers.

This is something which is knowingly reported throughout the whole area.

[Translation Ends]