Oswald von Wolkenstein

Otto Schmid. Vienna.

Effigy of Oswald von Wolkenstein in the Cathedral Cloister, Brixen.

Oswald von Wolkenstein

A Memoir of the
Last Minnesinger of Tirol

By

Signora Linda Villari

With Many Illustrations

London 1901
J. M. Dent & Co.
Aldine House, W.C.

BY GRACIOUS PERMISSION

THIS MEMOIR OF THE

LAST MINNESINGER OF TIROL IS

DEDICATED

WITH DEEPEST RESPECT

TO

HER IMPERIAL MAJESTY

THE EMPRESS FREDERICK OF GERMANY

QUEEN OF PRUSSIA

FLORENCE, *January* 1901.

Principal Authorities Consulted

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Preface

Long ago, in a Tirolese mountain resort facing the Rosengarten and the Schlern, I first made acquaintance with Oswald von Wolkenstein in the pages of a History of Bozen, and, fascinated by the romance of his life, determined to write a short paper on it.

But years passed; other subjects filled my thoughts, until at last, in Tirol once more, I recurred to the half-forgotten theme and began to hunt up authorities. Then, so much material fell in my way and roused so keen an interest in my hero's poems and times, that the work grew in my hands to its present proportions.

For Oswald cannot be properly studied apart from his times, and the well-rewarded labour of reading his verses in his own vernacular—using the modernised version as a book of reference, impelled me to try to give some faint idea of his value as a poet. Pursuing the work in another

country, due research would have been impossible but for the kindness of learned friends. So I take this opportunity of expressing my warmest gratitude to Professor Semper of Innsbruck, to Baron Salvadori of Trent, and to Dr C. Fasola of Florence for their precious and indispensable aid.

LINDA VILLARI.

FLORENCE, *December* 1900.

List of Illustrations

OSWALD VON WOLKENSTEIN

I

REGARDING most of the Minnesingers who played so picturesque a part in old German life and literature, few personal details are known. It is hard to learn what manner of men they were when the main facts of their history are either left untold or vaguely traced through a mist of fantastic legend. Unsubstantial, though often luminous shapes, they flit before our eyes in court and camp; we hear their songs, see their graceful forms, but their feet scarcely touch the earth—they have no "tactile values"—they never clasp our hands with a human grip.

Certain things we know, of course: how some of these poets are skilled masters of lute and harp, and sing their verses to melodies of their own composition, while others are voice-

less and have to employ attendant musicians to render their works. We see golden goblets, rich robes, and ladies' smiles showered on these shadows as they come and go; but, sometimes, hard blows and insults are their guerdon if their rhymes chance to fret sore spots, or betray over-ardent devotion to other men's wives.

Now and then we can build up an image of the singer from his written words. In the case of minstrels of illustrious birth, some outlines of their career may be gleaned from history; but, usually, bare outlines without the living touches required to give them flesh and blood.

For instance, in spite of persevering research, the birthplace of Walter von der Vogelweide, the greatest and best known of the Minnesingers, is still a disputed point, although the weight of evidence is in favour of a certain sun-kissed slope above Waidbruck in Tirol. Yet Walter's works live, for their poetic grace and lofty patriotism belong to all time.

Fortunately for us, Oswald von Wolkenstein was an autobiographical poet. This last of the Minnesingers was likewise a political personage,

took a very active part in the events of his time, and led so restless and adventurous a life that one marvels how he found time to learn,—much less to practise,—all the quaint devices and precepts of the minstrel's art.

That special school of poetry was already on the wane, but although, later on, Oswald discarded its stricter conventions, he never adopted the artificialities of the rising Meistersingers, but evolved a style of his own, roughly dramatic, spontaneous, realistic, and pulsing with the life of his mountain people.

But as our first concern is with the personal life of this remarkable man, detailed mention of his works must be deferred to a future chapter.

Born in 1367, two centuries later than Walter von der Vogelweid, he probably uttered his first cry in the family castle of Trostburg, at a short distance from his great predecessor's birthplace across the valley.

Oswald was the second son of Friedrich von Wolkenstein and Katherine von Villanders. His parents' marriage had united two branches

of the same stock, and his mother, as sole heiress of Eckhart von Villanders, added much territory, including the fief of Trostburg, to her husband's possessions. The Wolkensteins were already feudal lords of the Grödnerthal, and their lands spread southwards up to Kastelruth and Seis at the foot of the Schlern.

Their earliest stronghold stood on the mountain side guarding their hamlet of Wolkenstein at the mouth of the Langethal—a romantic avenue of peaks—that branches off from the head of the Grödner valley near the giant Dolomites of the Sella and Lang-Kofel groups. Local tradition has it that the founder of the line was an Italian chieftain who, driven from his own country by Attila's hordes, sought refuge in this remote spot, and mastering its few inhabitants built his eyrie on the flank of the Stevia. But, according to more authentic authorities, the Wolkensteins were a branch of the Villanders of Villanders near Klausen on the Eisach and only obtained the Langethal Castle by purchase, in 1309, from its original

The Trostburg, above Waidbruck on the Eisack.

owners the Maulrappen. A ruined tower, scarcely distinguishable from the yellow precipice to which it clings, is all that remains of this Wolkenstein nest, for the bulk of the building was buried under a landslip centuries ago.

