

*THE MINNESINGERS.*

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Many centuries ago there flourished in France writers and singers called troubadours, in the south, and trouveres, in the north. These people followed the reciters and writers of the earlier Chansons de Gestes, which had grown long and tedious, and so the new singers found appreciative listeners to their shorter, livelier, merrier songs, as they passed from town to town, or from castle to castle, or when they gave expression to their feelings of love and admiration beneath their mistress' windows.

The effect of this new practical development was felt even in Germany, and, in the Minnesingers, we find the counterpart of the troubadours of Provence. The character of their lyrics is expressed in the term "Minne," love, *i.e.*, they were writers of love songs. In general they sang of love, spring and flowers, and their songs are bright and joyous, or melancholy, as they felt happy or depressed; as Nature seemed to be joyous or sorrowful.

It seems rather singular that men used to the hardships of life in the rough and warlike times of eight or nine centuries ago should put aside thoughts of warfare and conquest, though many of them and their contemporaries did not, and devote themselves to the composition of poetry dealing with Nature and the tenderer human passions. But with many it was so, and, in this way, became more firmly established, if possible, that noble characteristic of the German people—the appreciation of, and regard for, women which they boast of, and to which the Minnesingers gave so much prominence in their poems.

In their work we may see, too, just a hint, sometimes more, of their longing for political and religious freedom of which Luther, a master-singer as well as a reformer, was the standard-bearer long after. This feeling was inspired by the experiences of the Crusades and encouraged by the Swabian rulers of the times, the Hohenstauf-

ens, though it did not burst out in all its force until long after.

The troubadours of Provence gave the example and the Hohenstaufens, themselves educated and refined rulers, gave the support and encouragement which was needed to supplement such literary productions as the Nibelungen Lied, thus reaching, educating and refining the masses to a greater extent than was possible in the case of the heroic epics.

The Hohenstaufen rulers who are particularly worthy of mention because of their appreciation of the productions of the Minnesingers, their sympathy with them and who themselves wrote songs, as was often the case with members of the nobility in those times, were "Frederick Barbarossa, who reigned thirty-eight years, and his grandson, Frederick II., who reigned thirty-six years." Both of these men were unusually well educated and refined and, because of their writings and acts in opposition to the severity of church rule, were called "heretics." Some of the most noted of those whose reputation is dependent entirely on poetical work are Henry of Veldig, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Hartman von der Awe, and Walther von der Vogelweide. Veldig was the first one of prominence and Vogelweide the one in whom the Minnesinger period had its culmination.

A fitting closing of this sketch may be a few stanzas from Vogelweide's "Spring and Women," translated by Bayard Taylor:

When the blossoms from the grass are springing,  
As they laughed to meet the sparkling sun;  
Early on some lovely morn of May,  
And all the small birds on the boughs are singing  
Best of music, finished and again begun,  
What other equal rapture can we pray?  
It is already half of heaven.

But should we guess what bliss might be given,  
So I declare, that, which in my sight,  
Still better seems, and still would seem, had I the same  
delight.

When a noble dame of purest beauty  
Well attired, with even garnished tresses,  
Unto all, in social habit, goes.

Finely graceful, yet subdued to duty,  
Whose impartial glance her state expresses,  
As on stars the sun his radiance throws!  
Then let May his bliss renew us:  
What is there so blissful to us.

As her lips of love to see?  
We gaze upon the noble dame, and let the blossoms be.