

PART IV.—LITERATURE.

Ancient poetry.

There is a deep vein of poetry in the Teutonic nature, and it appears to have revealed itself in the earliest ages. According to Tacitus, the Germans of his time had ancient songs relating to the god Tuisco, his son Mannus, and the three forefathers of the Teutonic race. They had also poems in honour of Arminius, the original subject of which was probably the god Irmin, whose pillar Charles the Great overthrew long afterwards in his first campaign against the Saxons. A song called "barditus," celebrating the greatness of the war-god whom Tacitus calls Hercules, was sung or chanted by the freemen as they advanced to battle. The name "barditus" led some ingenious writers of the 18th century to speculate respecting an order of bards among the ancient Germans; but there is no evidence that any such order existed. "Barditus" meant in the first instance a shield, and was transferred to the song because, while the singing went on, the shield was held to the mouth to make the sound more terrible. It is the opinion of many critics that the stories of "Reynard the Fox" and "Isegrim the Wolf" may be traced back to these remote times. If so, the probability is that they were brought by the Teutons from Asia, and were originally common to the Aryan family. There is every reason to believe that some elements of the *Nibelungenlied* belong to the prehistoric age. The legend of Siegfried has all the marks of extreme antiquity, and it seems to have had at first a purely mythological character. Of the rhythm in which these primitive conceptions were embodied we have no certain knowledge; but as the most ancient poems which have been preserved are in alliterative verse, it is reasonable to assume that this had grown up long before writing came into use.

Opposition of the clergy.

I. *The Early Middle Age.*—When the German tribes began to accept Christianity the clergy everywhere opposed the native poetry, and strove to replace its rude conceptions by the milder images of the gospel. Among the Goths of the 4th century Bishop Ulfilas took the most effectual means of achieving his purpose by preparing a clear, faithful, and simple rendering of the Scriptures,—a translation which has been of inestimable value in the scientific study of the Teutonic languages. No clergyman of like genius arose in Germany itself; but there, too, pagan compositions were steadily discouraged. Charles the Great was the first to check this hostile movement. He showed his love of his native speech, not only by beginning to put together a German grammar, but by issuing orders for a collection of old German poetry. Louis the Pious had little sympathy with the taste of his father, but he could not efface the impression produced by the great emperor. Many of the clergy ceased to dislike that which so mighty a friend of the church had approved, and in some monasteries there were ardent collectors of ancient epic fragments and ballads.

These treasures of Old High and Low German literature are nearly all lost, but from the small portions which have come down to us, and from hints in Latin chronicles, we can at least make out the themes with which many of them dealt. Ermanrick, or Ermanaricus, the famous Gothic king of the 4th century, was the subject of a large number of poetical legends. Siegfried continued to be a great epic hero, and from about the 7th century he appears to have been no longer treated as superhuman. The legend of the overthrow of the Burgundian king, Gundicarius or Günther, by Attila assumed many forms, and was at a later time connected with the story of Siegfried. Around the name of Theodoric the East Goth, as Dieterich, several legends soon grouped themselves; and from about the 9th century he was associated with Attila, with whom

in history he had nothing to do. Unfortunately, the fragments which have been preserved—all of which are alliterative—do not treat of these supreme heroes; their subjects are of subordinate importance and interest. The *Hildebrandslied*, which was written from traditional narratives early in the 9th century, and is in a mixed dialect, introduces us to a follower of Dieterich. Hildebrand, returning from the wars carried on by his lord, is compelled to fight his own son; but we are left in uncertainty whether father or son is conqueror. The *Ludwigslied* is a ballad of the latter part of the 9th century, written in honour of a victory gained over the Northmen by Louis III., the West-Frankish king. The author was probably a monk who had been a favourite at the court of Charles the Bald. There is also an Old High German ballad celebrating the reconciliation of Otto I. with his brother Henry; and similar ballads are known to have kept up the fame of Duke Ernest of Swabia, who rebelled against Conrad II., and of many other popular heroes. Walter of Aquitania, who flies with his bride from the court of Attila, and at Worms fights King Günther and his warriors, is the hero of a Latin poem of the 10th century, written by a monk of St Gall, whose materials were evidently taken from a more vigorous German original. The *Merseburger Gedichte*, two songs of enchantment, were written in the 10th century, but must have come down from a much more remote period. They are chiefly interesting for the light they throw upon the religious beliefs and customs of ancient Germany.

The old ballads, which were intended to be sung as well as recited, were handed down from generation to generation, and necessarily underwent many changes. They were preserved from an early period in the memory of the people by professional minstrels, who were held in considerable honour in the time of Charles the Great, but were afterwards rather tolerated than encouraged by the higher classes. Many of them were blind men, and in their solitary wanderings the ancient stories must often have assumed in their minds new shapes. They usually accompanied their singing with the zither or the harp.

Of the works with which the church sought to counteract pagan influences very few remain. The most important is *Heliant*, a Low German poem in alliterative verse said to have been written by a Saxon at the request of Louis the Pious. It is a narrative of the life of Christ, and follows closely the Four Gospels, whose separate accounts it attempts to harmonize. The author has considerable force and freedom of expression, and seems to have been so absorbed in the grandeur of his theme as to have deliberately rejected rhetorical ornament. The so-called *Krist* of Otfrid, a High German poet, who dedicated his work to Louis the German, has the same subject, but is not nearly so effective. It is the first rhymed German poem, and the necessities of rhyme often compel Otfrid to fill out his line with words and phrases which obscure his meaning. His lyrical passages are too didactic to rank as genuine poetry. The fragment of *Muspilli*, a Bavarian poem of the 9th century on the Last Judgment, indicates power of a much higher order. Its form is alliterative; and reminiscences of paganism are strangely mingled with its Christian ideas.