In any case the family had risen to prosperity and power long before the days of Knight Oswald, and Grödnerthal chroniclers proudly maintain that he was born at Schloss Wolkenstein. It is a poetic belief, for there could be no fitter cradle for a minstrel knight-errant than this wildly beautiful valley where daring peaks stand like flashing golden swords against the sky, and "forests perilous" darkly frame flower-gemmed meads and crystal streams. The question could be settled had the month of his birth been recorded, for his parents only used the mountain fortress as a summer abode. So there are many chances to one that Oswald first saw the light in the warm panelled chambers of the Trostburg.

This grand old castle—still in Wolkenstein hands—perched on a crag above Waidbruck in

the Eisack valley—and commanding the narrow jaws of the Grödnerthal, formed a fine point of vantage. Its lords could keep an eye on their vassals in both valleys, while near enough to Bozen and Meran to be in touch with public events and the court life of Tirol.

This, then, was the Wolkenstein home, and here three sturdy boys and two girls were reared in the happy-go-lucky style of the time, with much freedom and scanty instruction.

The young Oswald, destined to become "the most perfect representative of the spirit of his age" was a specially quick-witted, daring child, and when little beyond babyhood had one of his eyes shot out by a crossbow in some riotous carnival frolic.

The children's education — of a very elementary kind — was confided to the family chaplain, a meek ecclesiastic totally unequal to the task of keeping his turbulent pupils in order. As for their father, the sole lesson he cared to enforce was the daily recital of a catechism expounding the rights and privileges of the Tirolese nobility in general and of the

Wolkensteins in particular. These teachings naturally fired all three boys with an inordinate pride of birth, while Oswald, whose precocious brain was already crammed with the romances of chivalry and minstrel lays so constantly heard in his music-loving home, was seized with a premature ambition to win his spurs as a knight. All too soon his opportunity came.

In 1377 Duke Albert III. of Austria proclaimed a crusade against the heathen of Prussia and Lithuania, whereupon the Teutonic Order of knights of the Holy Cross, whose mission it was to fight the infidel and inculcate Christianity at the sword's point, called to arms a contingent of Tirolese knights, and our little ten years' old hero resolved to join the band.

In his autobiographical poem, entitled "Early Youth," he tells us:—

> "So it fell out that, aged ten,
> I was fain to see the shape of the world;
> A crust of bread and three pence
> In pouch for all my travel store."

His amazing parents seem to have made no

objection to their son's early start in life, and we know that a favourite maxim of theirs was that—"Who hath ne'er suffered hurt, knoweth not how to swallow herbs."

The crusading expedition probably halted at Trostburg by the way, for it comprised, among other good friends of the Wolkenstein house, the Count von Montfort of Bregenz, a noble of high standing, and his son Hugo. And as the latter, although a mere stripling of eighteen years, had already made his mark as a Minnesinger, it is probable that his presence had some share in deciding little Oswald's vocation. At any rate, when the knights resumed their march with standards flying, shining harness and fluttering mantles broidered with the black, lily-pointed cross of their order, they had a very small boy in their train. But a great-hearted boy, so full of enthusiasm for the duties of knighthood that he gladly groomed horses, scrubbed armour, did any menial task, as a fitting preparation for the vigil at arms. Naturally, severe hardships fell to his share; he was always roughly treated, often half-

starved. But the urchin's courage never drooped. Alert, observant, full of fun, he made the best of his novel life, while his pretty voice and talent for fiddling were highly appreciated in camp and bivouac. Probably, too, young Count Hugo was kind to him, for this warrior-poet had no musical gift and required a minstrel to sing his lays and fit them with appropriate melodies. So Oswald may have exercised his childish treble on the Count's verses and picked up some useful hints on the art of making poetry. In after years, Montfort's career touched his own path at various times and was almost equally adventurous. History is silent as to any tie of friendship between the two, but they must have been often thrown together. But during this first crusade, Oswald gained a friend for life in a princeling of about his own age, the son of Kaiser Charles IV. This Prince Sigismund, soon to be Markgraf of Brandenburg, then King of Hungary, and best known to fame as Emperor of Germany, never forgot his child-comrade and became his staunchest protector.

The crusading expedition did not achieve any great result. After various raids on heathen border-tribes, with the usual accompaniments of pillage and bloodshed, the premature severity of the season brought the campaign to a sudden end.

But the Tirolese contingent returned home without our Oswald. He remained behind in a Commandery of the Teutonic Order, served eight years as a common soldier in Prussia, Lithuania, Poland, and Red-Russia, went through many strange experiences, was severely wounded, and was once taken captive by the foe. But, wherever he might be, he seized every opportunity of gaining knowledge, picked up ten languages and spoke Sclavonic like a native. We next find him on the Baltic, noting the wonderful commercial enterprise of the Hansa towns and apparently in their employ, seeing that he visited all their principal depôts, at Novgorod, Bergen, Bruges, and even London. He also went to Denmark, where he served as a volunteer in Queen Margaret's war with Sweden.

