



## Karl König's Stories, Poems and Meditations

A review by Paulamaria Blaxland-de Lange  
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In this dark time, it was with great pleasure that I received the request to review the publication of Karl König's *Stories, Poems and Meditations*.

The last verse of a poem for the children of Lake Farm on the cover reads:

**We love the Earth below  
And the Heaven above  
We adore the brilliant Stars  
Who shine  
And the Mother Earth  
Who carries us.**

From the outpouring of an anguished soul to make sense of his experience to many a stroke of descriptive power this book is a worthy compendium alongside all the other work and achievements of this remarkable man, who - born September 1902 and passing on again in March 1966 - truly was a child of

his time, and who carried the sad destiny of two world wars deeply in his heart.

To be a poet or a doctor was an important question for him. We can be glad that he chose the latter, for one can be a poet while being a healer, indeed poetic insight enhances ever how one looks on the world and the other. Even at his most scientific he cannot but express himself with poetic power and social feeling.

In the introduction Alfons Limbrunner writes:

**"And now there is also – like the icing on the cake perhaps – artistic and literary work that was published only in small parts, in rudimentary form and mainly for his closest friends in earlier decades..."**

**A diary entry by the eighteen-year-old Karl König testifies to this:**

**"Science must be full of artistry and spirit, otherwise it will become godless and stale without truth and without grasping the world contexts. That is the great thing. Understanding the whole context, the great mystery. Everything is one."**

Richard Steel chooses a poem written by Karl König when he was seventeen in which he writes:

**"Give me the meaning.**

**The meaning of life I want to have."**

**And further on:**

**"I want... I want..."**

**Oh, let me want! ...**

**No No, we are only allowed to serve.**

**And barricade my heart from others**

**And thus severed with my emptiness**

**Joylessly stutter to the heavens."**

It is astonishing that at around the same age he makes his decision: **“Now I will simply stay an artist by nature.... And out of this came my first intention to become a doctor. Perhaps I will still write poems, but they will only be for myself.”**

*The book gives an idea of Karl König's youth, his family, his teachers, especially the poet and teacher Johann Pilz and his friends Alfred Berger and his family and his journey from Judaism to Christianity. As he wrote poems throughout his life, the book has a biographic quality right from early days in Vienna to his last months in Lake Constance.*

In his Editor's Note Richard Steel writes beautifully out of his perusal of the many diaries and manuscripts and his deep appreciation for his subject's life, striving, achievements and humanity.

Many of the poems and verses were written in German, some of them already translated, some of them capably translated by the editor.

He writes of Karl König's first meetings with the destiny of Kaspar Hauser and its consequent influence on him and his work, of his studies of the Goetheanum windows, of his earliest stories and ideas for plays, ending with a line from a poem written in 1924 – “finding strength in the midst of desperation”:

**“Come, brother human, let us dare to live again,  
Upright, towards new sight of designation.”**

The following section of Meditations cover the widest range of sense, feeling and thought, some of which bring tears to the eyes, some bringing beauty and clarity of thought and observation: the Goetheanum Windows, Goethe, from Old to New Testament, of Love and Sacrifice, of the call of the Angels, of Christ and of Lucifer, of Mary and of Peace, of the World and of Spirit.

This section also is like a labyrinth, leading to the certain goal: together “preparing the way”:

**“Thus we unite and strengthen  
In the work we have begun  
Of which the Good shall become  
So is assigned to us in spirit.  
And may the call from soul to soul  
Sound through our working bond.”**

The part named “Poems” starts with König's late teens, written in 1919, full of melancholy and already Christian, the first verse beginning:

**“In my breast there sits a woe  
Which haunts me day and night” ...  
And ending:  
“A longing for happiness,  
And joy for great and noble love.”**

And at Whitsun 1921 ending with:

**“Everything is shed from my self  
Far away are the grounds of my past  
Gloriously wakened, I look to the sun,  
Looking upward I bestride the road,  
That leads anew to eternal life  
To you, O Lord.”**

And from his dedication to Albert Steiner's Pilgrimage to the Tree of Life in 1926:

**"The Christ himself will near  
To greet your journey's end  
And in the highest dance of spheres  
You to his very feet commend."**

The poem "Calling Up" seems written even more for our present time:

**" Angel, you who watches at my side,  
O you, I call you  
In the immense need of our time.  
Find unhindered, O you my angel  
The way into my heart.  
Wrestle unceasingly, O my angel  
With the chains of my earthly bondage" ....**

Or the extra-ordinary verse he writes in 1938 in London, which could also well have been written now, reminding me of Rudolf Steiner's and Sergei Prokofiev's description of the Philosophers in Athens who wore the Palla in reverence to the Divine Sophia or Christian Morgenstern's verse of gratitude for the elements of Earth and the washing of the feet, a verse without name: "Untitled", starting with:

**"In the quietness of the heart,  
In the peace of the world" ...,  
and ending with:  
"...Mary arises  
Once more in her blue cloak.  
She holds the child in her arms,  
And the soul sings the unending song  
Of the ever-returning rebirth of the rose."**

It was the Palla or veil of the Sophia that protected Middle Europe, so that it could become the ground in which the first shoots of esoteric Christianity could come to the Earth.

