

A Patriotic Song from the Franco-Prussian War: *The Watch on the Rhine* (1840/54)

Abstract

Max Schneckenburger (1819–1849) wrote the poem *Die Wacht am Rhein* [*The Watch on the Rhine*] during the Rhine crisis of 1840, when France renewed its claim to the Rhine River as France's natural border. Germany feared that France was planning to annex the left bank of the Rhine. Thus, we read: "The Rhine, the Rhine, go to our Rhine, / Who'll guard our River, hold the line?" Like many other songs and poems, *The Watch on the Rhine* called for rivalries between various German kingdoms and principalities to be set aside and for Germans to establish a unified state. In 1854, five years after Schneckenburger's death, his poem was set to music by Karl Wilhelm (1815–1873). *The Watch on the Rhine* was the rousing tune sung by German soldiers as they headed into battle during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71.

Source

A voice resounds like thunder-peal,
'Mid dashing waves and clang of steel:
The Rhine, the Rhine, the German Rhine!
Who guards to-day my stream divine?
Chorus: Dear Fatherland, no danger thine;
Firm stand thy sons to watch the Rhine!

They stand, a hundred thousand strong,
Quick to avenge their country's wrong;
With filial love their bosoms swell,
They'll guard the sacred landmark well!
Chorus: Dear Fatherland, no danger thine;
Firm stand thy sons to watch the Rhine!

The dead of a heroic race,
From heaven look down and meet this gaze;
He swears with dauntless heart, "O Rhine,
Be German as this breast of mine!"
Chorus: Dear Fatherland, no danger thine;
Firm stand thy sons to watch the Rhine!

While flows one drop of German blood,
Or sword remains to guard thy flood,
While rifle rests in patriot hand,
No foe shall tread thy sacred strand!
Chorus: Dear Fatherland, no danger thine;
Firm stand thy sons to watch the Rhine!

And whether my heart in death does break,
French we will not let them you make,
Rich in water as is your flood,
So Germany is in heroes' blood!

Chorus: Dear Fatherland, no danger thine;
Firm stand thy sons to watch the Rhine!

Our oath resounds, the river flows,
In golden light our banner glows;
Our hearts will guard thy stream divine:
The Rhine, the Rhine, the German Rhine!
Chorus: Dear Fatherland, no danger thine;
Firm stand thy sons to watch the Rhine!

So lead us on, you are well-proved;
Trusting in God, reach for the sword,
Hail Wilhelm! Down with the brood!
And redeem dishonor with enemy blood!
Chorus: Dear Fatherland, no danger thine;
Firm stand thy sons to watch the Rhine!

Source of English translation: Eva March Tappan, ed., *The World's Story: A History of the World in Story, Song and Art*, 14 vols., vol. 7, *Germany, The Netherlands, and Switzerland*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914, pp. 249–50. A translation is also available online at:
<https://ingeb.org/Lieder/esbraust.html>.

Source of original German text: Wikipedia, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Wacht_am_Rhein.

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