

Hartmut Walravens

From the Kalmuck Steppes to Heinrich Heine

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Abstract: The paper offers a survey of the Kalmuck and Mongol typography developed in St. Petersburg under supervision of Isaak Jakob Schmidt, Europe's first expert on Kalmuck and translator of the Bible into this language. This work was practically, executed by Friedrich Gass, a designer, in St. Petersburg, probably advised by the engineer, Orientalist and printing expert Schilling von Canstadt. The actual printing was arranged by Nikolaj Grech, printer, bookseller, author, whose biography was translated by Maximilian Heine, brother of the poet Heinrich Heine. Two anonymous booklets on life in St. Petersburg were identified as M. Heine's work by means of a dedication which led to Therese Heine — a cousin of the Heine brothers, to whom Heinrich addressed his probably best known love poem "You are like a flower".

Key words: Mongol typography in St. Petersburg, Isaak Jakob Schmidt (1779–1847), Paul Schilling von Canstadt (1786–1837), Nikolai Ivanovich Grech (1787–1867), Heinrich Heine (German poet, 1797–1856), Maximilian Heine (physician, 1806–1879).

Making connections, finding things that belong together, piecing together fragments, finding traces, all this may make an exciting pastime (like reading detective novels), often it also spices up professional activity. Lawyers, police, customs investigators, doctors and researchers of all kind belong to the latter category; admittedly, their routine is by no means always as glamorous as it seems in movies and television entertainment programmes. It is easiest to watch such presentations and enjoy the highlights; more stimulus for the imagination is provided by crime novels, which can bring variety to grey everyday life. No less interesting is the literary and historical search for clues, probably precisely because the researcher is personally involved. Sensational results are to be expected in the fewest cases; on the other hand, mistakes are usually less consequential than accusing an innocent person or administering the wrong medicine.

Now, a researcher easily succumbs to the temptation to make his findings “interesting”. The harmless version is to relate obviously remote things: How can a Mongol text be related to love poems by Heinrich Heine? In this case the question would not be quite correct, because it suggests that it would be arranged on purpose; no, the connections are entirely coincidental.

The starting point is the founder of modern Mongolian studies, Isaak Jakob Schmidt (1779–1847),¹ a German-speaking pietist born in Amsterdam who attended school in Neuwied (Rhine) and then decided to go as a “commis” to Sarepta, a Moravian Church settlement established under Catherine the Great on the edge of the Kalmuck steppe. At that time, it was a pioneer existence, comparable to the “Wild West”, whereby the role of the Red Indians was taken over by the more peaceful Kalmucks. There is no trace of this flair nowadays, because Sarepta is incorporated into Volgograd, the historical Stalingrad. Young Schmidt spent some years with these western Mongols and learned their language. When the Russian Bible Society was founded in 1812, it was obvious to think of translating the Holy Scriptures into Kalmuck and Eastern Mongol, and Schmidt was enlisted for this task, who accomplished this difficult work, partly with the help of two Mongolian noblemen: for many Christian terms there were no counterparts in Kalmuck, Buddhist terms had to be redefined, new technical terms coined. Schmidt’s translations, as well as subsequent scholarly treatises on Mongolian language and history, led to his being elected a member of the Petersburg Academy of Sciences. Through his numerous publications, including text editions in Mongol, such as the Chronicle of Sayang Sečen² and the Epic of King Geser,³ also a grammar and a dictionary, Schmidt became the father of a new discipline, Mongolian studies, for which a first chair was established in Kazan in 1838. When an attempt was made in 2005 to compile Schmidt’s publications as completely as possible in order to facilitate an appreciation of his work, it turned out that two of his earliest works were not known in detail — not even their correct title could be determined. An earlier researcher could only quote them as “Kurze Darstellung der christlichen Glaubenslehre (kalmükisch)”⁴ and “Christliche

¹ WALRAVENS 2005.

² *Geschichte...* 1829.

³ *Die Thaten...* 1836. A translation into German followed in 1839: *Die Thaten Bogda Gesser Chans, des Vertilgers der Wurzel der zehn Übel in den zehn Gegenden*. Eine mongolische Heldensage, aus dem Mongolischen übersetzt von I.J. Schmidt. XIV, 287 pp.

⁴ A short account of the Christian faith (in Kalmuck).