In 1388 he crossed the seas to England, and his travel-notes in the Wolkenstein archives show that what most fascinated him in our country was the legend of King Arthur and the Holy Grail!

Maybe it was his dream of emulating the pure and perfect knight that drew him to Scotland when Robert II. was at war with the English? For, according to Beda Weber, he joined in the clash of arms and fought in the Scottish ranks on the field where Douglas fell.

After a flying visit to Ireland, he returned to Germany in 1389, and joining a company of traders travelled to Poland and the Black Sea. While among the Venetians and Genoese established in the Crimea, he found that his Grödnerthal dialect enabled him to understand at once the *lingua franca* of the market.

But energy and accomplishments notwithstanding, fortune still frowned on our vagabond poet. "Clothed in rags and always afoot," he could barely earn his daily bread. Once,

indeed, he looted a horse and galloped away feeling every inch a knight.

"But the ride went ill and punishment was mine."

Willing to turn his hand to anything: "neither too proud nor too good to be messenger or cook and thoroughly in my element as a groom," he shipped on a merchant vessel as cook and oarsman. Wrecked near Trebizonde, he got safely to shore clinging to a cask, and together with another survivor wandered through Armenia and Persia. Before long, he turned again to the sea and seems to have had plenty of fighting, for, as he says, "through friends and foes I shed much blood." The record of his wanderings is left unfinished, but on returning to Europe, there is reason to believe that he served against the Turks, in a position suited to his rank, under the banner of his old friend Sigismund, now king of Hungary; and in 1392, finally returned to Tirol after fifteen years' absence. Certainly too, neither penniless nor in rags, for his renown as a minstrel had preceded him and

he was known to have won distinction in battlefields.

Even his own mother, Dame Katherine, must have had some difficulty in identifying her long-lost boy. The curly-headed, impish, hare-brained knight-errant of ten was now a grave-faced gentleman of twenty-five years, of broad-set and powerful frame. His bright curls had turned grey, but his luxuriant beard was of golden hue. Although under middle height and blind of one eye, he had a commanding presence, a flashing glance, and a physiognomy that varied with his moods; now soft, dreamy or seductive, now stern, morose, furious or repellent. The ten languages at the tip of his tongue included Russian, Arabic, Latin and Provençal; he was a masterly performer on as many instruments, —the trumpet among others—had a grand tenor voice, a store of miscellaneous knowledge, and a large experience of mankind.

His home-coming made a noise throughout South Tirol, for the Wolkensteins and their kin were spread far and wide about the land in various valleys, and right up to the roots

of the great mountain ranges. Besides, in addition to family feeling and the prestige of personal merit, there were other reasons to increase the warmth of his welcome, for his presence was urgently needed at this juncture to promote certain arrangements in which important family interests were at stake.

Gratl. Innsbruck.

Kastelruth.

II

For many years before our hero's birth his astute grandsire, Eckhart von Villanders, had been steadily enlarging his domains on all sides, either by purchase or violence, according to circumstances. Bit by bit the Trostburg boundaries had been pushed up to Kastelruth, Seis and the Seiser Alp, and bit by bit the impoverished lords of Hauenstein in the forest region at the foot of the Schlern had sold most of their lands to their wealthy neighbour, only reserving the family castle with the home woods and pastures. So they were hemmed in on all sides by Wolkenstein ground, save where the bare pinnacles of the Schlern soared above their ancestral towers. But old Villanders coveted even those towers and still more the splendid timber of the forest encircling them. The Hauensteins being prolific as well as poor, in course of time both castle and precincts

were jointly owned by twelve descendants. Several of the latter dying off in rapid succession, Ulrich von Hauenstein gladly sold his share of the property, *i.e.* one-third of the castle, with the proportion of vassals, rights and privileges comprised in that share, to the acquisitive lord of Villanders. The deed of sale was signed in 1367, the very year of Oswald's birth, and Knight Eckhart settled the property on his new-born grandson as a christening present. *Hinc illae lachrymae!* No wicked fairy could have endowed the babe with a more fatal gift than this lonely manor in the forest of the Schlern. Before long, and after buying more scraps of land on either side, Eckhart usurped all feudal rights appertaining to Hauenstein. For now every direct male heir—save one at a distance—was dead, and even the Kastelruth branch of the family was extinct.

When Knight Eckhart's aggressive life presently ended, all his possessions, save Hauenstein—already settled on Oswald—fell to his daughter and her husband Friedrich von Wol-

kenstein. Some years later, in 1393, Heinrich, the last of the Hauensteins passed away, and his sister Barbara, the wife of Martin Jäger, a petty noble of Tisens beyond Bozen, remained sole heiress of two-thirds of Hauenstein and its feudal rights. The powerful Wolkensteins with strongholds on every hill, vassals in every valley, paid no heed to Barbara's claims, never dreaming that so insignificant a person would dare to contest the law of the strongest. But the lady and her husband proved stubborn antagonists. They brought their case to the notice of Duke Albert of Austria, who referred it to the Court of Heinrich von Rottenburg, Captain of the Etsch. Proceedings were instituted; but trial of the case was continually postponed, now by political emergencies, then by devices of the defendants, who meanwhile lorded it at Hauenstein and felled timber wholesale. Very probably Heinrich of Rottenburg had little wish to give judgment against such firm friends and allies as his Wolkenstein neighbours and still less when a prospect dawned of settling the dis-

pute in an amicable way. For Barbara Jäger possessed a beautiful young daughter of eighteen years, and when Oswald reappeared in Tirol, the name of the lovely Sabina was on all men's lips and deeply graven in many hearts.