During the reigns of Charles the Great and Louis the Pious secular learning was zealously cultivated in the monasteries of Germany as well as in those of other portions of the Frankish empire. The school established by Hrabanus Maurus in the famous abbey of Fulda vied with that of Tours, where Hrabanus had been a pupil

of Alcuin, in the excellence of its teaching. In the wars with the Northmen, with the Magyars, and with the Slavs under the later Carolingian kings, many of the ecclesiastical institutions were destroyed; but they sprang up again under the protection of Henry I. From the time of his son Otto I. the Germans stood in direct relation with Italy; the marriage of Otto II. with the princess Theophano brought them into connexion with the learning and refinement of the Byzantine court; and Gerbert, the friend of Otto III., afterwards Pope Silvester II., introduced them to some of the achievements of Arabian science. These influences quickened the energies of enlightened churchmen, and originated an intellectual movement which to some extent continued during the vigorous reigns of the first two Franconian sovereigns, Conrad II. and Henry III. The chief subject of study was the scholastic philosophy, to which, however, in its earlier stages, Germany made no supremely important contribution. The Neo-Platonic tendencies of Scotus Erigena were opposed by Hrabanus Maurus, who remained loyal to Aristotle and Boetius; and his example was generally followed, not only by his successors in Fulda, but by the members of all other German schools. The school of St Gall was exceptionally active, and one of the monks, Notker Labeo, who died in 1022, wrote some original philosophical books, and translated into German the *De Consolatione* of Boetius and two of Aristotle's works. In pure literature very little was done; but there are several well-written Latin histories belonging to the 11th century. The best thought of the age was manifested in its Romanesque architecture, and in the then subordinate arts of painting, sculpture, and music.

Hohenstaufen period.

II. *The Age of Chivalry.*—The reign of Henry IV., during which the struggle between the empire and the papacy began, had a disastrous effect on the national culture; and the evil was not remedied under the disturbed rule of his two immediate successors. But under the Hohenstaufen dynasty, during the period of Middle High German, the country passed through one of the greatest epochs of its literature. The more learned of the clergy interested themselves deeply in the development of scholasticism through the nominalists and the realists; and in the 13th century Albertus Magnus, a native of Swabia, produced the first systematic exposition of Aristotle, in the full light of Arabian research. It was, however, in poetry that Germany achieved the highest distinction; and her most important poets were members of the knightly class, which at this time rose to its utmost power and fame. There were many reasons why the members of this class became sensitive to the higher influences of the imagination. In the first place, they had the elevating consciousness of a life shared with a vast community which set before itself the loftiest aims. Historians sometimes take a malicious pleasure in contrasting the mean performance of many knights with their high vows; but these vows at any rate introduced into the life of rough nobles an ideal element, and inclined them to take interest in the gentler and nobler aspects of existence. In the Italian wars of Frederick Barbarossa the German knights saw more than they had ever before done of Southern civilization, and their minds were continually stimulated by the varying fortunes of their adventurous emperor. Of still greater importance was the influence of the crusades, in which the Germans first took an active part under Frederick's predecessor, Conrad III. The crusaders had a remote and unselfish aim, connected with all that was most sacred and most tender in their religious ideas; and this alone would have created a sentiment favourable to poetic aspiration. But, besides this, the far-off Eastern lands, with their strange peoples and mystical associations, awoke dreams which could not have other than harmonious utterance, and on the return of the

warriors they stirred the fancy of their friends with reports of a new and greater world. While the crusades lasted, the knights were forced into intimate acquaintance with the clergy, whose refined culture inevitably to some extent softened their rudeness; they also formed friendships with representatives of French chivalry. In France the works of the troubadours and the trouvères formed one of the most prominent elements of the national life, and the French nobles did not forget in Palestine the songs and romances of their home. The better minds in the German armies caught the inspiration, and longed to distinguish themselves by like achievements. And their desire was deepened when, by the acquisition of the Free County of Burgundy, Frederick Barbarossa opened a new pathway by which intellectual influences might pass from the western to the eastern bank of the Rhine.

The poetic impulse which thus entered Germany affected a wide circle; the highest princes as well as the humblest knights felt its power. Even the emperor Henry VI. himself is said to have been moved by the prevailing feeling, and to have composed verses. At the imperial and princely courts poets were encouraged to give expression to their genius; and the ladies whose beauty and virtues they delighted to praise stimulated their endeavours by marked appreciation. Thus the national imagination found in the whole temper of the age an atmosphere well adapted to the blooming of its first spring-time.

The most characteristic outcome of this active era is the series of poetical romances produced in the 12th and 13th centuries. The German poets might have found magnificent material in their old, native legends; but for the most part they preferred subjects which had already been artistically wrought by the trouvères, whose methods and style they also closely imitated. Among the themes they selected may be mentioned the legends of Alexander the Great, of Charles the Great and his paladins, of Arthur and the knights of the Round Table, with the allied legend of the Holy Grail. The fortunes of Tristram and Iseult also exercised a powerful charm over many minds. These and all other chosen subjects were treated wholly in the spirit of chivalry. The poets of the Middle Age had no idea of being true to the characteristics of a particular epoch; their own time was the only one they attempted to understand. Ancient heroes became in their hands mediæval knights; men who had died long before the rise of Christianity were transformed into devoted servants of the Church. And in every romance the supreme aim was to present an idealized picture of the virtues of knighthood.

One of those who prepared the way for the chief romance-writers was Conrad, a priest in the service of Henry the Proud, who, before 1139, composed the *Rolandslied*, setting forth, in imitation of the French *Chanson de Roland*, the overthrow of Roland, the favourite paladin of Charles the Great, in the pass of Roncesvalles. He was followed by another priest, Lamprecht, who, also working upon a French original, relates in the *Alexanderlied* the deeds of the Macedonian hero. Greater than either of these was Heinrich von Veldeke, the first of the poets who may claim to rank as German trouvères. His great work was the *Eneid*, written between 1175 and 1190. It is not only in armour and in dress that Virgil's characters are here changed; in thought and feeling they are recreated. The language of the poem is so carefully chosen, and the incidents are narrated with so much spirit, that it is still possible to understand the immense popularity it once enjoyed. Hartmann von Aue, in *Der Arme Heinrich* and other poems, selected themes that are extremely repulsive to modern feeling; but he was endowed with a genuinely plastic force, and interests us by touching certain mystical aspects of mediæval senti-

Hartmann von Aue.