The poet's aching cry "To Germany", describing poignantly what Rudolf Steiner also said about the German people becoming wanderers in the future, like the wandering Jews, carrying the idealism, love and strength of their folk in their hearts in service of the whole world rather than their own nations; poignant as Dr. König was born into both these folk souls, which so despairingly and disastrously met during the century of his life.

***Each poem is worth a mention, and is worth reading and living with, bringing forth imaginations, solace and compassion for the heart's suffering reflected in his poetry. Not all can however be mentioned here, the ones for the Festivals, and other deeply felt experiences.***

***The meditations appear not as if written for edification or instruction, but as the outcome, the result of meditation itself, which gives them the power to strike and move us and bestows on them their freshness and immediacy and also their universality.***

Another "Untitled" poem probably written in early 1940 has the sentence:

**"When the garment of an idea is so adequate, that  
One can experience the idea in reality."**

One can sense in the background Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy of Spiritual Activity and some of his meditations given to doctors.

A fragment of his poem "For ðe Camphill Community" written in 1942 follows which makes one think that for Karl König all humanity is this community:

**"And as the apple  
Became a heart  
Likewise the world turned  
Into a cross,  
Man into shame.  
Now beats,  
O Man,  
In this thy chest  
Heart**

**Now ripens  
In your chest,  
O Man,  
An apple.  
Now hangs,  
O apple-tree of World,  
From all thy branches,  
Hangs a heart.**

**And each of all thy branches  
Is a sword,  
And each of all they apples  
Is a heart.**

**O apple-tree of World,  
Thou are the Holy Judgement,  
At which  
Each sword to grace,  
At which  
Each heart to apple,  
At which  
Each sin into redemption  
Changes.**

One can forgive the writer for his mixed metaphors, as these coalesce into meaning. ðe wealth of material shows a great breadth of interest, historical insight and reading. In 1943 he writes of early childhood memories: of the little ÿst in father's protective hand and roundabout revelry ending with the image of the cross, black at ÿrst then lighting up during their quiet meal and a voice sounding:

**"And he who eats my bread  
Has lifted up his heel against my self."**

At the end of his poem probably written in 1944 in his notebook named: "Pound and Dollar" for instance he writes at the end:

**"A man, who, chained  
To a bare rock,  
Observed this drama  
Of Pound and Dollar,**

**Felt suddenly that he was free.  
The fetters fell from him  
And with a voice of strength  
He said:  
Now I begin to work;"**

~ is last verse does not stop with a full stop! It starts with an image of ancient Greece, then reminds us of the Templars' deed of the beginning of money and banking to allow for human freedom, followed by a sense of the ancestry of the refugees of a tired Europe starting a new life in the new world. And from this long reach of history the ultimate line: Now I begin to work;

Later in his poem for Easter Morning written in 1950, he ends with a description of the mood in which he travels this road of destiny to do this work of transforming Liberty into Freedom and Heart to Head with the image of the bell which sounds due to weight and lightness alternating:

**"O Lord,  
Take the bell-rope  
In your hand;  
I am ready to resound."**

~ ere is much beauty in these meditative verses, and the profound sense for esoteric Christianity and the penetration of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy sounds through these especially, sometimes in pure intimacy, sometimes loud and clear; sometimes the other senses are brought into play in the reader as in for instance the Calendar Verse (1962. Together with the picture of John listening at Christ's bosom), the end of which reads:

**"Rest your heart  
Upon the breast of time  
And listen  
To the heartbeat:  
It is the language of world-conscience  
Which you hear.  
It sounds throughout your soul  
And awakens in you the deeds  
Which lead to the good."**

*Richard Steel speaks in his chapter "One Last Poem" at length and nothing needs adding, suffice it to say that both the poem itself and Richard's intimate reading and writing about it give it an added joy to read. König's love of music, his experience of listening to Mahler's Second Symphony, his work on his "Animal Brothers", his struggles with his heart, his work on embryology and the Raphael Madonna show something of what this remarkable man felt and achieved, his sheer humanity and breadth of vision. Despite the darkness surrounding his allotted span, love and light jump off the page alongside and even despite it.*