Tractätlein zur Bekehrung der Burjäten, in zwey Abtheilungen”.⁵ The dates given were 1817–1818. Now, at first glance, these gaps in the documentation are perhaps annoying, but probably not of great importance — should one investigate such almost two hundred year old “Tractätlein” (little tracts) at all? The matter seems more interesting in the light of the fact that with these early Christian texts in Mongol and Kalmuck, one could probably take a look into the translator’s workshop — how did he try to translate Christian thought into the context of a Buddhist-influenced terminology? Besides, there were no European dictionaries of these languages at the time — only Mongol (or Mongol-Tibetan and Mongol-Chinese) ones were available. Thus, these small publications were given a higher status and priority after all. Since their titles were not known, the search was problematic. Although there were now catalogues of larger collections of Mongol books, for example for Germany, Copenhagen, St. Petersburg and Tôkyô, not even a detailed search yielded any hits. Finally, an entry in an old library catalogue of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft (German Oriental Society) in Halle aroused suspicion. The director of the University and State Library kindly provided a copy, and eureka! it was the “Christliche Tractätlein!” A pencil inscription in an old hand even gave this German title, so that the identification was certain. Professor Charles Bawden,⁶ doyen of British Mongolian studies and author of a fundamental study on the Christian mission to the Mongols,⁷ checked the text, translated and analysed it, and thereby gave interesting details on the translation work.⁸

It proved to be a special surprise that this text had an imprint “Санктпетербургъ в типографии Н. Греча 1818” (St. Petersburg, printing house of N. Greč). The Mongol prints known so far from the early period, i.e. after 1815, have no imprint, at best a year, and even that is rather sporadic. Thus, research has had to rely on conjecture as to whether the printing was done in Eastern Siberia (where a British mission was established) or even in London (since the British & Foreign Bible Society subsidised the printing of the Scriptures). Bibliographical “ethics” aside, the question of the place of printing is by no means merely academic, but very practical — which printing house was capable of printing Mongol at the time as there were neither Mongol types nor typesetters? When Schmidt completed his first work, the

⁵ Christian tracts for converting the Buryats, in two parts.

⁶ WALRAVENS 2017: 175–210.

⁷ BAWDEN 1985.

⁸ BAWDEN 2009.

translation of the Gospel of Matthew into Kalmuck (presumably in 1812/13), it was not published until 1815.⁹ Researchers speculated whether the reason for the delay was that Schmidt had lost his manuscript in the fire of Moscow in 1812 or whether it was the lack of types! In fact, Schmidt had to design the types and fortunately found a skilled typographer in Petersburg, so that the first Kalmuck typography was created. In contrast, we have less information about the creation of Mongol typography. It is true that texts in Mongol script had been printed in China (Yuan dynasty) since the Mongol rule, but, following the example of Chinese, the printing was done by engraved wooden blocks, not by individual letters, or types.

The aforementioned imprint now provides concrete clues. Apparently, then, (Eastern) Mongol typography was ready for use in 1818, and we have a printed record of it. But questions remain:

— Who developed the typography? We know that Schmidt was involved.

— What is the role of the pioneer of printing technology in Russia, Baron Paul Schilling von Canstadt,¹⁰ in this undertaking?

— What caused N. Grech to print Mongol and Kalmuck books? (Who was he in the first place?)

A clue to the emergence of a Mongol typography is provided by a statement of the Paris sinologist of the time, J.P. Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832), who wrote¹¹ that in 1817 Baron Schilling von Canstadt had a Mongol-Manchu type set cut by Friedrich Gass (1769–1854) in Petersburg. At that time, Manchu was the state language of the Chinese empire alongside Chinese, so it was given a great deal of attention in Europe as well. The Manchu script had been developed from Mongol script: The main differences were diacritical marks and writing habits; in this respect, it was by no means illogical to represent both writing systems by one typography. Since the types were relatively large, Schilling had a smaller set cut by Schelter¹² in Leipzig in 1819, following the same pattern. Rémusat further reports that Schilling lent these types to the Bible Society, which used them to print the Gospel of Matthew in Manchu translation by Stepan Lipovcov in 1822.¹³ He also donated a set of types to the Société asiatique in Paris.

⁹ *Evangelium...* 1815.

¹⁰ WALRAVENS 2005: 768–769; CHUGUEVSKIJ 1971: 280–294; GUREVICH 1911: 276–280; WALRAVENS 2020.