ment. The master in whom these aspects were most fully represented was Wolfram von Eschenbach, a member of a noble family of Franconia, who was born during the reign of Frederick Barbarossa and died during that of his grandson, Frederick II. He was one of a group of poets who established themselves at the Wartburg, the court of the brilliant landgrave Hermann of Thuringia; and his chief poem, *Parzival*, was composed there towards the end of the 12th century. Germany did not produce during the Middle Ages a more truly poetic mind, and it is curious to observe how exactly he anticipated some of the qualities for which she long afterwards became famous. He has all the dreaminess, the sentiment, the passion for the ideal, which are, or rather at one time were, her most attractive characteristics. The hero, trained by his mother amid circumstances of idyllic simplicity, suddenly passes into a world of movement and adventure, and he is brought by accident to the gorgeous palace of the Holy Grail, of whose kingdom he ultimately becomes lord. The object of the poem is evidently to depict the strivings of a restless but noble spirit, dissatisfied with passing pleasure, having always before it a high and spotless aim. It is difficult for modern readers to detect the spiritual significance of many of the scenes; the poet seems to escape from us into a far-off region, whence his words reach us rather as dim echoes than as clear, ringing sounds. And some of the descriptions are in themselves tedious and superfluous, while advance from one stage of the tale to another apparently proceeds according to the arbitrary whim of the moment. Nevertheless, the character of *Parzival* is a true conception of genius, and enables us to understand, better than any other imaginative creation of mediæval Germany, that discontent with life as it is, that sense of being haunted by visions of spiritual loveliness, which, throughout the Middle Ages, existed side by side with unrestrained delight in the outward world.

A complete, almost a dramatic, contrast to Wolfram von Eschenbach is found in Gottfried of Strasburg, the greatest of his literary contemporaries. These two men are representatives of a distinction which incessantly recurs;—that between the poet who fashions spirits of a finer mould than those we actually know, and the poet who contents himself with penetrating into the innermost recesses of existing character. Gottfried's theme is *Tristram and Iseult*; and the charming tale, which unfortunately he did not live to carry to the end, was perhaps never more beautifully told. There are no mystic longings in the men and women he presents to us: they love the earth and the sky, with their gorgeous colours, graceful forms, and happy sounds; they care not to inquire what may lie behind these, or whether in the scheme of things there is a place for moral law. Few poets have set forth so powerfully the fascination of youthful passion. In his glowing pictures we find no shadowy figures like those of Wolfram, with step so light that they appear to be the figures of a dream; his images are clear, sharply cut, like those of the world from which they are taken. And although psychological analysis was unknown to him, the actions of his characters display keen insight into the secrets of human hearts when entangled in the most confused meshes.

Mediæval romance bore its richest fruit in the works of these two great poets; and most of their successors imitated one or other of them. Those who followed in Gottfried's steps came nearest to a happy result, for Wolfram was one of those lonely and daring spirits in whose remote path it is given to few to tread without stumbling. The best known of Gottfried's imitators was Conrad von Würzburg, who wrote on the Trojan war and many other subjects, and is considered one of the most artistic of mediæval writers. Towards the end of the 13th century the movement showed

signs of exhaustion, and romances began to make way for rough popular tales and rhymed chronicles.

Fortunately the poets of the age of chivalry did not all occupy themselves with the subjects of French romances. A few, whose names we do not know, turned towards the rich material in the metrical legends of their native land. Of these poets the most important was he who collected and put into shape the ancient ballads which make up the *Nibelungenlied*. How far he modified them we cannot tell. In the form in which we possess them, they probably owe something of their force to his genius; but he needed rather to arrange and to curtail than to invent, and, although a genuine poet, he was not at all times competent for his task. The work includes the legends of Siegfried, of Gundicarius, or Günther, king of Burgundy, of Dieterich, and of Attila; and the motives which bind them into a whole are the love and revenge of Kriemhild, the sister of Günther and Siegfried's wife. She excites the envy of Brunhild, the Burgundian queen, whose friend, Hagen, one of Günther's followers, discovers the vulnerable point in Siegfried's enchanted body, treacherously slays him, and buries in the Rhine the treasure he has long before conquered from the race of the Nibelungen. There is then a pause of thirteen years, after which Kriemhild, the better to effect her fatal purpose, marries Attila, king of the Huns. Thirteen years having again passed, her thirst for vengeance is satiated by the slaying of the whole Burgundian court. The Germans justly regard this great epic as one of the most precious gems of their literature. It has little of the grace of courtly poetry; its characters are without subtlety or refinement; we are throughout in the presence of vast elemental forces. But these forces are rendered with extraordinary vividness of imagination, and with a profound feeling for what is sublime and awful in human destiny. The narrative begins with epic calmness, but swells into a torrent, and dashes vehemently forward, when the injured queen makes a fearful return for her wrongs, and is herself swept away by the tragic powers she has called to her service. In the management of the story there are occasional traces of mediævalism; but its spirit is that of a more primitive time, when the German tribes were breaking into the Roman empire, when passions were untamed by Christian influence, and when the necessities of a wandering and aggressive life knit closely the bonds that united the chief to his followers. Deliberate villainy hardly appears in the poem; the most savage actions spring either from the unrestricted play of natural feeling, or from unquestioning fidelity to an acknowledged superior. Here and there we come upon touches which indicate that the poet who preserved the ancient legends was not incapable of appreciating finer effects than those at which he generally aims. The sketch of the hospitable and chivalrous Rüdiger, who receives the Burgundians on their way to the court of Attila, and afterwards dies while unwillingly fighting them in obedience to his queen's command, is not surpassed in the most artistic of the mediæval romances.

Gudrun is another epic in which a poet of this period gave form to several old legends. They had for centuries been current along the coasts of Friesland and Scandinavia, and the society they represent is essentially the same as that of the *Nibelungenlied*,—a society in which the men are rude, warlike, and loyal, the women independent and faithful. Although full of serious episodes, *Gudrun* is as happy in its ending as the greater poem is tragic; and we feel throughout that the beautiful Princess Gudrun of Seeland, whom the Northmen have carried from her home, and on whom the cruel Queen Gerlind heaps indignities, will at last be restored to King Herwig, her brave and passionate lover. The characters stand out clearly in their rough vigour; and several happy strokes

call up a vision of the bleak coasts and changeful northern sea which are the scenes of their adventures.