Perhaps, at this time, the Wolkensteins were already trying to placate their opponents by friendly overtures. At any rate the young man and young maid were speedily brought together and both fell in love at first sight. She was beautiful and bewitching; he, though grey-haired and one-eyed had much personal charm, together with the prestige of daring deeds and versatile talents. His verses, his music, his romantic adventures captivated the girl's imagination. It flattered her vanity to see this travelled paladin at her feet, while other women sighed for him in vain. But Sabina soon tired of her conquest. Oswald's passionate adoration became wearisome; his songs lost their charm. After playing fast and loose with him for some time, always finding fresh excuses for delaying the wedding, she finally professed doubts of his love and declared she

could not possibly marry him until he had proved the strength of his constancy by a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

By a significant coincidence, she came to this decision in 1397, exactly when the Bishop of Brixen had pronounced verdict for the plaintiffs in the great Hauenstein *versus* Wolkenstein case. The Jägers were to be re-instated in two-thirds of the Hauenstein estate, and they also claimed 1,000 *gulden* as compensation for damages to forest and farm.

Accordingly the ambitious Sabina now hoped to find a better market for her charms than marriage with a younger son who could only offer her a share of her own lawful inheritance. But Oswald never doubted his lady's good faith. In those days, pilgrimage to Palestine was a common test of knightly love. So it was in a spirit of piety and chivalrous submission that our Minnesinger donned pilgrim garb and, staff in hand, trudged off to Italy on his way to the East. During the first stages of the journey he vented his passion in ardent lays to his mistress, but then, with a sudden change of mood, he

discarded his palmer's robe and scallop shell, took ship from Genoa to Egypt in proper soldierly array and traversed Arabia by caravan. That he showed prowess in some crusade is plain from the reward bestowed on him in Jerusalem where he was dubbed Knight of the Holy Sepulchre.

According to his amplest biographer, Beda Weber, Oswald's thoughts, deeds, and verses at this period "all bore the stamp of love-madness" (*Liebeswahnsinn*). After an absence of three years, he turned his steps homewards, visiting the chief cities of Italy by the way, and on Christmas Eve, 1400, re-entered the gates of Trostburg.

It was a terrible home-coming. His father lay unconscious in the agony of death and expired the same night. His mother fell dangerously ill from prolonged anxiety and grief; and when Oswald asked news of his Sabina he learnt that she had betrayed him and was already the wife of Hans Hausmann of Hall. Adding insult to injury his false love had brutally declared that a rich old burgher was a

better mate than a one-eyed pilgrim-minstrel. His home desolate, his dearest hopes shattered, Oswald was utterly crushed for a time and gave way to frenzies of despair. But the artistic temperament is elastic; so before many months had elapsed Ritter Oswald sought consolation in riotous gaiety as the intimate friend and boon-companion of the youthful heir of Tirol, Duke Friedrich of Austria, generally known as "Friedl of the empty purse."

At this time that spendthrift princeling lived only for pleasure. Music, women, and wine were his chief delights. Accompanied by Oswald and other wild sprigs of nobility, he roamed the country, feasting, carousing and making love to every pretty face in cottage or castle. Sometimes, indulging too freely in the strong red wine of Tirol, the Duke had to be pulled from under the table and put to bed by less tipsy comrades, and Oswald commemorates one of these festive bouts in his graphic verses on "A Tavern Night-Scene." Our minstrel's songs and ballads were already famed throughout the length and breadth of the land, and

his personal popularity equalled that of his works.

So life whirled on merrily down to the year 1406. Then, however, Friedrich assumed the reins of government as sovereign Count of Tirol and brought the reckless fun to an unexpectedly serious end. After having associated with his nobles on a footing of perfect equality, without caring to assume even the leadership of their pranks, now Friedrich suddenly awoke to the responsibilities of his station and showed his resolve to be master, and not merely nominal lord of the land.

The Tirolese nobles had bitterly resented the cession[1] of their country to Austria by their last native ruler, Margaret "Maultasche," and, during the subsequent reigns of absentee counts, had gradually usurped power at the expense of their titular over-lord, encroaching on his prerogative at every turn, refusing to acknowledge his authority, and, while professing

[1] For particulars of this cession, *vide* Coxe's *History of the House of Austria* (vol. i.) and Zingerle's *Schildereien aus Tirol.*

steadfast allegiance to their suzerain the Emperor, always striving for the virtual independence of Tirol, or,—in point of fact,—for the absolute independence of their own caste. And the Kaiser looked on their proceedings with an indulgent eye. In his jealousy for his own imperial rights, he saw the advantage of these dissensions in Tirol. The arrogance of provincial barons could do him no harm, whereas he had much to dread from the encroachments of subject princes and rejoiced to see their power restricted.

