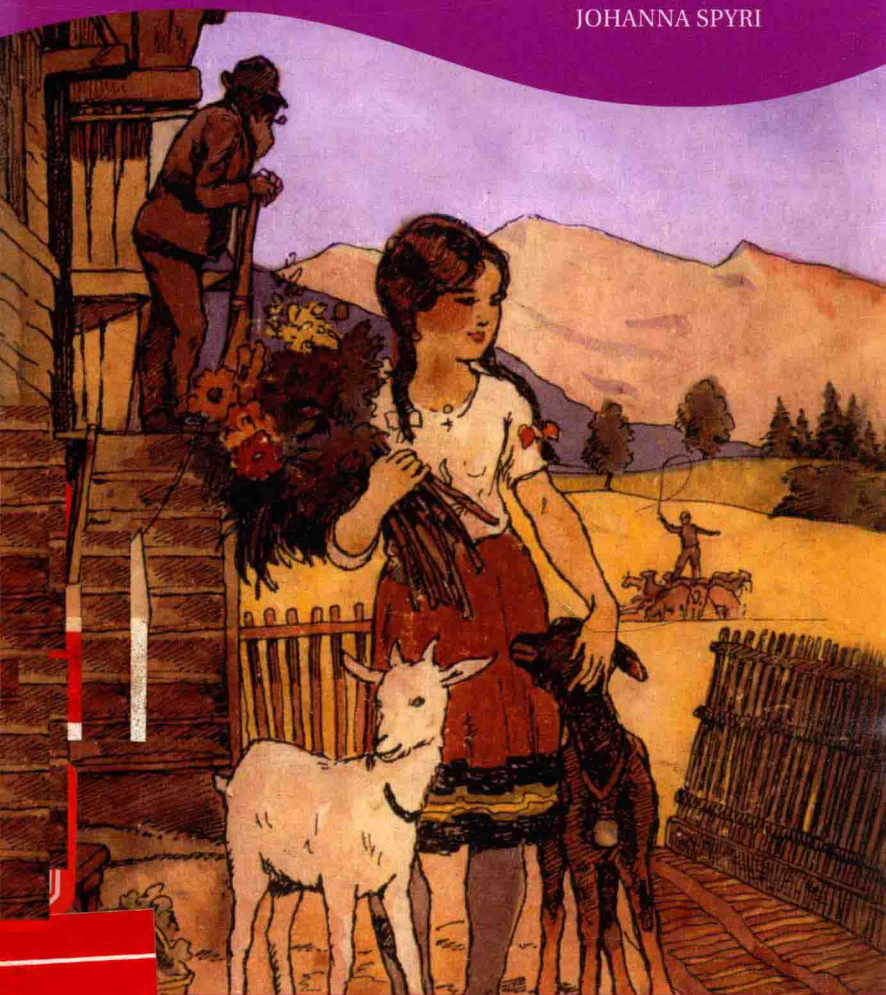


WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

Heidi

JOHANNA SPYRI



Complete and Unabridged

Heidi

JOHANNA SPYRI



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

In loving memory of
MICHAEL TRAYLER
the founder of Wordsworth Editions

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INTRODUCTION

Heidi is a delightful story of life in the Alps, one of many tales written for children by the Swiss authoress, Johanna Spyri, who died at her home in Zurich in 1891. She had been well known to the younger readers of her own country since 1880, when she published her story *Heimathlos*, which ran into three or more editions, and which, like her other books, as she states on the title page, was written for those who love children, as well as for the youngsters themselves. Her own sympathy with the instincts and longings of the child's heart is shown in her picture of Heidi. The record of the early life of this Swiss child amid the beauties of her passionately loved mountain-home and during her exile in the great town was for many years a favourite book of younger readers in Germany and America, and later became equally popular in England.

Madame Spyri, like Hans Andersen, had by temperament a peculiar skill in writing the simple histories of an innocent world. In all her stories she shows an underlying desire to preserve children from the misunderstanding and sometimes the mistaken kindness that frequently hinder the happiness and natural development of their lives and characters. The authoress, as we sense in reading her tales, lived among the scenes and people she describes, and the setting amid which she places her small actors has the charm of the mountain scenery with which she was so familiar.