In the 15th century a German writer brought together in a single volume which he called the *Heldenbuch*—the "Book of Heroes"—a number of old legendary tales that must have been frequently on the lips of the people and of the wandering minstrels, while the knightly poets were singing of *Tristram* or of *Arthur*. This work, which was partly written by Kaspar von der Rhön, will not compare in imaginative force with its more famous rivals. The most powerful of the stories is probably the "Grosser Rosengarten," in which a monk, Ilsan, displays a very unclerical, but truly Teutonic, passion for war.

The age of chivalry was remarkable not only for its romances and epics but for its lyrics. All the leading writers of the time exercised themselves in lyrical poetry, and it was laboriously cultivated by multitudes who did not feel equal to the task of a prolonged effort. Among those who gained more or less distinction may be named Heinrich von Morungen, Reinmar der Alte, and Gottfried von Neifen. The poets of this class were known as *Minnesänger*, because their favourite theme was *Minne* or love. They began by imitating the troubadours, whose metres they often reproduced when not penetrated by the emotion which originally found in these forms a genuine expression. At a later stage it was considered a point of honour for each poet to invent a stanza of his own, whether or not those already existing were appropriate to his feeling. Thus many of the *minne* songs produce an impression of unreality and coldness, seeming at best to be but clever pieces of handiwork. But when the utmost deduction has been made, it is surprising how much of what was achieved by these ardent writers still appeals to us. The best among them strike notes which respond in every age to a master's touch; and they do it with a fine sense of beauty, a trained instinct for the appropriateness of words, and an evident delight both in simple and in subtle melody.

Perhaps no group of writers has ever had a deeper undertone of sadness than is to be detected in the greatest of the *minnesänger*. They had a vivid consciousness of the evanescence of human pleasure, an abiding feeling that corruption lurks behind the gayest forms and brightest colours. But they caught with proportional eagerness the passing rapture, letting no drop escape from the cup that would soon fall from their grasp. This intensity of feeling is reproduced in their lays, yet it was purified and generalized as it passed from the fleeting reality to the permanent realm of art. Their treatment of love, although sometimes, according to modern ideas, extravagant and fantastic, often displays genuine elevation of sentiment. They sing also in impassioned strains the loyalty of the vassal to his lord, the devotion of the Christian to his church. If they do not exhibit the soaring spiritual ambition of Wolfram's *Parzival*, they have a kind of pathetic memory of a lost paradise, a vague longing, by some distant difficult service, in battle with the infidel, to attain to a world in which the discords of the present life may be forgotten or harmonized. And behind all their images is the background of nature, whose loveliness they do not the less appreciate because they refrain from elaborately describing it. To the dwellers in dreary towers winter had often a cheerless and melancholy aspect; but this made all the more enchanting the new life of spring. It is in bailing the returning warmth and colour of the young season that the *minnesänger* attain their happiest triumphs.

Of all the *minnesänger* the first place belongs without question to Walther von der Vogelweide, probably of Tyrol whom Gottfried of Strasburg praises as heartily as he slyly depreciates Wolfram von Eschenbach. Walther lived some

time at the Wartburg, and was the friend of King Philip and Frederick II; he died on a little estate which the latter gave him in fief. Other *Minnesänger* lavished praise on generous princes; Walther was of a more manly character, and seems always to have maintained an independent bearing. Besides the usual themes of the lyrical poetry of his time, he wrote with enthusiasm of his native land; he also frequently alludes to the strife between the spiritual and secular powers, and sternly rebukes the ambition of the papacy. Beyond all his rivals he gives us the impression of writing with ease and delight. The structure of his stanzas does not hamper the movement of his feeling; it appears to provide the conditions of perfect freedom. Such a lyric as his *Unter der Linden an der Heide*, with its musical refrain *Tandaradei*, although a masterpiece of art, is exquisite in its childlike simplicity; it has the unaffected grace of a flower, the spontaneity of a bird's song.

As the expression of all that was fantastic and ridiculous in the age of chivalry, must be mentioned the *Frauentrost* of Ulrich von Lichtenstein, a work which was written about the middle of the 13th century, and had a certain popularity in its time. It is an autobiography, with a number of lyrics interwoven to give variety and animation to the narrative. The solemn gravity with which the author relates the amazing tasks imposed upon him by his mistress shows how easily the worship of womanhood degenerated into almost incredible childishness. Ulrich is sometimes compared to Don Quixote, but this is to do extreme injustice to Cervantes's hero. Amid all his illusions the fictitious knight maintains a certain pathetic dignity; the knight of reality passes from absurdity to absurdity without a touch of idealism to redeem his folly. And his lyrics are the tasteless manufacture of a thoroughly prosaic spirit.

Several of the *minnesänger*, Walther von der Vogelweide especially, display at times a strongly didactic tendency. From the beginning of the period this tendency was developed by writers who took little interest in poetry for its own sake, and it became more and more prominent as the purely lyrical impulse passed away. The didactic poet, however significant his labours may be to his contemporaries, has necessarily the stamp of commonplace for posterity; and the gnomic writers of the 13th century form no exception to this rule. But several of them have at least the interest that attaches to sincerity and earnestness. There is genuine enthusiasm for pure morality in the *Welsche Gast* of Thomasin Zerklar; and the *Bescheidenheit* of Freidank expresses so high a conception of duty, and expresses it so well, that the work was ascribed to Walther himself. Reinmar von Zweter and Heinrich Frauenlob came a little later, and they were followed by Hugo von Trimberg, whose *Renner* sets forth unimpeachable lessons in homely and satirical verses. A higher tone is perceptible in *Der Winsbecke*, a collection of sayings in which we find an echo of the reverence for noble women that marked the epoch at its dawn. Among didactic writings must be classed the well known *Der Krieg auf der Wartburg* ("The Contest at the Wartburg"). It includes the verses supposed to have been sung at a tournament of poets attended by Heinrich von Ofterdingen, Walther von der Vogelweide, and Wolfram von Eschenbach.

As Latin continued to be the speech of scholars, and the passion for metrical expression pervaded the higher classes, there was not much scope for the growth of prose. Nevertheless, it is in this age that we find the first serious attempts to secure for German prose a place in the national literature. The *Sachsenspiegel* and the *Schwabenspiegel*, two great collections of local laws, although of a scientific character, and mainly interesting because of their social importance, had considerable influence in encouraging the

Minnesänger.