So young Duke Friedrich stood between two fires and saw that the Empire would give him no help in asserting his prerogative. In his roistering, hare-brained days he had willingly joined the "Elephant League," an association of nobles to which all his comrades belonged, and probably this intimacy enabled him to measure the impossibility of reconciling their claims with his rights as sovereign Count of Tirol. His eyes were opened to their preposterous assumptions, to their inborn and carefully fostered creed that their caste owed allegiance to the

Kaiser alone, and that the Count of Tirol was a mere figure-head bound to leave their power untouched. He also knew that the virtual ruler of the land was Heinrich von Rottenburg, chief of the League and captain of the Etsch. Once, when the young Duke was strolling through the Bozen streets with some festive companions, he saw Heinrich riding into the town in full harness with a brilliant retinue of attendant lords.

"Do you know who that man is?" he asked, laughingly.

"Who but Rottenburg, captain of the Etsch," answered one of his friends, amazed by the question.

"Not at all," retorted Friedrich. "He is the Regent of Tirol. I'm not worth a brass farthing compared with him."

Another time, when Rottenburg appeared in state array, the prince pushed through the crowd of obsequious attendants and drawing his sword presented it to the Captain as in act of tendering homage, whereupon Rottenburg exclaimed, laughing at the jest—

"Fritz, Fritz! when wilt thou learn wisdom?"

"When thou hast lost it!" was the prompt reply.

The jest was turned to deadly earnest, at a later time when Rottenburg's power was shattered by the Duke.

Meanwhile, when roaming about the country in disguise like Haroun el Raschid, though unlike him, for purposes of amusement, Friedrich not only discovered the monstrous tyranny practised by his nobles, but learnt to appreciate his sturdy mountain folk, and foresaw that both peasants and burghers would give him valiant support in case of conflict with their oppressors. This, too, regardless of the fact that the Tirolese prelates—being likewise temporal lords —were all on the nobles' side.

To give a full account of Friedrich's long struggle with his rebellious barons would lead us too far from our special theme; but certain details and episodes in which Oswald was concerned demand some preliminary words in order to explain the character of the prince and his change of front towards our poet.

III

FRIEDRICH IV. was the youngest son of Duke Leopold of Austria and Virida Visconti of Milan. He was neither a man of first-class ability nor of high moral worth, but after the reckless period of his minority and the first troublous, blundering years of his reign, he developed excellent qualities as a ruler. Really solicitous for the welfare of his people, physically brave and of genial temper, he could strike hard on emergency, but seldom showed rancour, and, even when coarsened by sensual excess, remained susceptible to impulses of generosity and mercy. During the prolonged and harassing strife with his nobles he acted both with military skill and political insight, and in spite of early extravagance, was so successful in reorganising the finances of the State that his successor Duke Sigismund gained the merited designation of "Sigismund the Wealthy."

Gratl. Innsbruck.

Duke Friedrich of Austria, Count of Tirol.

In his madcap, early days, he had felt a passion of admiration for Oswald von Wolkenstein—his elder by a year or so—looked up to him in all things, and made him his prime favourite. This versatile wanderer, whose sword was no less keen than his intellect, this fertile poet, wittiest of boon companions, sweetest of singers, not only pleased his taste but captivated his imagination. His other associates seemed of dullest clay beside this golden-tongued Wolkenstein with all those thrilling tales of Eastern adventure and scraps of strange lore gleaned from all parts of the globe.

Accordingly, when the smouldering discontent of the nobles burst into flame, his favourite's desertion roused him to the bitterest resentment. From the moment that Oswald joined the hostile Adelsbund League into which the jovial Association of the Elephant had developed, Friedrich's love turned to hate, and his hardest blows were aimed at his quondam friend.

Nevertheless, Oswald had a real affection for

his prince, and there is good reason to believe that—overrating his own influence at Court—he originally adhered to the League for the purpose of acting as mediator between his fellow-nobles and the Duke. But, naturally enough, this attempt to serve two masters was regarded with suspicion by both, and he was presently caught in the current of party strife. His brothers Michael and Leonhard, his kinsmen the Lichtensteins of Karneid, his friends the Starkenbergs of Greifenstein, the Spaurs of Nonthal, Heinrich von Rottenburg and Nicholas Vintler were all in the revolt, and his interests, in the main, coincided with theirs. So, after much hesitation and certain futile attempts towards reconciliation, which only excited suspicion of his motives on either side, he threw himself heart and soul into the cause of the Bund.

This was the turning-point of his life, the opening of so strenuous and agitated a career, that, at first sight, one is surprised that the gentle art of verse-making should not have been crushed out of him. But, a born realist,

the impulse of outer events was as life-blood to his muse, and so much of his poetry is autobiographical, that it is necessary to sketch the course of those events, as well as the private history of our minstrel knight, before turning our attention to his works.

