

Already in Provence and Northern France the new instinct of poetic feeling had given birth to love songs and romances, which were to take root and blossom among the people of Germany. The new impulse spread and grew; it was everywhere fostered and encouraged by the German nobility, and before long almost every court was a centre for the cultivation of the poetic art, where the wandering Minnesinger was sure of encouragement and support. Hence we find that many of the most famous poets of this time were attached to the court of their prince, fighting under him in time of war, and treated as honoured guests in time of peace. The great imperial festival at Mainz in 1184, under Frederick Barbarossa, where nearly seventy thousand French and German knights were assembled, gave additional force to the new movement.

By this time the Minnesingers were a recognized body. They were, for the most part, knights, attached, as has been said, to the household of some prince, but often wandering from place to place in search of adventure. Unlike their predecessors, the wandering minstrels, or gleemen (*Spielmann*) of the ninth century, they were generally of noble birth, and often renowned for feats of arms. Their central theme was Love, and with this was closely connected the worship of woman. In the heroic poems and epics of the preceding centuries, war was the leading motive; the later renaissance of German poetry in the eighteenth century, received its inspiration in great measure from a fuller interpretation and comprehension of nature; but the poetry of the Minnesingers, as the name implies, was emphatically the poetry of Love. In the early epic poems the chief interest lies in the enmities and battles of the different nations, and the fate of the principal characters is closely connected with the result of battles and sieges. Love grows up in the midst of war and bloodshed, and has something of their lurid and savage character. With the Minnesingers this is all changed. It is love in its bright and smiling aspect that meets us. The Minnesang reflects the splendour and gaiety of the court, it is full of the delight of May, of the songs of birds, and the scent of flowers. It has lost the intenseness of the preceding age. But the Minnesingers too had their serious side, and the results of their work in literature, music and civilization have been more important than at first appear.