Ulrich von Lichtenstein.

Didactic poets.

Walther von der Vogelweide.

respect of the Germans for their own language. The preachers, however, were the principal founders of prose style. Preaching became about the middle of the 13th century an agency of great power in the life of Germany. A number of the clergy, dissatisfied with the technicalities of scholasticism, and with the mere forms under which spiritual aspiration was often crushed, strove to attain to a fresh vision of religious truth, and to kindle their own enthusiasm in the minds of others. Of this generous band the most popular was Brother Berthold, a Franciscan monk, a man of a noble and commanding temper, and an orator of the highest rank. Love for the poor was his dominant motive, and he sometimes expressed it in language a modern socialist might envy. Having something of the imaginative glow of the minnesänger, he gave such colour to his abstract teaching as made it at once intelligible and attractive. Of a less poetical nature than Berthold, Master Eckhart, the next early master of religious prose, was more deeply philosophical. Although familiar with the scholastic systems, he broke away from their method, and became the founder of the mystical school which was one of the most potent factors in preparing the way for the Reformation. Eckhart's reasonings are sometimes hard to follow, but he is not a confused thinker; his obscurity arises rather from the nature of his themes than from his mode of handling them. He occasionally touches profound depths in the spiritual nature of man, and it is refreshing to pass from the formal hairsplitting of the scholastic philosophers to the large conceptions of a mind which obeys its own laws and is evidently in direct contact with the problems it seeks to solve.

Declina-
tion of
chivalry.

III. *The Later Middle Age.*—After the fall of the Hohenstaufen dynasty the age of chivalry in Germany virtually came to an end. The breaking up of the old duchies set free a large number of petty nobles from their allegiance to mediate lords; and as there was no longer a strong central authority, either to hold them in check or to provide them with such outlets for their energy as they had found in the crusades and in the imperial expeditions into Italy, nearly the whole class sank from the high level to which it had temporarily risen. Many knights became mere robbers, and thought themselves honourably employed in taking part in the innumerable little wars which shattered the prosperity of the nation. Men of this kind were not very likely to inherit the free and poetic spirit of Walther von der Vogelweide. In the course of the 14th and 15th centuries attempts were still made by Wolkenstein, Muskatblüt, and other writers to imitate his style; but in their hands the lyre of the minnesänger gave forth only feeble or discordant notes. For a long time the princes were no more inclined to literature than the nobles; they were too much occupied with mutual jealousies, and with incessant attempts to shake themselves free of the crown, to give heed to anything so removed from practical interests as poetry.

It so happened that during this period the cities rose to a position of higher importance than they had ever before occupied. There was a while when it even seemed possible that by their leagues, and by alliance with those emperors who had insight enough to recognize their strength, they might become the preponderating element in the state. Driven from the castles of the princes and the towers of the nobles, literature took refuge in these young and growing centres of a vigorous life. Not one or two here and there, but multitudes of honest citizens, became possessed by the desire to distinguish themselves in the arts in which they had been so much surpassed by the nobles of a previous generation. Unfortunately, they had no literary training; they were not familiar with any great models; few of them had leisure for the cultivation of style; and the character of their

daily employments was not such as to kindle thoughts that demand poetic utterance. At that time every trade had its guild; and they now formed guilds of poetry, the task of whose members was in intervals of leisure to produce songs according to a body of strict rules, as in hours of business they produced shoes or loaves. The rules were called the "Tabulatur," and the rank of each member was determined by his skill in applying them. The lowest stage was that of a man who had simply been received into the guild; the highest, that of a master, who had invented a new melody. Between these were the scholar, the friend of the school, the singer, and the poet. Literature produced under such conditions could not have much vitality. It amused the versifiers, and developed a certain keenness in the detection of outward faults; but the spirit of poetry was wanting, and there is hardly a "meistersänger" whose name is worthy of being remembered.

Much more important than these tedious manufacturers of verse were the unknown authors of the earliest attempts at dramatic composition. In the 10th century Hroswitha, the abbess of Gandersheim, wrote Latin imitations of Terence; but they were without influence on the progress of culture. The real beginnings of the modern drama were the crude representations of scriptural subjects with which the clergy strove to replace certain pagan festivals. These representations gradually passed into the "Mysteries" or "Miracle Plays," in which there was a rough endeavour to dramatize the events celebrated at Easter and other sacred seasons. They were acted at first in churches, but afterwards in open courts and market places; and for many hours, sometimes day after day, they were listened to by enormous audiences. The fragment of a Swiss "Mystery" of the 13th century has survived; but the earliest that has come down to us in a complete form is a play of the first half of the 14th century, treating of the parable of the ten virgins. Like those of France and England, these mediæval German dramas display little imagination; and they are often astonishingly grotesque in their handling of the most awful themes. Along with them grew up what were known as "Shrove Tuesday Plays," dialogues setting forth some scene of noisy fun, such as a quarrel between a husband and wife, with a few wise saws interspersed. They were declaimed without much ceremony in the public room of an inn, or before the door of a prominent citizen, and gave ample occasion for impromptu wit. Nuremberg seems to have been particularly fond of "Shrove Tuesday Plays," for one of its poets, Hans Rosenblüt, who flourished about the middle of the 15th century, was the most prolific author of them. A little later he was extensively imitated by Hans Folz, a Nuremberg barber and meistersänger.

By far the most interesting writers of the 14th century were the mystics, who continued the movement started by Eckhart. Johannes Tauler of Strasburg (1300-61) had not the originality and force of his predecessor, but the ultimate mysteries of the world had an intense fascination for him, and his tender and sensitive spirit opened itself to lights which find no way of entrance into more robust and logical intellects. He did not in the main pass beyond the speculations of Eckhart, but he added grace and finish to their expression, and made them a greater popular power than they could have become through the master's writings. Heinrich Suso, of Constance (1300-65), who has been called "the minnesänger of the love of God," made the doctrines of Eckhart an occasion for the outpourings of a full and sometimes extravagant fancy. Eckhart's teaching was also put into shape by an unknown author, whose work was afterwards published by Luther under the title *Eyn deutsch Theologia*. To all these writers the phenomenal world is in its nature evil, but it is also unreal; the only reality

they recognize is a world outside the limits of space and time, in union with which man rises to his true life. They are chiefly of importance in the history of speculative thought, but even from the point of view of literature they were of high service in the development of a rich and vigorous prose.