As we have said, the old "Elefantenbund," in which Friedrich himself was enrolled, was dissolved in 1406 and reconstituted as the "*Adelsbund an der Etsch.*" This new league comprised one hundred and thirty-five nobles pledged to defend their "good Tirolese rights" against all assailants, not excepting their own sovereign, in case of necessity. Heinrich von Rottenburg, "Captain of the Etsch," was at the head of the Bund and Oswald von Wolkenstein was its leading spirit. The latter's intellectual superiority, and his known influence with the Emperor were of the utmost value to the rebel lords. For Sigismund, being assured of these barons' loyalty to the Empire, had no wish to discountenance any scheme that might cramp the energies of his too ambitious kinsman Duke Friedrich. At first, however, Oswald

clung to the hope of inducing the prince to make important concessions and continued his vain efforts at mediation. Thus, before the Bund broke into open rebellion there was a period of sullen opposition and secret ferment in Tirol, and Friedrich profited by the delay to deal his enemies one or two unexpected blows.

His chief difficulty being the lack of gold that had won him the nickname of "Friedl of the empty pouch," the first thing to be done was to replenish his treasury. To effect this, it was indispensable to get rid of Nicholas Vintler the great banker of Bozen, who had all the revenues of the State in his hands. Vintler was a member of the League in virtue of his rank, but took little interest in its schemes. His personal tastes were artistic and literary, and all his spare time was spent in decorating his beautiful castle of Runggelstein and giving sumptuous entertainments in its frescoed halls. A wealthy merchant and banker, he had filled for many years the post of "Receiver General" of Tirol. He held all the mortgages and title deeds of State property, and the feudal nobility had to

pay into his hands all tithes and taxes due to their over-lord on their fiefs.

It is uncertain whether Vintler made unlawful profits by these transactions or not; but at any rate the taxes he levied on his fellow-nobles were based on old calculations by no means corresponding with the increased value of their lands. When first appointed to his office by Friedrich's father Duke Leopold, he had been granted a special patent exempting him from the duty of submitting his accounts to examination.

Accordingly he was deaf to all remonstrance, and while professing devoted loyalty to his sovereign, refused to make any change in his system of taxation. So after much ineffectual discussion, Friedrich lost patience, captured Vintler's luxurious castle by sudden assault and proclaimed its owner as a rebel. The banker had already fled to the stronghold of a fellow-member of the Bund and presently, with diplomatic caution, opened peaceful negotiations with the irritated prince. Matters were finally patched up; Vintler not only recovered his beautiful

Runggelstein but obtained compensation for damages inflicted by Friedrich's men-at-arms. Nevertheless the prince had scored a victory, for the seizure of all Vintler's papers and accounts enabled him to master the financial situation. Taxation was now rearranged on a juster basis; money began to flow into the coffers of the State, and the first blow was dealt at the power of the nobles.

We must not forget to mention that Vintler was an intimate friend and admirer of Oswald von Wolkenstein who often played a prominent part in the contests of minstrelsy for which Runggelstein was famed. Having overthrown the Receiver-General, Friedrich followed up this success by active measures against various other members of the Bund. The Lichstensteins of Karneid and other kinsmen and friends of the powerful Wolkensteins were the next to feel the weight of his hand. The Wolkensteins' turn was to come later.

Meanwhile Oswald's false love, Sabina Haussman, had lost her elderly husband, and being free to use his wealth to forward her ambitions,

was now an established power at the court of Tirol. Her dazzling beauty had speedily enslaved Friedrich's too susceptible heart, and she was employing her wiles to inflame his wrath against her rejected lover in order to press her claims for compensation as heiress of Hauenstein. She coolly valued her share of the Jäger estate at 6,000 gulden, and demanded that Oswald should either pay this preposterous sum, or be forced to make restitution of the castle and lands.

As we have already explained, the Wolkensteins had taken full possession of Hauenstein before Oswald's birth. Therefore, in accordance with the creed and custom of the time, our hero was not only devoid of responsibility for his predecessors' deeds—however irregular they may have been—but bound to preserve his inheritance intact. Besides, he had the completest belief in the soundness of his title. His grandfather had purchased Hauenstein from the Jägers and given it to him at his birth. What could be clearer? His dearest ambition had been to make Sabina its chatelaine as his

wife. Thus she would have been mistress of all. Her claim—such as it was—to a share of the estate had been forfeited by her own act, when she had broken faith with him in favour of the burgher of Hall. Let her rave! Not a scrap of Hauenstein soil, not a single gold piece would he yield!

Nevertheless, Oswald soon found it advisable to go abroad for a while. Things were at a deadlock in Tirol; fresh plans must be hatched to strengthen the nobles' cause. Also, there was another and still more pressing reason for flight. In spite of Sabina's virulent enmity, he was always thinking of her, always haunted by her too seductive image and shrank from meeting her face to face. A word, a smile, and he would be again at her feet!

So, in 1408, he started for Spain, to take part in a crusade against the Moors about to be waged by King John of Portugal. At most critical moments, the mediæval side of Oswald's nature always regained the mastery, and to do battle for the faith seemed the best means of safety from temptations of the flesh.

