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 GERMAN TROUBADOURS AND
 MASTER-SINGERS.

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THE German nation, which is not a political product of to-day, as some appear to think, but which was knit together nearly a thousand years ago, in a union far more efficient than the incomplete one at present existing, has, like its western neighbour, enjoyed an early literary development. A rugged, heroic poetry, and some religious chaunts, which have come down to us in a fragmentary form, mark the most ancient time. Between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, Germany has had her *minne-singer*, or troubadours. After that, a school of *meister-singer* flourished in the towns, until that gigantic cataclysm occurred—the Thirty Years' War, during which the nation's life-blood ebbed out whilst its soul was panting for spiritual freedom.

Then the 'princes,'¹ who by law were mere provincial governors, but who had for some time past aspired to sovereignty and endeavoured to set up particular dynasties, began to tear the Empire to shreds. The popular forces which in the various Republican (*Eidgenossen*) Leagues, and in the War of the Peasants during the Reformation movement, had sought to reorganise the nation on a democratic basis, were no longer in the field. The princes thus had it all their own way; and Germany who once had undoubtedly been an indivisible union—not a mere confederacy of sovereign states, but a real Union—became split up into a medley of petty principalities over whom merely a shadow of Imperial rule flitted, until that shadow, too, was formally done away with in 1806, when the Corsican conqueror lorded it over Continental Europe.

During the colossal misfortune which befel Germany in consequence of the terrible struggle of the seventeenth century, it seemed for a while as if her intellectual light were extinguished. Her very language, with

¹ *Fürsten*, which originally did not mean sovereign rulers, but simply the first or foremost of the high aristocracy—a meaning that word still had at Luther's time.

its combined strength and aptitude for musical development, became barbarised. It sank down to the level of a rude dialect. Only gradually, our literature, which had had so promising a beginning, recovered the lost ground, but at last attained once more a development the extent, beauty, grandeur, and richness of which is now universally acknowledged even by a nation in which an unapproachable poetical master-mind has risen.

There is a great break between the Master-singer epoch and the literature of which Goethe and Schiller are the foremost representatives. Yet, Goethe was, as he himself confesses, deeply indebted to that particular poet of the Master-singer school who is best known by name, though not by his works, namely, to Hans Sachs, the much-vilified 'shoemaking rhymester' of Nuremberg. 'In order to find a congenial poetical soil on which we could plant our foot, in order to discover an element on which we could breathe freely'—says the author of *Wahrheit und Dichtung*—'we had to go back a few centuries, when solid capabilities rose splendidly from a chaotic condition; and thus we entered into friendly intercourse with the poetry of those bygone ages. The minne-singers were too far removed from us. We would first have had to study their language; and that did not suit us. Our object was to live, and not to learn. Hans Sachs, the truly masterly poet, was nearest to us. A genuine talent, although not in the manner of those knights and courtiers; but a quaint citizen, even as we boasted of being! His didactic realism agreed with our tendency; and we used, on many occasions, his easy rhythm, his facile rhyme.'

So Goethe, who, moreover, in his 'Poetical Mission of Hans Sachs,'¹ has fervently sung the praise of the citizen poet, uttering strange curses against 'the folk that would not acknowledge their master,' and condemning them to 'be banished into the frog-pond,' instead of dwelling on the serene heights where genuine bards throne in glory.

If a Goethe could thus speak of a master-singer, that often-despised school of town's-poets may, after all, merit some notion. The proper judgment of the rise and origin of the Meister-singer is, however, generally obscured at the very outset by the unduly sharp division made between their early representatives and the chivalric Minstrels of Love. Minne-song and Master-song are reckoned to bear their antagonistic difference in their very appellations. Yet, the apparently distinctive name of 'Meister' was applied already to poets in the period in which we generally assume that the German troubadours flourished. On the other hand, the word 'minne-singer' is of quite recent date. It was Bodmer who first used it in the last century: and this comparatively new word

¹ Hans Sachsens poetische Sendung.

then gave rise to 'an over-strained division-line which is detrimental to a proper understanding. Grimm at least, the great authority, has decidedly laid it down as his opinion that the Troubadour-song and the Master-song in Germany are not only not to be thus divided, but that they have a close affinity in their essential points. Docen and von der Hagen have upheld the contrary view. 'The Minne and Meister-song,'—Grimm says—'are one plant, which at first was sweet; which in its older age developed into a degree of acerbity; and which at last necessarily became woody. But unless we go back to the days of its youth, we shall never comprehend the branches and twigs which have sprouted forth from it.'