~ e parables König wrote for eurythmy (Rudolf Steiner suggested that stories for Eurythmy should be in verse) are indeed written as poems, and - as they are written for the children in the Schools - are didactic. Even so the image of the rich man selling all his worldly goods to buy a yeld with treasure in it (the working of the very sod) and the story of the wise trader (one wanders if Dr. König might here be writing of Elijah, who was supposed to have traveled the wide world as a diamond merchant) whose Angel gives his destiny 'pearl' to the hierarchies to prepare it for the next Incarnation, are a moving testament to his deep insight in the destiny of the child with special needs. König lovingly writes to and for his life's partner and wife Tilla: At the end of the story of ~ e Bohemian Moravian Brotherhood, given to her in May 1939, he writes:

**"My heart becomes quieter than ever before in my life. I rest my head on my wife's shoulder and it feels to me as if a hand had touched me, like a star shining on me, a big, silent, loving hand. And the palm of this**

hand is adorned by strange runes that my heart can read at this very moment. And the beat of my heart harmonizes with the sound of the heart-bell. Their meaning is:

**I am the Way, the truth  
and the life.  
No one comes to the Father  
save through me.**

**I say that to my wife, but she already knows, and just nods to me quietly.  
Then we go home, hand in hand."**

Other stories such as the Monk's Dream written in 1943, sound like true Imaginations in the telling. Also, as child of his time König was steeped in the philosophical thinking that was the Middle European precursor and gift to esoteric Christianity, in the scientific writings of Goethe and the poetic German Soul as expressed in Schiller, Goethe, Novalis and Christian Morgenstern.

In Athena Parthenos A fairy Tale, Karl König again brings together ancient Greece and Middle Europe as he writes:

**"May Athens and Vienna join their hands  
Like Sisters under one star's light?"**

Writing in 1944 of what must have been his own profound suffering, which may well find its echo in our hearts and time, he describes Athena Parthenos as "protector of reason's fire" and continues: "Humanity has discarded you, Lost and forgotten, and then:

**"what you, as protector once performed in Athens,  
You saw as witness, take place in Vienna."**

Yet further on he writes:

**"Beauty causes us to strive; truth allows us to love."**

In this fairytale, based as it is on the Snake and the beautiful Lily, it is worth noting not only who the characters are but – reminiscent of Rudolf Steiner and the real people whom he modelled his characters in the Mystery Dramas on - who the performers of the characters are, so any subsequent actors would need to play a double role! König's studies and insight in the characters' destinies is extraordinary, placing them in relation to each other and the times. Towards the end he writes:

**"In Greece, it was the path into the abyss.  
In Europe, it is the bridge over the river.  
What was abyss has become river;  
What was path must become bridge."**

And he ends with:

**"It has conquered  
Human want and fear,  
It has awakened  
The singing dance of stars,  
It has created  
The new morning's splendor."**

The last few stories in the book written for Tilla and the Camphill Community are full of a wistful longing: About the breaking of bread together in the Three Days:

**“A few places have been prepared and there are people who hold common devotional meals. The cloud in the little pond is beginning to come to fulfilment”.**

And in Christmas Past, Present and Future:

**“Then also was a good man good, and a liar was bad, and everything had its proper name and called according to its own reality. What a time it was!”**

In A Highland Story (1959), König describes his soul's journey from King to Shepherd written under his pseudonym A. Shepherd.

Late in his life, and also under this name he publishes One Morning 1352 BC, written as if describing an experience of being the niece of the Pharaoh and Royal Keeper of the Herons who sees a Cross added onto the image of the kingly heron's crown and which König himself then adds to the reproduction from the tomb of Inkerkha in Luxor, used to accompany the story in the Cresset in 1964. In a dream she hears the Pharaoh speak after his death:

**“The cosmic Word has vanished  
The Logos does not speak  
Within the holy space” .....**  
**“The time has come and is at hand  
When gates and doors of our  
Holy Mysteries  
Have to be closed for ever.”**

Dr. König continues to write in a most intimate way of his own inner experiences in “Also a Christmas Story”, the story written in 1946/7 which has come to mean so much to those committed to Camphill, in which during his accustomed walk to find inner peace, he crosses the threshold in the woods, where he meets friends and children whom he knew in life and who now lead him to their ‘house’ in what he thinks must be ‘the land of the dead’ and which they call ‘the land of Truth and Life into which the paths of all people lead.’ He meets the ten women bearing a cross which becomes a cloud to carry souls to their next metamorphosis and the grey women's transformation to the rainbow substance of the ten Goetheanum windows; he sees the image of the Child of Europe on the wall, and witnesses the preparations for the building of the Bond.

**“Oh, have faith, my heart!  
Oh, have faith.  
Nothing shall you lose,  
Yours is, yes yours,  
Everything you experience,  
All your suffering too!”**

May all of us hear it, now.

***I would warmly like to recommend this book for all readers, not just for those familiar with the subject.***

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