A plain narrative prose style was cultivated in the chronicles which began at this time to be written in different parts of Germany. The Limburg Chronicle written between 1336 and 1398, the Alsace Chronicle about 1386, and the Thuringian Chronicle, by Rothe, a monk of Eisenach, about 1430, have all considerable historical value; and the fact that they are in German, not like previous chronicles in Latin, proves the rising respect among the people for their native speech.

During the latter part of the 15th century there was in Germany, as in the other leading European nations, a great revival of intellectual life. And it was due to the same causes as prevailed elsewhere,—especially the rediscovery of Greek literature and the invention of printing. The movement was naturally most powerfully felt in the universities. The first of these institutions had been founded early in the 14th century by Charles IV. in Prague. Soon afterwards others were established in Vienna, Heidelberg, Cologne, and Erfurt; and in the 15th century universities were set up also in Rostock, Greifswald, Tübingen, Leipsic, and elsewhere. For a long time law and divinity were almost the only subjects studied; but when the Renaissance passed from Italy into Germany, university teaching became the instrument of a freer and larger culture. Scholastic philosophy fell into disrepute; the most active minds occupied themselves only with the intellectual treasures of the ancient world. The men devoted to the new studies were called "Humanists," and they carried on continual warfare with the more ignorant and intolerant of the clergy. Unfortunately they knew nothing of the value of their own language; they wrote, as the scholastic philosophers had done, solely in Latin, and they gave but slight and contemptuous attention to the movements of popular literature.

Popular
literature
of 15th
century.

Yet the popular literature of their time was quite worthy of study, for the stir of new life had affected not only scholars but all classes of society, citizens and even peasants included. It is surprising how many books found their way to the public between 1450 and the outbreak of the Reformation; every one seemed anxious that the newly discovered process by which writers could appeal to so wide an audience should be turned to the utmost possible advantage. Of this great mass of literature a comparatively small proportion was created in obedience to the free impulses of the intellect. The problems of the time were mainly social and practical; men were less moved by ideal interests than by questions as to the tyranny of the princes, the greed and sensuality of the clergy, the worldliness of the papacy, the powerlessness of the crown to enforce peace and order. Multitudes of little tales in prose and verse appeared, in which the princes, the nobles, the clergy, and sometimes rich citizens, were held up to ridicule. The "Shrove Tuesday Plays," which now became extremely popular, also expressed the general discontent; and there were even "Miracle Plays" whose object was to reveal the wrongs of the people. In one of them, the leading character of which was Joanna, the mythical female pope, a clerical author did not hesitate to pour contempt on the Roman see itself.

Reineke
Vos.

By far the greatest of these satirical writings was the epic narrative, *Reineke Vos*. It has been already stated that the stories of "Reynard the Fox" and "Isengrim the Wolf" probably belong to prehistoric ages. They became current through the Franks, in Lorraine and France:

and from the 11th to the 15th century they formed the subject of many works in Latin, French, and German. The epic to which allusion is now made appeared in 1498; and was probably by Hermann Barkhusen, a printer of Rostock. It is in Low German, and its materials were obtained from a prose version of the tale which had appeared some years before in Holland, and of which Saxton printed an English translation. Originally, the story had no satirical significance; it was a simple expression of interest in what may be called the social life of wild animals. In the hands of the author of this Low German poem it becomes an instrument of satire on some enduring tendencies of human nature. He does not lash himself into fury at the vices he chastises; he laughs at while he exposes them. His humour is broad and frank, and he did more than any one else to make Reynard the type of the resource and cunning which overmaster not only brute force but even truth and justice. There are several renderings of the poem into High German, the most important being the well-known work of Goethe in hexameters.

Another popular satirical work was the *Narrenschiff* Brandt ("Ship of Fools") of Sebastian Brandt, published in Basel in 1494. It is an allegorical poem of more than a hundred sections, in which the vices are satirized as fools. This work passed through many editions, and was rendered into more than one Low German dialect, and into Latin, French, and English; it was even made the subject of a series of sermons by Geiler, of Kaisersberg, a well-known preacher of the day, who had himself some satirical talent. Brandt was personally of a mild and unassuming character, and the fact that he became a satirist in spite of himself is a striking proof of the confusion which had fallen upon both church and state. Now that the occasion of his book has passed away, it is difficult to realize that it once enjoyed almost unprecedented popularity. We cannot but feel that the writer was an honest man; but his allegories are without force or charm, and his moral lessons have been the commonplaces of every civilized society. A satirist of a bolder type was Thomas Murner, who, although he lived far into the age of the Reformation, belongs in spirit altogether to the preceding period. He was a preacher, and both in sermons and in secular writings attacked without mercy the classes who were the butts of his fellow-satirists. After the beginning of the Reformation he included Luther among the objects of his comprehensive dislikes. His laughter was loud and harsh, and can hardly have been favourable to any small buddings of charity that may have revealed themselves among the antagonisms of his generation.

One of the favourite books of this time was *Tyll Eulenspiegel*. It was published in 1519, and the author (probably Murner) seems to have included in it many anecdotes already well known. According to the preface, Tyll was a Brunswick peasant of the 14th century, who went about the country perpetrating practical jokes. The force of his humour mainly consists in taking every word addressed to him in its most literal sense, and in giving it applications altogether different from those intended by the speaker. There are readers who still find amusement in his rough pleasantries.

During the better part of this stirring period Maximilian I. was emperor, and he interested himself a good deal in the current literature. As in politics, however, so in poetry, his sympathies were altogether with an earlier age; and he attempted to revive the taste for mediæval romance. From a sketch said to have been prepared by him, Melchior Pfingz celebrated in *Theuerdank* the emperor's marriage with Princess Mary of Burgundy. The work was splendidly printed, and attracted much notice; but romantic poetry, once so fascinating, produces in its pages

the effect of an elderly coquette who, refusing to believe in the ravages of years, tricks herself out in the gay adornments of youth. An earlier book, the *Weiss Kunig*, an autobiography of Maximilian, written by his direction in prose by his secretary Treizsauerwein, has the excellence neither of a chronicle nor of a romance; it is for the most part the fantastic work of a mind which misunderstood its epoch and its own powers.