But on the way through Germany he turned aside to visit the castle[1] of his old friend Ulrich II. of Schwangau on the Lech. The two were kindred spirits as regarded the art of minstrelsy, as well as sterner themes, and the Schwangau line boasted of more than one Minnesinger. Here Oswald found his good genius in the person of Ulrich's young daughter Margaret, a slender maid of sixteen, already fired with eager enthusiasm for the Tirolese poet whose songs she had sung ever since she was a child. This angelic vision of girlhood quickly freed our hero from Sabina's lurid spells, and in spite of his physical defects and his forty-two years, he soon won the maiden's heart. They were duly betrothed; but the marriage was to be deferred until Oswald's return from the war to which he was pledged. So once more he loved and rode away. And, strangely enough, he showed no haste to secure his bride, even when the

[1] This castle is the now ruined tower of Hinter-Hohen Schwangau in Bavaria, close to the well-known Schwanstein and Hohen Schwangau built by the mad King Ludwig.

crusade had ended in triumph. Possibly the tender love-ditties inscribed to his Margaret during this absence deadened the pain of separation, but, in all probability, some more potent attraction was accountable for his neglect.

We know that the Portuguese sovereign and his English queen (a daughter of John of Gaunt) showed the warmest appreciation of Oswald's versatile powers, and that their sons Peter and Ferdinand, who led the crusade, were knights of his own stamp. After taking a prominent part in the campaign and in that brilliant feat of arms, the storming of Ceuta, until then an impregnable stronghold of the Barbary pirates, he returned to Portugal with the victors and tarried long at their court. He next visited the Moorish king of Grenada, where his gift of minstrelsy won him fresh laurels, and then journeyed slowly through Castile and Provence, everywhere acclaimed as the king of Minnesingers.

According to Beda Weber, the minute though —too often—incorrect chronicler of our hero's

life, Oswald's absence was prolonged to 1413, when startled by ill tidings from the Bund, he hastened to join the Emperor Sigismund in Lombardy and accepted a secret mission to Tirol in furtherance of the imperial schemes.

But Herr Anton Noggler's discoveries in the Wolkenstein archives prove that Oswald returned to his country at least two years earlier, and was apparently again in good favour at Court. For early in 1411 a suit brought against him by the Bishop of Brixen came to trial and Duke Friedrich gave a verdict for the defendant. Also, certain allusions in the Wolkenstein papers lead Herr Noggler to believe that about this time Oswald was again bewitched by Sabina's charms, offered her his hand for the second time and was rejected anew. If this were the case, Oswald's neglect of his Margaret is explained, so too the long break in his autograph note-books on which Weber's narrative is based. Humiliation and —let us hope—some touch of remorse may well have driven him back to Spain, to seek forgetfulness in music and song.

However this may be he was undoubtedly in South Tirol in 1413, and, dismayed by the success of Friedrich's acts of repression, applied his energies to the task of obtaining the Kaiser's active help for the Bund.

Indeed, as matters stood, the sole hope of the Tirolese barons lay in the recognition of their status as vassals of the Empire alone and their consequent independence of the Count of Tirol. So they looked forward eagerly to the approaching Council of Constance as the means of securing that recognition and reducing their too vigorous sovereign to the position of a lay figure. They had a fair chance of success, for besides other causes of friction, the Kaiser was specially enraged against Friedrich on account of his adherence to the schismatic Pope, John XXIII.[1] Accordingly Oswald was sent to Constance as the representative of the Adelsbund.

[1] *Vide* Coxe's *History of the House of Austria*, vol. i., p. 194 and *foll.*

Gratl. Innsbruck.

Emperor Sigismund.

IV

ALL Europe indeed was represented at Constance. This solemn gathering of princes and potentates convened by Sigismund[1] to end the schism in the Church appealed to all sorts and conditions of men. In the shadowy background of that brilliant scene hundreds of political schemers were busily weaving their webs, while in front of the stage passed endless processions of sightseers and pleasure-seekers of every degree. Country bumpkins, stout burghers, steel-clad knights, noble ladies, men-at-arms, friars, priests, pedlars, pickpockets, pilgrims, jugglers, mimes and musicians all jostled one another in the city by the lake.

[1] Carlyle gives a passage from his inaugural speech: "'Right Reverend Fathers, *date operam ut illa nefanda schisma eradicetur*'—to which a cardinal mildly remarking: '*Domine, schisma est generis neutrius*,' Sigismund loftily replies: '*Ego sum Rex Romanus et super grammaticam.*'" (*Vide History of Frederick II. of Prussia*, vol. i., by Thomas Carlyle.)

Towards the close of 1414 no less than fifty thousand foreigners were gathered in Constance, as many visitors from adjacent parts, and about thirty thousand horses. The official contingent furnished by the Church ran up to eighteen thousand persons. Twenty-nine cardinals headed the list, next came thirty-three archbishops, one hundred and fifty bishops, one hundred abbots, fifty arch-priests, three hundred doctors of canonical law, with the requisite train of lay functionaries and hangers-on. It is also said that, in addition to the throng of official personages and spectators, seven hundred musicians and players, and an equal number of public women pursued their respective callings in the town.