Even the usual separation into 'chivalric' poets and 'civic' poets must be accepted with some caution. Among the crowd of lyric bards whose songs have been handed down to us in that famous collection attributed to Rüdger von Maness, the splendid manuscript of which is still, in spite of the Peace of Frankfort, retained by the French, there are not a few singers of humble descent and calling. We there meet with a clerk, a schoolmaster, a fisherman, a smith, and other mechanics—even a poet of the much persecuted race of the Hebrews, namely, the Jew Süsskind, of Trimberg. That which we possess of him, is poetry of a more abstract, philosophical character, a kind of Solomonic wisdom, not untinged with melancholy. In the midst of priestly fanaticism, he sings of the freedom of thought. 'Thought penetrates through stone and steel; Thought travels quicker over the field than the quickest glance of eyes; Thought rises high up in the air above the soaring eagle.' No doubt, this Jewish Marquis Posa had, as he himself relates, at last to leave the poetic art, finding little favour among its noble patrons. In bitter disappointment he complains that he is travelling on the fool's high-road (*ich var uf der tôren vart*), and says he will give it up, grow a long beard of gray hairs, live in the manner of the old Jews, clad in a long mantle, with a capacious hood, walking along with lowly gait, and trying to forget that he had ever sung at courts.

The vast majority of those whom we now call minne-singers were no doubt of noble descent. Some of our emperors were befriended by the muse. Even Henry VI., that iron ruler, is reckoned among the troubadours; his lay: '*Ich grueze mit gesang die suezzen, die ich vermîden nâht wil, noch enmac*' is one of the most touching:

I greet with song that sweetest lady
Whom I can ne'er forget;
Though many a day is past and gone
Since face to face we met.

Frederick II, too, another German ruler of the Suabian house of Hohenstaufen, struck the lyre; but as he composed in the Italian

tongue, he cannot be included among our own troubadours. Great depth of feeling marks his song: '*Di dolor mi conviene cantare.*' An excellent English translation, under the title of 'My Lady in Bondage,' is to be found in 'The Early Italian Poets, from Ciullo D'Alcamo to Dante Alghieri,' by G. D. Rossetti. Some have fancied to see in this song of the free-thinking German emperor an allusion to the captivity of the Church, a symbolisation of religious ideas. This view is undoubtedly a most erroneous one; Frederick's lay has as much to do with the Church as the Song of Solomon has.

But though king-emperors, dukes, princes and counts, had a slight part in the literary productions of that age, the main strength of the minnesinging brotherhood resided in men of less ambitious descent, who had sprung from the lower nobility, and who were generally gifted with very small worldly goods, if with any at all. Uhland, in his otherwise so beautiful Tale of German Poesy (*Mährchen*), which describes the different periods of our literature in a charming Dornröschen allegory, calls German poesy a 'princely child,'¹ and a 'princess.' The great connoisseur of our ancient literature, who knew better when he wrote in prose, allowed himself, in his 'Tale,' to be beguiled into this mis-statement by the seduction which the Dornröschen myth naturally offered. The truth is, the mass of our early lyric bards were, in rank, only removed a degree from the generality of freemen. Some of them pass even wrongly

¹ Zwo mächt'ge Feen nahten
Dem schönen Fürstenkind;
An seine Wiege traten
Sie mit dem Angebind

Und als es kam zu Jahren,
Ward es die schönste Frau,
Mit langen, goldnen Haaren,
Mit Augen dunkelblau

Viel stolze Ritter gingen
Der Holden Dienste nach:
Heinrich von Offerdingen,
Wolfram von Eschenbach.
Sie gingen in Stahl und Eisen,
Goldharfen in der Hand;
Die Fürstin war zu preisen,
Die solche Diener fand.

Von alter Städte Mauern
Der Wiederhall erklang;
Die Bürger und die Bauern
Erhuben frischen Sang.

as members of the nobiliary order. For instance, it is by no means sure that Walter von der Vogelweide was of aristocratic origin; the contrary is more probable in fact. Again, as I have above remarked, there were, among the poets of that period, not a few whose civic character is beyond question. These circumstances have to be mentioned, in order to show how difficult it is to draw a strong line of demarcation between *minne-singer* and *meister-singer*, at least in the intermediary stage during which they blend, whilst afterwards no doubt a change occurs—im-perceptible at first, and only later of the most pronounced kind.