Popular poetry.

Behind the strife and noise of contending sections there was slowly growing up an admirable intellectual product of Germany,—its popular poetry. One of the earliest writers who struck the note of the popular poets was Veit Weber, a Swiss who fought with his countrymen against Charles the Bold, and who celebrated in vigorous verses the battles of Granson, Murten, and Nancy. From this time the German people had always a living poetry of their own, created by unknown authors, but caught up by the masses, passed on from village to village till it was everywhere known, and handed down by each generation to its successors. This popular poetry ultimately reflected every aspect of daily life among the humbler classes; each section among them had its appropriate lyrics, and there were songs of youth, of age, and of middle life. There is no elaboration in these offshoots of the popular fancy, but many of them have an artless beauty which touches the fountains of smiles and tears, and which had an irresistible fascination for the poets of the greatest period of German literature.

Reformation period.

IV. *The Century of the Reformation.*—It is possible that if there had been no Reformation the Renaissance would have revealed itself in Germany in a great literary movement, as in France and England, or in a great artistic movement, as in Italy. The conditions of both movements were present in the labours of the humanists on the one hand, and of the Holbeins, Albert Dürer, and Lucas Cranach on the other. But the questions of the Reformation were too profound and agitating for the mind of the nation to turn seriously to any task save that which they imposed. Thus it happened that the young shoots of the Renaissance withered almost before they were in leaf. It was settled that Germany must wait until a much later time for the full exercise of her highest energies.

Luther.

In literature not less than in religion Luther (1483–1546) was the commanding spirit of the age; but he was so rather by accident than by choice. For form for its own sake he cared little; he studied it solely that he might the better produce the moral effect at which he aimed. It is hardly possible for any one to sympathize now with the violence and the dogmatism of his tracts, addresses, and sermons; but they had the high merit of addressing the nation in a language it could understand. They are always clear, simple, warm with the glow of a passionate nature; and amid their noise and fury an attentive ear will sometimes catch the still small voice of a spirit touched to finer issues than mere party warfare. "My task may be hard," he himself said, "but the kernel is soft and sweet." We do extreme injustice to Luther if we do not recognize in him a strongly poetic element,—an element which had free play only in the best of his private letters, and in his still popular hymns. By the highest of his literary achievements, his translation of the Bible, he made a truly splendid contribution to the spiritual life of his people. No body of literature has been so fortunate in its translators as the Scriptures; and Luther's rendering ranks with the best. Its absolute simplicity brings it to the level of a child's understanding; its strength and grace give it an enduring place as a work of art. Germany instantly felt its charm; and for three centuries it has been to innumerable millions the supreme consoler and sanctifier, the power associated with

their tenderest, most pathetic memories, the one link which has connected sordid lives with noble and sublime ideas. And for the first time it gave the nation a literary language. Up to this stage every author had written in the dialect with which he was himself familiar; henceforth for the men of Swabia, of Bavaria, of Saxony, and of all other districts there was a common speech, which the writers of each state could use without any sense of inferiority to those of another. It is thus to Luther that the Germans owe the most essential of all the conditions of a truly national life and literature.

The writer who deserves to stand next to Luther is Ulrich von Hutten (1488–1523). An accomplished humanist, he effectively attacked the enemies of the new culture in the *Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum*, of which he was one of the chief writers. This was before the special work of Luther began; and at a still earlier period he had assailed in a series of fine Latin orations the tyranny of Duke Ulrich of Württemberg, who was accused of murdering a member of Hutten's family. He had little real sympathy with Luther's religious aims; but he threw himself heartily into a movement by which it seemed possible to purge the state of the spiritual and secular ills which were in deadly antagonism to the progressive energy of humanism. His German writings are mainly short satirical poems and prose dialogues and addresses. Their style is direct, bold, and trenchant; but they are now interesting mainly because of the spirit of freedom which breathes through them, the lofty political ideals of the writer, and his generous ardour for the popular welfare.

A far more voluminous author than Hutten or Luther was Hans Sachs, meistersänger of Nuremberg (1494–1576). He was, indeed, one of the most prolific of German writers, having composed, according to his own calculation, more than 6000 poems. Although extremely popular in his own time, Sachs was almost forgotten after his death. His memory was revived by Wieland and Goethe, and he is now universally admitted to have been the chief German poet of the 16th century. Every species of verse then known he freely cultivated, and there is no important element of his age which is not touched in one or other of his works. He had little of the culture of the schools, and many of his verses are excessively rude. But Hans had considerable force of imagination, sly humour, and, in his happiest moments, a true feeling for melody. His best works are his "Shrove Tuesday Plays." It is true he makes hardly more attempt than Rosenblüt to develop a dramatic action, but his characters have life, and in many individual scenes are artistically grouped. His didactic dialogues and satirical tales present a remarkably vivid picture of the ideas, controversies, and moral sentiments of his generation; and some of his lyrics still live in the memory of the nation. The song in which he hailed the "Wittenberg Nightingale" gave fine utterance to the reverence of the Lutherans for their chief, and in his hymn, *Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz?* he so happily met the spiritual need of the day that it was soon translated into eight languages, including English, French, and Greek.

If Hans Sachs was the most industrious poet of the century, Johann Fischart was beyond all comparison its greatest satirist. There was a distinctly Rabelaisian touch in this restless, bizarre, and effusive spirit,—a man of upright and manly character, keenly alive to the evils of his time, and continually opening fire at new points on his enemies. He was an enthusiast for the Reformation, and did it more lasting service among the middle class than half the theologians. His chief work was an adaptation of Rabelais's *Gargantua*, which he rendered with an insight into its purpose, and a fulness of sympathy with its

Ulrich von Hutten.

Hans Sachs.