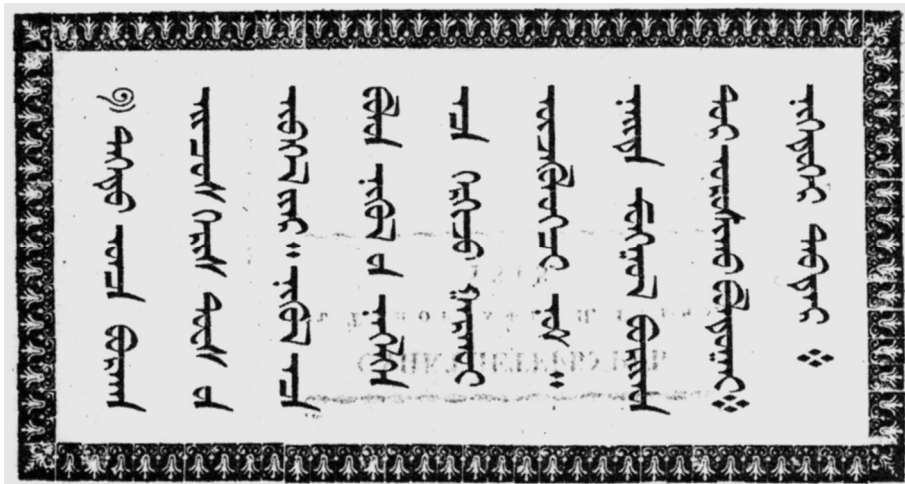
¹¹ WALRAVENS 1999.

¹² WALRAVENS 2022: 451–460.

¹³ WALRAVENS 1977/78: 65–74.



Title-page of I.J. Schmidt's Kalmuck tract, printed in 1815.
dēdu onco burxan yēzūs kiristusiyn ibēlēr : nüülese bolōd nüüliyin nekelgen-ēse yayazi
γarxu üzüülüqçi nom : niyide xalimaq-tu orosixu boltuyai,
 see the Text of LM 3 in *Another tract for the Buryats*, 124–131, transcription, 61–63.



Title-page of I.J. Schmidt's Mongol tract,
 translated from the Kalmuck and printed in 1818.

Schilling's activities are not surprising — he was much interested in Oriental languages, collected books,¹⁴ and experimented as an inventor with electricity and the telegraph — he became known for his invention of an electromagnetic telegraph, actually, and only his sudden death led to this achievement being initially attributed to others. Schilling was also concerned with printing technology, and his examples of Chinese printing were not inferior in appearance and perfection to the best products of the Imperial Printing Office in Peking, as Abel-Rémusat noted. This versatile scholar had been appointed director of the first Russian lithographic institute by the Tsar in 1818, so it stands to reason that he should be involved in such a novel project as a Mongol typography.

Prof. Bawden, an expert on Mongolian Bible translations, states that the typography used was owned by the Bible Society; Franz Babinger, the first biographer of I.J. Schmidt, was of the opinion that Schmidt designed the type and supervised its production.

If we assume that two Mongolian type sets were developed quite independently of each other in St. Petersburg in 1817–1818, then this is not impossible, but it would be a coincidence without convincing probability. In addition, the “ingenious German” who helped to create the Kalmuck typography a few years earlier (his name is not mentioned in the documents) was probably the same Friedrich Gass who cut the Manchu-Mongolian types for Schilling. The characterisation that he was not a printer also fits him: Gass worked for the Mint, and he had graduated from the Academy of Arts.

Another argument is revealing: Russia, as China's neighbour, was very interested in expanding mutual trade. Russia also had the privilege — as the only European country — of maintaining a mission in Beijing, which gave it the opportunity to train language and country experts there. Members of this mission had worked out a five-language dictionary which was of great value in promoting Chinese studies, and so — after Napoleon had made a start by printing the first Chinese dictionary in Europe in 1813¹⁵ — it was decided to print this dictionary, which was probably much better, and the funds were provided for it. But first a test was to be made, because printing Chinese, Manchu, Mongolian, Russian and Latin together was already a special challenge. At Schilling's suggestion, Chinese was to be printed lithographically, the other four scripts with types, and Schilling had just

¹⁴ WALRAVENS 2012: 407–431.