The master-singers regarded themselves as the continuators of the old poetry. Among the 'Twelve Masters' who, the legend says, founded the poetical schools in the cities, Frauenlob, Klingsor, Walter von der Vogelweide, the Marner, and Reinmar von Zweter are named—all undoubtedly troubadours, although by no means all belonging to the nobiliary order. I need not say that this alleged formal foundation of a master-singer guild is as much a myth as Arthur's Round Table. Chronologically, the Twelve Masters could not have acted together; nor could they have done what the fable relates, in the reign of Otto the Great under whom the event is said to have taken place. Nevertheless, even that myth shows that the Meister-singer felt some contact with their predecessors. And indeed there are, among what are now called the Minne-singer, several who are remarkably like some of the later didactic, sententious master-singers. Again, among the towns'-poets, especially among those who are reckoned as precursors of the school, some by far excel, in fervour and chivalric colouring, their aristocratic prototypes. The master-singers called their own art '*die holdselige Kunst*;' an appellation reminding us of the '*science gaye*' of the Provençal troubadours, among which latter however—in the words of Görres—'the ardent breath of Moorish poetry is felt,' whilst among the minne-singer, and still more among the majority of the meister-singer, a colder tone prevails.

Territorially also, the Master-song coincides with the Minne-song. It extended from the Upper Rhine, from Alsace, then a very cradle of German culture, into Franconia, Bavaria, Thuringia, and partly also Lower Germany, or Saxony, as it was then called. It was mainly the South and the West on which both forms of poetry grew up—the onesprouting forth from the other. At Toulouse also, as Grimm remarks, the last remnants of Provençal poetry, the *jeux floraux*, lingered on the same spot where they had flourished of old.

And even as the later master-singers composed their lays according to set rules, so we find 'rules' and 'masters' already among the chivalric poets in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Nor could it well be otherwise if we remember the form and figure of the Poetic Art of those early ages. Now-a-days, in thinking of poems, we have a notion

of some book that is to be read, of some production composed in the solitude of a study, and destined to be conveyed into the mind of others through the medium of the eye. But the minne-singer were yet bards in the ancient Orphic fashion. They really sang; their delivery was essentially a chaunting one. Hence the birds on the flowery meadow play such a part in their lays. Hence those poets, not quite inaptly, called themselves 'nightingales.' In this respect also, the two poetic circles have a point of contact which ought to be kept in mind, for the *Meister-Singer*, like their predecessors, never delivered their productions otherwise than in singing. Their name, therefore, was not a mere figure of speech.

Germany was then, even in a higher degree than now, a country full of song. The melodies, some of which have been preserved, were simple enough; but the whole nation delighted in the repetition of those strains: and song, which was but another word for poetry, was almost invariably connected with dance. Dance, among all nations of ancient time, is not simply an amusement, but at the same time an act of consecration: in the earliest ages a religious, sacrificial performance. It is as if the harmony of the many-winded movements had been considered an image of the variegated, and yet orderly, cycle of Nature; of the recurrence, after many changes, of the same phenomena on this planet, as well as on the starry skies.

A 'wandering society' (*fahrende diet*) of minne-singer consisted, at least, of the poet, the declamator (*sager*), the fiddler, and the dancer. When the poet himself was unable to sing, he was represented by another, called the little songster (*das singerlein*). A player on some wind-instrument (*blasgeselle*) is also mentioned by some of the minne-singer; he probably played on the flute. Now, in order to get a proper conception of the character of these migratory poetical associations, we must dismiss the remembrance of our modern manners and views, and rather think of the most ancient Greek, or, for the sake of that, Teutonic life, and we shall at once look upon the matter in a very different light. It will be seen at a glance that where such a co-operation was required as is indicated by the appellations of the various members of a 'Fahrende Diet,' a sort of poetical school would gradually be formed, with distinct rules—a school in which there would be masters and pupils, and various degrees.

'From whom have you learnt your art?' asks Klingsor, in wrathful contempt, his rival, Wolfram von Eschenbach, during the famous Tournament of Song known as the Wartburg Contest, in which the rival minne-singer were represented as contending for the palm. The ironical question can only be understood when one knows that the then united arts of poetry and of singing were already at that time taught in regular

school, or guild, fashion, even as was later the case among the burgher-poets. Klingsor is probably but a mythic personage, a sort of early medieval Faust. But the author of the 'Wartburg War' has certainly not put an anachronistic remark into his mouth.

There were many gradations in these poetical fellowships. The high-born dukes and members of ruling houses who occasionally turned to the harp, did not, of course, belong to the singer class properly speaking. The veritable singers, or poets, according to the customs of the age, led a migratory life, going from one court, or nobleman's mansion, to the other, expecting reward for what they gave. Their poetry is by themselves called 'courtly song' (*hovelicher sang*). The expression had, however, not the unpleasant meaning that would now be evoked by the term 'courtly.' *Hof*, from which 'hovelich' (courtly) is derived, then meant any country seat. The word is even now used in Germany as well for a prince's court as for a peasant freeholder's dwelling. The habit of taking reward, wages (*miete*), for their poems, was openly acknowledged by these minstrels. So distinguished a poet as Walter von der Vogelweide did not scruple to say that he expected his 'wages.' Still, in the beautiful lay in which he sings the praise of German women—