Fischart.

methods, unsurpassed even by Urquhart. In the poem, *Das Glückhafte Schiff*, he gives evidence of a faculty for stirring narrative verse, but his prose is richer, fuller, and more free. Considering how imperfectly prose style was then developed, he had an astonishing command over the resources of the language. He delighted in new and complicated word-formations, and by means of them often succeeded, while dealing with his main theme, in casting side lights on its subordinate branches. Even he, penetrating and enlightened as he was, could not rise so far above his age as to condemn the burning of witches; but hardly another popular folly escaped his glance. From the evil practices of hypocritical priests to the impudence of astrologers and weather prophets every abuse found in him a watchful critic; and nothing of the kind could be more admirable than the skill with which he excites contempt while professing to write in a spirit of respect and credulity. The secret of his power lay also partly in his profound humanity, for this scathing satirist was at heart thoroughly genial; his mockery had its root in an abiding faith in justice.

Prose writers.

Several other cultivators of prose style deserve mention. Albert Dürer, whose paintings, drawings, and engravings gave to the age of transition between mediævalism and the modern world its most perfect artistic expression, wrote several scientific treatises, one of which, on the proportions of the human body, is a masterpiece of calm, clear, and systematic exposition. Johann Thurmmeier, called Aventinus (1466–1534), Sebastian Franck (1500–45), and Ægidius Tschudi, of Glarus (1505–72), wrote histories which, as ordered narratives, rank considerably above mere chronicles. The autobiography of Götz von Berlichingen, if its style is without merit, has an enduring interest as a sketch of the rude lives of the petty nobles at the time when the old social order was breaking up under the influence of new ideas. Huldrich Zwingli, the Swiss Reformer (1484–1531), could state an argument with logical precision, but his style is thin and weak in comparison with the nervous force of Luther. Johann Agricola (1492–1566) wrote some theological works on the Catholic side; he is chiefly important, however, for a collection of German proverbs, which afford important evidence as to the currents of popular thought. Of a far higher class as a religious writer was Johann Arndt (1555–1621), who wrote the most widely read work of the 16th century, *Vier Bücher vom Wahren Christenthum* ("Four Books on True Christianity"). Soon after Luther's death the doctrines of the Reformation lost nearly all vitality; becoming the subjects of vehement controversy among contending theologians, they ceased to interest the masses, who turned to simpler and more congenial themes. Arndt, like Eckhart, Tauler, and Luther himself, being a man of religious genius, saw the futility of these noisy disputes, and brushing them aside went to the heart of Christianity as a power fitted to nourish spiritual feeling and to govern conduct. His work appeared in Magdeburg in 1610, passed through edition after edition, and was translated into eleven languages. It still has a place of its own, for beneath the forms of a past age there burns the fire of a true enthusiasm. Sebastian Franck, already mentioned as a historian, wrote some religious works in a spirit akin to that of Arndt; but he lacked the intensity, the power of touching the popular mind, which was possessed by the later writer. Less practical in tendency, but incomparably deeper in philosophic thought, were the writings of the Gölitz theosophist, Jacob Boehme (1575–1624). Boehme is in many respects one of the most striking figures in the history of German speculation. A man of mild and humble temper, working in patient obscurity as a shoemaker, he spent his life in grappling with the vastest problems which perplex humanity. Starting from the dogmas of Christianity,

Arndt.

Boehme.

he sought to ground them in the deepest reason; and although he often appears to darken counsel by words, yet his writings contain many bold suggestions, which have profoundly influenced later philosophical systems. There are times when one feels that his struggling thought is imperfectly uttered only because it is not expressed in poetic forms. For Boehme was one of those thinkers who occupy the borderland between philosophy and poetry, a fact often perceptible in the concrete shape which the most abstract ideas assume in his hands. There is a touch of poetry in the very title of his first and best known, although not perhaps his best, book, *Aurora*.

The secular poetry of this period, if we except the works of Hans Sachs and Fischart, is without value. An ambitious didactic poem by Rollenhagen, *Der Froschmäusler*, gained a certain reputation; but it stands far beneath *Reineke Vos*, of which it is partly an imitation. The religious lyrics of the age are, however, of high excellence; they, indeed, are the sole works in which a perfect marriage was effected between idea and form in the epoch of the Reformation. In his grand battle-hymn *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, in his pathetic verses *Aus tiefer Not schrey ich zu dir*, and in other lyrics, Luther led the way; and he was, as we have seen, followed by Hans Sachs. Nicolaus Herrmann in his *Erschienen ist der herrlich Tag*, Paul Eber in his *Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein*, Philip Nicolai in his *Wie schön leucht uns der Morgenstern*, and several other writers not less distinguished, created, in moments of genuine inspiration, lyrics which must move men while religious instincts survive. The adherents of the Reformation everywhere opened their hearts to these beautiful poems, for in them alone, not in creeds or sermons or controversial treatises, were the deepest emotions of the time freely poured forth. Next to the translation of the Bible, nothing did so much as the popular hymns to unite the Protestants, to stimulate their faith, and to intensify their courage.

During this century the drama made considerable progress. Besides the "Mysteries" and "Shrove Tuesday Plays," "School Comedies," in imitation of Terence and Plautus, were written and acted in the universities and public schools. Luther, with the large humanity characteristic of him when dogmatic disputes were not in question, encouraged these comedies, and was, indeed, friendly to dramatic effort of all kinds. To persons who complained that modesty was often offended by the actors he replied that if they carried out their principle they would have to refrain from reading the Bible. When the Jesuits began to agitate in opposition to Protestantism they detected at once, with their usual tact, the importance of this element in popular life; and through their influence more attention was paid not only to the plays but to the manner in which they were represented. Towards the end of the 16th century Germany was visited by a band of English comedians, who went about acting in their own language. They appear to have produced a deep impression; and at least one of their importations, the clown, the "Pickelhäring" of the Dutch, survived in Hanswurst or Jack Pudding, who was for more than a century an indispensable character in every play designed to gratify the prevailing taste. In imitation of the English comedians, wandering companies, consisting largely of idle students, now began to be formed, and thrilled both rustic and city audiences with blood-and-thunder tragedies, and with comedies too coarse to deserve even the name of farces. About the middle of the century a theatre was built in Nuremberg, and Augsburg and other cities soon followed the example. Duke Julius of Brunswick (1564–1613) not only built a theatre in his capital but maintained a permanent company; and he amused himself by writing for it comedies and tragedies in the approved style of the day.

Growth of the drama.