¹⁵ *Dictionnaire* 1813.

developed the typography for Manchu and Mongolian. In 1817, 4 test pages were printed — by the Grech printing house!¹⁶

If we compare the Mongolian style with the Schmidt treatise, it is quite similar, but some of the letters are very Manchurian. Can the details discussed so far be brought into an overall picture? A good working hypothesis would be to assume that Schilling, with Gass's help, produced the typography in 1817, and that then, with Schmidt's advice and help, these types were more closely adapted to Mongolian and used for printing the tract (and other Schmidt texts) in 1818.¹⁷

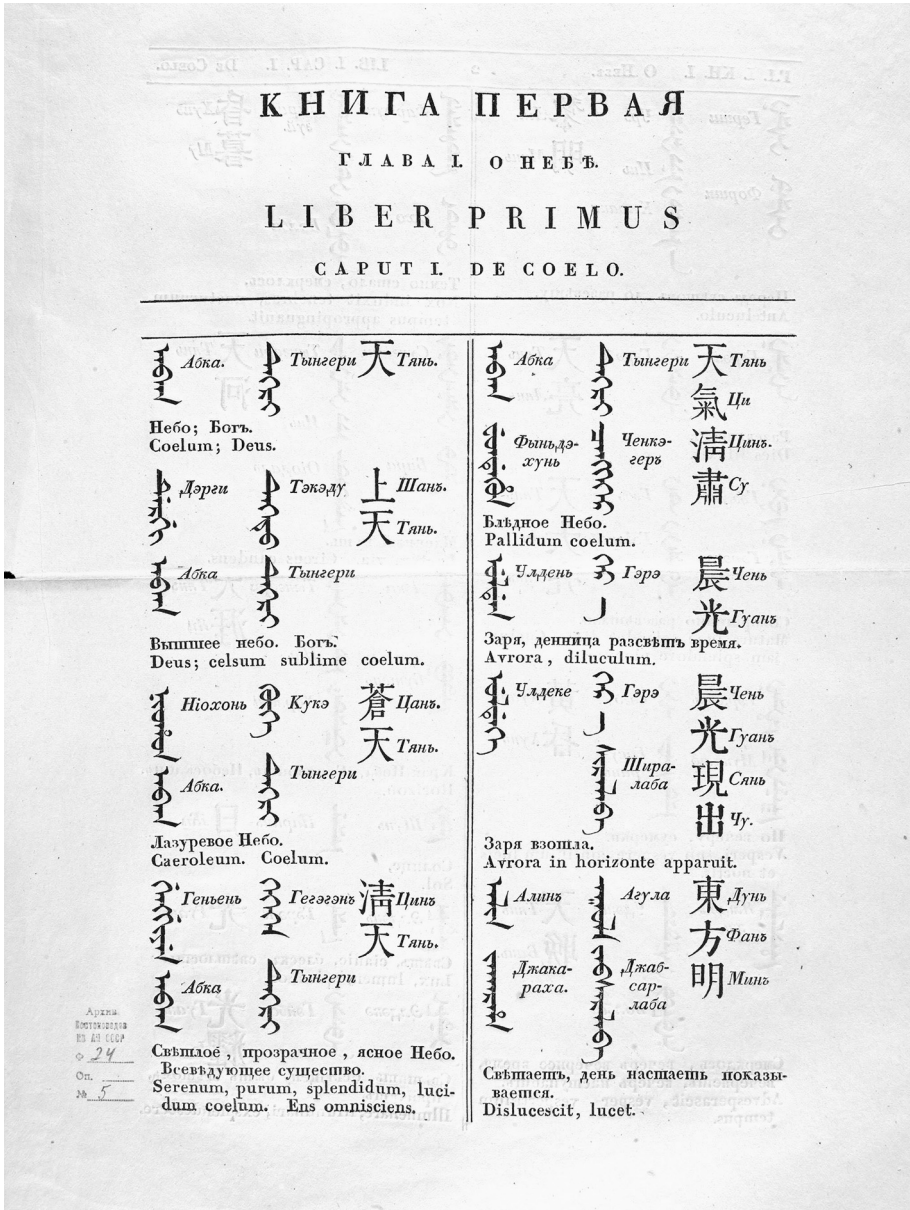
The link between the two interest groups seems to have been the printing house — it was obviously either particularly qualified and was thus called upon for a difficult project, or its owner had appropriate connections (or both!); on the other hand, the printing house was associated with the Bible Society and was thus also eligible for Mongol productions. Incidentally, the president of the Bible Society, Count Aleksandr Nikolaevich Golicyn, became Minister of National Education in 1817, and therefore it became almost a necessity for people in public life to accept the Bible Society, especially since Tsar Alexander was considered religious.