German men are nobly bred;
E'en as angels our women are
Virtue and pure love,
He who seeks for them,
May he come to our land so full of bliss—
O, long would I live therein!

the poet has the good taste (that is to say, according to the courtesies of the time) of declaring that womankind is far too sublime for him to expect any other 'wages' from them than amiable greetings (*schone grueze*). The same Walter, some time afterwards, obtained a feudal tenure in reward for his exertions during an election contest for the German crown. The poetical effusion in which he expresses his unbounded gratitude for this liberal act of the ruler whom he had helped to place on the Imperial Throne, is rather comic in its exuberance. He says he no longer fears to 'feel frosty winter in his toes,' nor does he mind what wicked lords think of him. He now has 'air in summer, and fuel in the cold season;' his neighbours consider him a most excellent man, whereas formerly they looked quite bearishly at him. His poems, once regarded as bitter, grumbling, and scolding utterances (his satires on Church and State are here alluded to), are now thought quite clean and fit for a court:

Ich was sô volle scheltens, daz mîn âten stanc;
Daz hat der kûnec gemachet reine, und dar zuo minen sanc.

A rather realistic expression for a tender minne-singer! But troubadour language, generally so fragrant, sometimes breaks out into utterances totally unfit for a modern drawing-room.

Between the various poetical associations, and the different rivals in the art, angry feuds occasionally sprang up, according to the excitable nature which has from olden times been attributed to the poetical genius. The angriest words were exchanged between those who looked down upon each other as being of an inferior degree in the poetical guild. There were bards who carefully cultivated the ancient and purer traditions; others who descended to the lowest humdrum versification. As taste degenerated in consequence of the nobility assuming more and more a lansquenet and even robber character, and becoming, therefore, unable to enjoy true poetry, the inferior caste of poetasters rose to the surface. Even as the minstrels in England, and the *Confrérie des Menestriers* and the *Troubadours* in Northern and Southern France, gradually became mere street-bawlers and *jongleurs*, so also in Germany a gradual deterioration took place in the character of the wandering bards. So-called 'sentence-sayers' (*spruch-sprecher*) and court fools (*hofschalke*) began to introduce themselves in the castles and mansions and to obtain the chief hold on the people at large. A great many complaints are yet extant of later minne-singer, who utter their grief at the decaying art.

They charge that decay upon the miserly habits which had grown up among the nobility, as well as upon the increase of 'court foolery.' Thus Konrad von Würzburg complains of these 'untutored fools' (*künstelose schalke*), whom he calls a bastard cross-breed between a wolf and a fox, and of whom he says that they steal from the real poets (the *künstereichen*) both the language and the melody. In a symbolical representation he leads True Art into a wood before the throne of Justice. Clad in tattered, beggarly garments, True Art utters her grievance. The verdict of Justice is, that he who confers upon the vile poetasters the rewards which rightfully belong to the veritable bards, shall for all time to come be shunned by Love.

Much stronger are the expressions of the minne-singer Boppo, with the surname of 'the Strong.' He was famed for his bodily strength; nor was his language deficient in massiveness. In abusing the inferior versifex class, he runs through the whole animal kingdom, and through every imaginable scolding term, in order to fix strange denominations upon them—as for instance: *herr esel, düinkelgut, ehrenneider, galgenschwengel, niemands freund, wiedehopf, schwalbennest, entenschnabel, affenzagel, schandendeckebloss*. That power which our language possesses of coining new terms, had evidently been concentrated in a remarkable degree in the hands of Boppo, who, albeit a troubadour, is supposed to have originally

been a glass-blower, and who subjected his antagonists to a most unmerciful fire of vituperative appellations.

The Minne-song had flourished in Germany in the twelfth and thirteenth, partly still in the fourteenth century. Even in the fifteenth we yet meet with wandering poets; but they are few and far between; and the castle-gates generally remain locked to them. The nobles change into robber knights. The chase, plundering expeditions, petty feuds, and gross carousals, are now their only occupations. The Empire is distracted and convulsed by the aristocratic leagues of the 'Cudgellers' (*Bengeler*), the 'Grim Lions,' and other brigand associations of the nobility. Meanwhile, in the towns, a new power rises. There, a spirit of freedom makes its way; there, trade and commerce expand; a lofty architecture combines with the development of the pictorial art. In the towns, therefore, Poetry also takes its refuge. The lyre is little heard now in the courts and the castles; the bardic guilds are henceforth established in the cities.