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CHAPTER I

Up the Mountain to Alm-Uncle

From the old and pleasantly situated village of Mayenfeld, a footpath winds through green and shady meadows to the foot of the mountains, which on this side look down from their stern and lofty heights upon the valley below. The land grows gradually wilder as the path ascends, and the climber has not gone far before he begins to inhale the fragrance of the short grass and sturdy mountain-plants, for the way is steep and leads directly up to the summits above.

On a clear sunny morning in June two figures might have been seen climbing the narrow mountain path; one a tall strong-looking girl, the other a child whom she was leading by the hand, and whose little cheeks were so aglow with heat that the crimson colour could be seen even through the dark, sunburnt skin. And this was hardly to be wondered at, for in spite of the hot June sun the child was clothed as if to keep off the bitterest frost. She did not look more than five years old, if as much, but what her natural figure was like, it would have been hard to say, for she had on apparently two, if not three, dresses, one above the other, and over these a thick red woollen shawl wound round about her, so that the little body presented a shapeless appearance, as, with its small feet shod in thick, nailed, mountain-shoes, it slowly and laboriously plodded its way up in the heat. The two must have left the valley a good hour's walk behind them when they came to the hamlet known as Dörfli, which is situated half-way up the mountain. Here the wayfarers met with greetings from all sides, some calling to them from windows, some from open doors, others from outside, for the elder girl was now in her old home. She did not, however, pause in her walk to respond to her friends' welcoming cries and questions, but passed on without

stopping for a moment until she reached the last of the scattered houses of the hamlet. Here a voice called to her from the door: 'Wait a moment, Dete; if you are going up higher, I will come with you.'

The girl thus addressed stood still, and the child immediately let go her hand and seated herself on the ground.

'Are you tired, Heidi?' asked her companion.

'No, I am hot,' answered the child.

'We shall soon get to the top now. You must walk bravely on a little longer, and take good long steps, and in another hour we shall be there,' said Dete in an encouraging voice.

They were now joined by a stout, good-natured-looking woman, who walked on ahead with her old acquaintance, the two breaking forth at once into lively conversation about everybody and every thing in Dörfli and its surroundings, while the child wandered on behind them.

'And where are you off to with the child?' asked the one who had just joined the party. 'I suppose it is the child your sister left?'

'Yes,' answered Dete. 'I am taking her up to Uncle, where she must stay.'

'The child stay up there with Alm-Uncle! You must be out of your senses, Dete! How can you think of such a thing! The old man, however, will soon send you and your proposal packing off home again!'

'He cannot very well do that, seeing that he is her grandfather. He must do something for her. I have had the charge of the child till now, and I can tell you, Barbel, I am not going to give up for her sake the chance which has just fallen to me of getting a good place. It is for the grandfather now to do his duty by her.'

'That would be all very well if he were like other people,' asseverated stout Barbel warmly, 'but you know what he is. And what can he do with a child, especially with one so young! The child cannot possibly live with him. But where are you thinking of going yourself?'

'To Frankfurt, where an extra good place awaits me,' answered Dete. 'The people I am going to were down at the Baths last

summer, and it was part of my duty to attend upon their rooms. They would have liked then to take me away with them, but I could not leave. Now they are there again and have repeated their offer, and I intend to go with them, you may make up your mind to that!’

‘I am glad I am not the child!’ exclaimed Barbel, with a gesture of horrified pity. ‘Not a creature knows anything about the old man up there! He will have nothing to do with anybody, and never sets his foot inside a church from one year’s end to another. When he does come down once in a while, everybody clears out of the way of him and his big stick. The mere sight of him, with his bushy grey eyebrows and his immense beard, is alarming enough. He looks like any old heathen or Indian, and few would care to meet him alone.’

‘Well, and what of that?’ said Dete, in a defiant voice, ‘he is the grandfather all the same, and must look after the child. He is not likely to do her any harm, and if he does, he will be answerable for it, not I.’

‘I should very much like to know,’ continued Barbel, in an enquiring tone of voice, ‘what the old man has on his conscience that he looks as he does, and lives up there on the mountain like a hermit, hardly ever allowing himself to be seen. All kinds of things are said about him. You, Dete, however, must certainly have learnt a good deal concerning him from your sister – am I not right?’