Nikolai Ivanovich Grech (1787–1867), from a German family (hence his occasional spelling Gretsches), began his career as a teacher at the German St. Peter's School in Petersburg, but became a celebrity thanks to his diverse publishing and educational activities — authoritative works on Russian grammar and literature at the time were written by him, and he founded influential journals such as *Syn otechestva* (“Son of the Fatherland”, since 1812) and *Severnaya pchela* (“Nordic Bee”). The fact that Grech was also active as a printer is mentioned in the literature at best in a subordinate sentence, and Grech himself did not mention it in his memoirs either. An early biography of Grech was written by Faddei (Tadeusz) Bulgarin (1789–1859), with whom Grech published the “Nordic Bee” from 1825. Although this paints a sympathetic and highly positive picture of the important man, it offers nothing about his printing activities. A German translation¹⁸ can be found in the Berlin State Library, bound together with two anonymous collections of feuilletons from St. Petersburg:

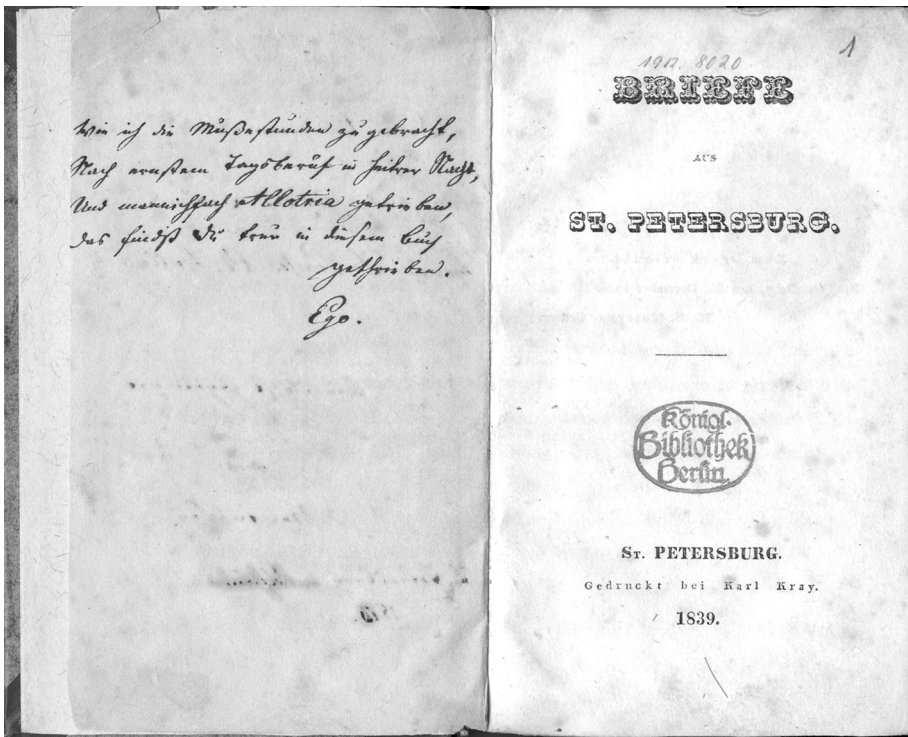
¹⁶ SKACHKOV 1977: 124–126; WALRAVENS 2022: 91–147.

¹⁷ There is a misprint in note 4 where the date should be “1818” instead of 1828. A further update was accepted for publication by the Central Asiatic journal. See: WALRAVENS 2015: 213–22.

¹⁸ GRETSCH 1838.



Sample printing, first page, of the pentaglot dictionary of P. Kamenskij. Around 1817. (Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg.)



Autograph of the author on the fly-leaf of: *Briefe aus St. Petersburg*. 1839
(Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin)

Briefe aus St. Petersburg.

St. Petersburg, Printed by Karl Kray, 1839. 86 pp. as well as
Geselliges und Literärisches. Erinnerungen an St. Petersburg [Social and
Literary. Memories of St. Petersburg.]

St. Petersburg, printed by Karl Kray, 1841. 96 pp.