The transition is a gradual one. The old poetical forms remain at first the same as before: the Master-song is, as it were, evolved from the Troubadour song, and appears, at least in the beginning, so mixed up with the latter that in some cases it is impossible to make a distinct classification one way or the other. Even as in nature there is no abrupt break in the forms of life, so also on the domain of intellectual development. The lines of division are generally less marked in reality than we assume them to be for the sake of finding our way through the maze of multiform phenomena. Epic poetry is, through a process of condensation, evolved from the ballad form, and gradually dissolves again into the latter. The drama arises from the lyric strophe and antistrophe. Chivalric poetry in Germany takes its rise from a previous popular and monkish literature. The master-song, too, sprouts up from the ancient stem: a later blossom, of less fragrancancy, amidst the shed leaves of the decaying minne-song. On the emblematic *meistertafel* at Nuremberg, the Rose Garden was depicted in which the errant chivalry once sang; and Hans Sachs, in the sixteenth century, still composed many of his lays on the melodies of Walter von der Vogelweide and other troubadours.

Generally, Oswald von Wolkenstein and Hugo von Montfort are regarded as the last representatives of the Minne-song; Muscatblüt and Michael Beheim, who lived at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteen centuries, as the chief precursors of the Master-song. Wolkenstein and Muscatblüt are the more important of the four. Their poetical character, it seems to me, is almost invariably indicated in the wrong way, even in standard works like those by Gervinus and Vilmar. Both these eminent historians of our literature reckon Oswald

von Wolkenstein among those who once more raised the old troubadour song, while they accuse Muscatblüt of affectation and triviality. I consider this statement a very unwarranted one. The opinion of Gervinus that Muscatblüt was 'as far from the breath of free nature as his artificial tone is from the artless strophes of Montfort,' can at most be applied to his Lays on The Virgin Mary. In them we meet with a complicated versification, an affected rhyme, an offensive superabundance of imagery. Still, it ought not to be forgotten that even in this he kept within the taste of his time. On the other hand we frequently find in his productions a wealth of sentiment, rendered in such simple words that it is not too much to say that some of his poems may be placed at the side of the best of all times and nations.

Who has not admired Gretchen's Song at the Spinning Wheel as a true master-piece? On looking more closely, we meet, in ancient German literature, poems coming so near to it that we may assume without disrespect that Goethe, who had studied the old Faust plays and borrowed much from them, had also embodied many a lyric jewel of that time in his dramatic treasure. Has not Gretchen's plaint: 'My peace is gone, my heart is sore' a striking affinity to a poem by Muscatblüt,¹ in which a lover thus pours forth his grief:

Herz, Muth und Sinn
 Sehnt sich dahin,
 Wo meine Gewalt
 So mannigfalt
 Sich ganz hat hingekehret.
 Mein freier Will'
 Ist worden still;
 Mein stäter Muth
 Mich trau'ren thut:
 Mein Herz ist ganz versehret.

I fear it will be found impossible to render in English the pathetic simplicity of these quaint lines. The following² gives, however, some idea of the poet's power:

With grief o'erborne,
 And anguish-torn,
 My soul and heart
 Would fain depart
 Where each sad thought a captive dwells.
 My once free will
 Is quelled and still;
 My constant breast
 By woe oppressed;
 My heart with hopeless mis'ry swells.

¹ I give it but slightly changed in orthography, so as to render it more accessible to the student of modern German.

² I am indebted for this version, as well as for one or two others, to the kindness of a friend, Miss Garnett.

Somewhat in the tone of the popular Parting-songs (*Scheidelieder*), but at the same time reminding one of Gretchen's : '*Ach neige, du Schmerzensreiche,*' are the following passages in the same poem by Muscatblüt :

Ach Gott, erkenn,
 Warum und wenn
 Ich sehnender Mann
 Verdienet han,
 Dass ich muss von ihr scheiden
 Dass Lieb' mit Leid
 Von Liebe scheid',
 Das heisst doch wohl ein Leiden.
 Denn Lieb ohne Leid nicht kann sein ;
 Lieb' bringet Pein,
 So Mann und Weib
 Mit betrübtem Leib
 Hie von einander scheiden.

Wie möcht mein Herz
 In solchem Schmerz
 Fröhlich sein,
 Dass ich die Reine
 Soll ewiglich vermeiden.
 Ach, Scheiden, dass du je wardst erdacht ;
 Scheiden thut mich kränken.
 Scheiden hat mich zu Sorgen gebracht,
 Thut Muscatblüt bedenken.
 Scheiden hat mich
 Gemachet siech ;
 Scheiden will mich verderben.
 Daran gedenk', traut selig Weib !