‘You are right, I did, but I am not going to repeat what I heard; if it should come to his ears I should get into trouble about it.’

Now Barbel had for long past been most anxious to ascertain particulars about Alm-Uncle, as she could not understand why he seemed to feel such hatred towards his fellow-creatures, and insisted on living all alone, or why people spoke about him half in whispers, as if afraid to say anything against him, and yet unwilling to take his part. Moreover, Barbel was in ignorance as to why all the people in Dörfli called him Alm-Uncle, for he could not possibly be uncle to everybody living there. As, however, it was the custom, she did like the rest and called the old man Uncle. Barbel had only lived in Dörfli since her

marriage, which had taken place not long before. Previous to that her home had been below in Prättigau, so that she was not well acquainted with all the events that had ever taken place, and with all the people who had ever lived in Dörfli and its neighbourhood. Dete, on the contrary, had been born in Dörfli, and had lived there with her mother until the death of the latter the year before, and had then gone over to the Baths at Ragatz and taken service in the large hotel there as chambermaid. On the morning of this day she had come all the way from Ragatz with the child, a friend having given them a lift in a hay-cart as far as Mayenfeld. Barbel was therefore determined not to lose this good opportunity of satisfying her curiosity. She put her arm through Dete's in a confidential sort of way, and said: 'I know I can find out the real truth from you, and the meaning of all these tales that are afloat about him. I believe you know the whole story. Now do just tell me what is wrong with the old man, and if he was always shunned as he is now, and was always such a misanthrope.'

'How can I possibly tell you whether he was always the same, seeing I am only six-and-twenty and he at least seventy years of age; so you can hardly expect me to know much about his youth. If I was sure, however, that what I tell you would not go the whole round of Prättigau, I could relate all kinds of things about him; my mother came from Domleschg, and so did he.'

'Nonsense, Dete, what do you mean?' replied Barbel, somewhat offended, 'gossip has not reached such a dreadful pitch in Prättigau as all that, and I am also quite capable of holding my tongue when it is necessary.'

'Very well then, I will tell you – but just wait a moment,' said Dete in a warning voice, and she looked back to make sure that the child was not near enough to hear all she was going to relate; but the child was nowhere to be seen, and must have turned aside from following her companions some time before, while these were too eagerly occupied with their conversation to notice it. Dete stood still and looked around her in all directions. The footpath wound a little here and there, but could nevertheless be seen along its whole length nearly to Dörfli; no one, however, was visible upon it at this moment.

'I see where she is,' exclaimed Barbel, 'look over there!' and she pointed to a spot far away from the footpath. 'She is climbing up the slope yonder with the goat-herd and his goats. I wonder why he is so late today bringing them up. It happens well, however, for us, for he can now look after the child, and you can the better tell me your tale.'

'Oh, as to the looking after,' remarked Dete, 'the boy need not put himself out about that; she is not by any means stupid for her five years, and knows how to use her eyes. She notices all that is going on, as I have often had occasion to remark, and this will stand her in good stead someday, for the old man has nothing beyond his two goats and his hut.'

'Did he ever have more?' asked Barbel.

'He? I should think so indeed,' replied Dete with animation; 'he was owner once of one of the largest farms in Domleschg. He was the elder of two brothers; the younger was a quiet, orderly man, but nothing would please the other but to play the grand gentleman and go driving about the country and mixing with bad company, strangers that nobody knew. He drank and gambled away the whole of his property, and when this became known to his mother and father they died, one shortly after the other, of sorrow. The younger brother, who was also reduced to beggary, went off in his anger, no one knew whither, while Uncle himself, having nothing now left to him but his bad name, also disappeared. For some time his whereabouts was unknown, then someone found out that he had gone to Naples as a soldier; after that nothing more was heard of him for twelve or fifteen years. At the end of that time he reappeared in Domleschg, bringing with him a young child, whom he tried to place with some of his kinspeople. Every door, however, was shut in his face, for no one wished to have any more to do with him. Embittered by this treatment, he vowed never to set foot in Domleschg again, and he then came to Dörfli, where he continued to live with his little boy. His wife was probably a native of the Grisons, whom he had met down there, and who died soon after their marriage. He could not have been entirely without money, for he apprenticed his son, Tobias, to a