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HEINRICH HEINE

6. A Ticket of Admission to European Culture (1823,  
c. 1854)<sup>1</sup>

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From the nature of my thinking you can deduce that baptism is a matter of indifference to me, that I do not regard it as important

even symbolically, and that in the circumstances in which it will be carried out in my case it will have little significance for others

*Source:* Hugo Bieber, *Heinrich Heine: A Biographical Anthology*, trans. M. Hadas (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), pp. 157, 196. Reprinted by permission of the Jewish Publication Society.

likewise. For me perhaps its significance will be that I can better devote myself to championing the rights of my unfortunate brethren. And yet I hold it beneath my dignity and a stain on my honor to undergo conversion in order to obtain a position in Prussia. Dear old Prussia! I really do not know what course to take in this bad situation. I'll turn Catholic yet for spite, and hang myself. . . . We are living in sad times. Scoundrels become our "best," and the best must turn

scoundrel. I understand well the words of the psalmist: "Lord, give us our daily bread, that we blaspheme not Thy name. . . ."

The baptismal certificate is the ticket of admission to European culture. . . .

My becoming a Christian is the fault of those Saxons who suddenly changed saddles at Leipzig,<sup>2</sup> or of Napoleon, who really did not have to go to Russia, or of his teacher of geography at Brienne, who did not tell him that Moscow winters are very cold.

## NOTES

1. Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), German-Jewish poet and essayist. In 1825 he was baptized a Lutheran, with the hope that his conversion would facilitate the gaining of a doctorate and the pursuit of a career as a civil servant or academic. His repeated attempts to secure a position were, however, futile. Finally, after having failed to obtain a promised chair at the University of Munich and fearing police action against himself because of his political satire, he left Germany for Paris in 1831.

He spent the remainder of his life in exile. His attitude to Judaism was complex. He deemed it "a misfortune," but he also wrote warmly and proudly of Judaism. To a friend he once declared, "I make no secret of my Judaism, to which I have not returned, because I never left it."

2. At the battle of Leipzig, October 1813, the Saxon troops fighting with the French defected to the allies, and thus ensured the defeat of Napoleon.