Is there a want of natural truthfulness, a want of deep feeling, in this? Undoubtedly Gervinus' *Geschichte der Deutschen Dichtung* has rendered great service by showing the intimate connexion between the political and the intellectual life of the nation. But Gervinus has not, to my knowledge, made very profound studies in our ancient writers. I am afraid that in the case of Muscatblüt he rendered his verdict off-hand, without being intimately acquainted with the subject. The same might be said with regard to the judgment he passed on Wolkenstein—again a most erroneous one, giving a false notion both of Wolkenstein's particular bent and of his general capabilities.

In saying this, I am surely far from endeavouring unduly to raise Muscatblüt, the commoner, above Wolkenstein, the knight. Muscatblüt certainly does not attract our sympathies by anything else than his lyric merits. Whilst Walter von der Vogelweide boldly denounces papal tyranny and priestly arrogance with a truly reformatory energy, Muscatblüt, the precursor of the Master-song, combines a voluptuous Mariolatry

with an ardent hatred against all reformatory aspirations, for instance, of the Hussites. It is true, the Czechian movement in Bohemia, even at that time, created already much bitterness in Germany on national and political grounds; and John Huss, besides being a reformer, was a representative of this Czechian, anti-German movement. But Muscatblüt attacked the memory of Huss on Church grounds, giving his assent in rather a brutal manner to the fiendish act of the inquisitorial assembly at Constance. With an allusion to the name of the Bohemian leader, which in Czechian signifies 'goose,' he exclaimed: 'There is yet many an unroasted gosling to be examined!' 'To examine,' in those days, was the technical term for 'putting on the rack!'

Altogether, some of the fore-runners of the Master-singer school were rather characterised by this dark spirit of opposition to the reformatory movement, which was strongly coming up long before Luther. However, at Augsburg, about the middle of the fifteenth century, we already find considerable enlightenment among the master-singer school there; for, in a reactionary satire against the boldness of the towns, which dates from that time, there is the following ironical praise of Augsburg:

Augsburg hat einen weisen Rath;
 Das sieht man an ihrer kecken That
 Im Singen, Dichten und Klaffen.
 Sie haben errichtet eine Singschul,
 Und setzen oben auf den Stuhl
 Den, der übel redt von den Pfaffen.

Thus, heretical views already were a recommendation, in 1450, for the position of chairman among the civic bards of that free town. That was before Luther was born! We here see the beginning of that Protestant movement which afterwards became a very law to the master-singers; the Bible, in opposition to the legendary cycle of the Catholic Church, serving them as a text-book and a guide in their poetical productions.

Michael Beheim, that other precursor of the Meister-singer school, was one of the last wandering poets who tried their luck by singing at courts. He however met with many rebuffs, and then, ill-humoured and full of anger against those who would not be his patrons, broke out into pungent satires against the princes and the nobility. In this he certainly was far from representing in any way the character of the later meister-singer who never asked for princely or aristocratic favour, much less for pecuniary reward from courts. Following their trade for a livelihood, they sought in poetry, so far as they understood it, merely a satisfaction for the mind and the heart, endeavouring to render their 'schools' a means of raising the intellectual and moral standard of their own class and of the popular classes in general. As to Beheim's effu-

sions, they were rather of that artificial and somewhat tasteless style which Gervinus wrongly attributes to Muscatblüt. Yet it must not be forgotten that even in such stiff and strangely-set *dévises* as we meet with, for instance, in his praise of a lady, who is said to be—

ein Balsamgarten	rein,
Der Lilien ein	Stengel,
Violensprengel,	Ros',
Und auch Zeitlos,'	Blum',
Der Seligkeit Ruhm,	Güte,
Maienblüthe,	des Sommers Zier—

he is not too far removed from some troubadour prototypes.

On the contrary, how distant, in spirit and tone, is Oscar von Wolkenstein from the Minne-poets, whilst yet it has been said of him that he had continued the old chivalric song! I, for my part, cannot conceive a more erroneous judgment. A few songs of a more delicate nature there are no doubt to be found in Wolkenstein, who is a queer mixture of a venturesome, heroic *ritter*, of a Don Quixote, and of a Sancho Pansa. But the bulk of his poems, which fill a goodly volume, is surely not of the nobler troubadour kind. His dancing songs especially are of a broad-grinning comicality. There is a boorish bacchanalianism in them which sometimes verges upon satyr-like grossness, or seeks relief in mere senseless outcries. What could be less like a minnesong than the poem which begins with the words 'Mine host, we feel a jolly thirst,' and in which one of the tamest verses, utterly untranslatable in their unbridled hop-and-jump wildness, runs thus :

Pfeifauf, Heinzel, Lippel, Jäckel!
 Frisch, froh, frei! Frisch, froh, frei! Frisch, froh, frei!
 Zweit euch; rührt euch; schnurra bäckel!
 Hans, Luzei! Kunz, Katrei! Benz, Clarei!
 Spring kälbrisch drunter, Jäckel!
 Ju hei hei! Ju hei! hei! Ju hei hei!