The former bears the caption:

*Wie ich die Mußestunden zugebracht,
Nach ernstem Tagsberuf in früher Nacht,
Und mannichfach Allotria getrieben,
Das findest Du treu in diesem Buch geschrieben.*

[How I spent the hours of leisure,
After a serious day's work in the early night,
And sometimes practised allotria,
That you will find faithfully written in this book.]

EGO

On the flyleaf there is the dedication:

Dem Biedermanne, seinem vielgeschätzten Freunde Herrn Dr. Praeses A. Halle freundlichst zugeeignet vom Verfasser

[Kindly dedicated by the author to the good man, his much esteemed friend Dr. Praeses A. Halle].

St. Petersburg in September (improved in October) 1841 (corrected in 1843).

These two anonymous works are not assigned to any author in the usual reference works. But the fact that the two writings are bound together with Grech's biography, the latter of which was also printed by Karl Kray, leads us to suspect Dr. Maximilian Heine.

The recipient of the dedication copy was Christian Hermann Adolf Halle,¹⁹ 1798–1866, lawyer in Hamburg, 1831–1848 President of the Hamburg Commercial Court. In 1828 he married Therese, the youngest daughter of the banker Salomon Heine, the uncle of the poet Heinrich Heine. Here, the assumption that Maximilian Heine — not proven as a writer at first glance — was connected to Heinrich Heine's family becomes stronger. More detailed research reveals him to be one of the poet's younger brothers — 1806–1879; he studied medicine in Berlin, Göttingen, Heidelberg and Munich and, after gaining his doctorate in Göttingen (1828), entered Russian service as a military doctor in 1829.²⁰ With a short interruption, he worked as a doctor in the Russian civil service until his retirement in 1865 and enjoyed wide-ranging recognition. In 1867 he was in Paris, in 1879 in Berlin, where he died. Of his writings, his contributions to the history of the Oriental plague²¹ in particular are praised as progressive and forward-looking. He was also co-editor (with Rudolf Krebel and Karl Heinrich Thielmann) of the *Medizinische Zeitung Rußlands* in 1844–1860, and for three years editor of the *Magazin für angenehme Unterhaltung* (St. Petersburg), to which the two anonymous feuilleton volumes owe their origin. Of biographical interest are his memoirs of Heinrich Heine and his family. By his brother Maximilian Heine (Berlin: F. Dümmler, 1868. X, 247 p.)²²

¹⁹ *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 18979: 418–419.

²⁰ HEUER 2002: 9–16; STELZNER 2004.

²¹ St. Petersburg: Eggers, 1846.

²² *Erinnerungen an Heinrich Heine und seine Familie*. Von seinem Bruder Maximilian Heine.



Maximilian Heine in Russian uniform.

From: *Heine-Reliquien*. Hrsg. von Maximilian von Heine-Geldern und Gustav Karpeles.
Berlin: Curtius 1911, 152.

Maximilian Heine was more adaptable and diplomatic than his famous brother. He is described as the favourite nephew of Salomon Heine; he avoided controversy and was a successful civil servant — in Russia he made it to court councillor and was nobilitated. A portrait shows him with an enormous moustache and in uniform with impressive epaulettes. His relationship with his brother Heinrich, although it fluctuated, could generally be described as good, which was undoubtedly encouraged by the long distance. Heinrich also counted on his brother's financial support and medical advice. In one will Maximilian was even appointed executor, but this was later changed in favour of Heinrich Laube, probably not least because of the topographical distance. Maximilian wrote in a pleasing style, but one will hardly attest him a special literary talent.

The two brothers seem to have agreed on one point, namely their admiration and affection for their cousins Amalie (1800–1838) and Therese (1807–1880), which, however, were not reciprocated. In any case, Heinrich was inspired to write some of his most important love poems, such as “Du bist wie eine Blume”, dedicated to Therese.

Du bist wie eine Blume,
So hold und schön und rein;
Ich schau dich an, und Wehmut
Schleicht mir ins Herz hinein.

Mir ist, als ob ich die Hände
Aufs Haupt dir legen sollt,
Betend, daß Gott dich erhalte
So rein und schön und hold.

You are like a flower,
So pure and good and fine,
I look on you, and sorrow
Fills this heart of mine.

I feel I should pray a blessing,
My hands upon your brow,
That God may always keep you
As fine and pure as now.²³

It was published in Heine's *Das Buch der Lieder* (Book of Songs) in 1827.

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²³ Translated by Richard Packham. <https://lyricstranslate.com>.

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