Or take the following bit of a nonsensical jumble of words! Barring two or three lines, no meaning can be detected in them, except a fierce animalism that breaks out into a rapid utterance of inarticulate cries :—

Da zysly, musly,
 fysly, fusly,
 henne, klusly,
 kumbt in's husly,
 werffen ain tusly,
 susa, susly,
 negena grusly
 well wir sicher han.

Clerly, metzly,
 elly, ketzly,
 thuont ein setzly,
 richt eur letzli,
 tula hetzly,
 trutzza tretzly,
 vacht das retzly,
 der uns freud vergan.

Unless I greatly err, the minne-singers had a somewhat different style.

In other poems, Wolkenstein, who on his adventurous expeditions in Europe, Asia, and Africa, had become something of a linguist in a rather unscientific sense, heaps together, in the absurdest manner, odds and ends of various languages, so as to produce a perfect maze of gibberish. A few biographical notes on this vagabond freelance, to whom in all histories of our literature a totally wrong place is assigned, may perhaps prove of interest; the more so because in his character there is such an eccentric medley of the old and the beginning modern time, a mixture of chivalry and of very Nether-Dutch 'popular' ways and manners.

He was a Tyrolese by birth, and lived between 1354 and 1423. As a boy, he lost an eye by a shot; but with his other eye he peered only the more deeply into the romantic 'ritter' literature of his time. At the age of ten he left his father's castle, in order to participate in a crusade against the heathen Slavonians in Prussia. His parents let him depart without much ado; for his support they handed him three-farthings and a piece of bread. On the march he gained his livelihood as a groom. At night the roystering boy slept in a stable-corner, or covered by the starry canopy. For eight years he served as a common baggage-boy, went through Prussia, Lithuania, Poland, Red Russia; became a captive, was almost mortally wounded, went to Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Flanders, England, Scotland, Ireland, mostly serving—in what later became the lansquenet character—in various armies and countries. In the company of German merchants he went through Poland to the shores of the Black Sea, and into the Crimea; became a cook on board ship, then a common boatswain; saw Armenia and Persia; sailed, again as a ship's cook, to Candia; took part in an expedition against the Turks; fled from a lost battle, wandering through Dalmatia, and returning to the Tyrol. At the age of twenty-five, his hair had become grey; his face was deeply furrowed; but he had learnt no less than ten languages.

When he resolved to marry, he met with a tragi-comic misfortune. Wooing a certain Sabina Jäger, a citizen's daughter, he was told by her

that, to prove his true love, he ought, as a first chivalric duty, to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Which he did; but on returning he found Sabina Jäger married! Later he turns up in the struggles of the Tyrolese nobles against the dukes in Austria; then again in Spain, Holland, England, Portugal; in a crusade against the Moors; afterwards as a wandering singer in the Moorish Kingdom of Granada and in the Provence. Meanwhile his castles had been burnt down; still, immediately afterwards, he celebrates a marriage. But his former love, Sabina aforesaid, who now resided at the Court of Innsbruck, allures him to a rendezvous under the pretext of a pilgrimage; and as Don Quixote Wolkenstein unsuspectingly meets her, she has him captured and bound, in order to extort from him a ransom of six thousand gulden. The iron fetters which the false fair one imposed upon him, made him a cripple for life; nevertheless, after the death of his wife, we see him once more in the field, and once more in captivity. For a long time he pines in a loathsome dungeon. On issuing from it, he marries again! Then he goes to war against the Hussites. But at last he can move neither foot, nor arm; neither walk, nor stand; and thus he dies an inglorious death from dropsy. In the wars in which he played a part, he always kept on the losing side—a born bird of ill-luck. Even after his death, there was an evil star shining over his remains; for on the church, near which he was buried, being rebuilt, his tomb-stone became accidentally transposed, and the whereabouts of his burial-place were forgotten.

Such was the chequered career of the strange man who erroneously is represented as one of the last 'Minne' poets, but whose lays generally resemble the troubadour style as much as a broom-stick does a forget-me-not.

However, Wolkenstein, as a poet, does not stand alone in this exuberant hilarity. Between Minne and Meister-song, we find a third element interposing at that time—an element of gross joviality, which, strange to say, makes its appearance even on clerical ground. This peculiar phenomenon is to be observed in many spiritual Church poems of the fifteenth century. Whilst the Minne-singer, when they yielded to religious enthusiasm, exhibit a melancholy, brooding mood, a mystically ardent adherence to sacred traditions; whilst the Meister-singer, about the time of Hans Sachs, are characterised by a profound but quiet profession of faith, there is, in that age of transition when the Master-song only begins to rise, a certain hilarious form of spiritual poetry.

Many of those clerical poems sound almost like a student's *Gaudeamus igitur*. Were it not known that they are Church songs, they might be mistaken for satires against the clergy. The mixture of Latin and

German, in itself not unapt to produce a risible effect, is very much used in those poems :

In dulci júbilo—
 Nun singet und seid froh!
 All unsre Wonne
 Liegt in praesepio ;
 Sie leuchtet mehr als die Sonne
 Matris in gremio ;
 Qui est A et O,
 Qui est A et O!

O Jesu parvule,
 Nach dir ist mir weh!
 Tröst' mir mein Gemüthe,
 O puer optime,
 Durch aller Jungfrau'n Güte,
 O princeps gloriae,
 Trahe me post te!
 Trahe me post te!

Mater et filia
 Ist Jungfrau Maria.
 Wir waren gar verdorben
 Per nostra crimina :
 Nun hat sie uns erworben
 Coelorum gaudia.
 Quanta gratia!
 Quanta gratia!

Ubi sunt gaudia ?
 Wo die Engel singen
 Nova cantica,
 Und die Glöcklein klingen
 In regis curia.
 Eia, qualia !
 Eia, qualia !

This, surely, is not a very austere triumphal song on the birth of the Saviour. A clerical May-song in honour of the Thorn-crowned is also extant, in which the faithful are invited to assemble under the Tree of the Cross :

Unter des Kreuzes Aste,
 Da schenkt man Cyperwein ;
 Maria ist die Kellnerin,
 Die Engel schenken ein ;
 Da sollen die lieben Seelen
 Von Minne trunken sein.

Under the branches of the Cross
 Is poured forth Cyprus wine ;
 Maria bears the goblet round,
 The angels pour the wine ;
 There all dear souls shall drunken be
 With juice of Love's own vine.

In the 'Bath-Song,' another clerical lay, the pilgrimage of the faithful to the Saviour is literally described as a journey to a Spa, nay as a voyage to Baden-Baden. Even the effect of the water, the bleeding necessary for the cure, and other mundane matters, are strangely mixed up with the religious subject. The five introductory verses run thus :

Wohlauf ! im Geist gen Baden,
 Ihr zarten Fräulein ;
 Dahin hat uns geladen
 Jesus der Herre mein.

Hie quillt der Gnaden Bronnen,
 Der Freuden Morgenröth' ;
 Da glänzt die ewige Sonne,
 Und alles Leid zergeht.

Da hört man süß erklingen
 Der Vögelein Getön,
 Und auch die Engelein singen
 Ihre Melodie gar schön.

Da führt Jesus den Tanz
 Mit aller Mädchen Schaar ;
 Da ist die Liebe ganz
 Ohn' alles Ende gar.

Da ist ein lieblich Kosen ¹
 Und Lachen immermehr ;
 Da kann die Seel' hofiren
 Mit Freuden ohn' alles Weh !

The following I believe to be a fair translation :—

Up ! haste to the Baden spring,
 Ye tender maidens fair !
 Jesus, our Lord and King,
 Himself invites us there.

The well of grace supernal,
 Joy's rosy dawn is there ;
 There shines a sun eternal—
 Banished are pain and care.

¹ *Smiren*, in the old text,

There soundeth, sweetly singing,
Of birds the harmony ;
There angels' voices are ringing
Celestial melody.

There the Lord doth lead the measure
'Mid troops of damsels bright';
And there the heavenly pleasure
Of love is infinite.

There caresses sweet are given,
And unending laughter is heard ;
There the souls may go a-courting,
With gladness undeterred.

And let it not be too hastily assumed that in these extraordinary verses, which partake so strongly of the erotic character and even of the erotic terminology, the spirit of the later pietists, or 'Mucker,' is already visible. On the contrary, strange as it may seem, the probability rather is that this Bath-song, which describes the well, the dawn, the crowd of young girls, and the chirping of the feathered songsters in a region where all grief ceases, is a dim echo of the worship of the Germanic Goddess of Love, whose place, after the introduction of Christianity, was occupied by the Virgin Mary. In the Freia myth also, we have the well of eternal rejuvenation—the rosy dawn which everlastingly pervades the region of this goddess—the crowd of children that move joyously on a flowery meadow filled with the song of birds ; in short, the whole outer structure of a legend in which afterwards only names were changed.

In this way, ancient Germanic paganism, with its mystic poetical charms, once more flickers up from beneath the Roman Catholic integument, ere the *Meister-singer* intone the sadly serious chaunts of the 'Haupt voll Blut und Wunden':

O sacred Head, surrounded
By crown of piercing thorn !
O bleeding Head, so wounded,
Reviled and put to scorn !