Our observant poet was much interested by the stir and turmoil of this world's fair although he seems to have had some uncomfortable moments. Naturally, prices were high, even for privileged members of the Council, and the numerous poor gentlefolk scattered through the suburbs were cruelly squeezed by extortionate inn-keepers. Oswald relates in verse how the best of everything

was reserved for spiritual palates, while laymen were left to starve. He gives comic instances of the cost of food and of hosts who would confiscate the very wheels of your coach, should your purse fail to satisfy their greed. Nevertheless, even hungry guests found abundant amusement in the overflowing city. Dancing, singing and fiddling went on all day and nearly all night in its streets. There were public diversions of every kind: grand tournaments, miracle plays, Tirolese peasant dramas, wild-beast shows and fights, excursions to pleasure gardens by the lake and convivial meetings on all sides. Female society of every class could be freely enjoyed. Ladies of high degree flocked to the festivities in Constance, gladly escaping for a while from the dulness of home life in isolated castles. Many valiant knights, Oswald among them, boasted of having their beards torn out in the scrimmage and confusion of the dance; while some bemoaned the loss of precious jewels and seals snatched by light fingers in the crowd. So, for the general public, life at Constance at this period was a whirl of perpetual gaiety.

Music was discussed no less than theology, for the last, melodious minstrel lays and the new, pedantic strains of the Meistersingers mingled with the debates of prelates in Council. Also many weddings were solemnized, owing to a belief in the supreme efficacy of nuptial benedictions pronounced by fathers of the Church. Nor was the clash of arms unheard, for the soldiery and retainers of the different "nations" assembled, frequently came to blows over their cups. It was also noted that much land in Tirol changed hands about this time, for titled owners in need of cash for their pleasures gladly struck bargains with thrifty peasants.

But while taking their share of the fun, many prominent Tirolese nobles were anxiously watching the proceedings of the Council and looking to the discomfiture of their sovereign through the verdict of the empire and the Church.

In the midst of all these mundane excitements Oswald was suddenly recalled to tenderer feelings. At some great festival he came, un-

expectedly, face to face with his neglected betrothed. She had come to Constance with her father or brother, and the errant lover seems to have had little difficulty in making his peace with the beautiful girl. Perhaps the songs written for her during his wanderings pleaded in his favour, for her image certainly inspired some of the very best of his work. Few German poets of any age have produced love poems of equal tenderness and descriptive force. In one of the "Margaret" series his "proud Swabian" is a truly living figure. We behold her perfections of face and form; hear her speak and sing. She stands before us a radiant vision, "nobly planned" with soft, dark eyes, waving light hair, delicate nose, smiling lips, shell-like ears and tiny feet. So, we can imagine how she listened to Oswald's prayers and quickly granted the mercy craved. We may be sure that he pressed his suit ardently enough; for the simple, blushing child from whom he had parted so lightly five years before, had now blossomed into a stately young lady whose beauty was enhanced by the gauds of festival

attire. During all these years of waiting she had been constant to her beloved poet, and although constancy may have been easy in her tranquil home-life, the lesson of mercy could not have been so easily learned save from exceptional sweetness of nature.

As will be seen later on, her attitude towards Oswald—in spite of his age—was invariably one of *quasi* maternal indulgence.

It would be interesting to know whether she had heard of her poet's recent doings at Innsbruck and how—forgetful of his vows—he had again worshipped at the shrine of his false goddess. News travelled slowly in those days, and Schwangau was a sheltered retreat; but in any case, the gentle Margaret forgave everything to the man of her choice, her first and only love. In fact she seems always to have regarded her Oswald's faults as the unavoidable "defects of his qualities."

Even the notorious Wolkenstein temper caused her no alarm, and after prolonged experience of it in the seclusion of Hauenstein, she was still able to say with a cheerful smile,

that "the Wolkenstein fury was a good-natured thing and did no harm."

Matters went smoothly now; the lovers met frequently and all preliminaries for the marriage had been arranged, when suddenly public events interposed to delay the wedding.

Being an Imperial envoy, with a yearly stipend of 300 "*red* Hungarian gulden," Oswald was not his own master. It was his duty to watch public events, to fly hither and thither as required, and now, all at once, he received orders to accompany the Emperor to Perpignan.

Accordingly, Margaret was left behind with her family in Constance, and even her sweet endurance must have been tried by this fresh parting, and by dread of the new temptations to which her volatile betrothed would be exposed.

The object of the journey was serious enough, for Sigismund was bent on completing the work of the Council, and—as a sequel to the forced abdication of Pope John XXIII. and voluntary withdrawal of Gregory XII.—procuring the renunciation of Benedict XII. who had

taken refuge at the Aragonese court. But, of course, the Imperial visitor was welcomed with due pomp, and at all the festivities held in his honour his minstrel envoy played a very conspicuous part. We have no record of Margaret's ideas on the subject, but we know what any loving girl must have felt, especially, when the promised bridegroom was so very apt to be carried away by artistic excitement.

Throughout the Middle Ages the court of Aragon was renowned for its enlightened patronage of music and poetry, and the Queen Margarita who showered favours on our Tirolese singer was the wife of King Ferdinand. In a poem entitled "Am Minnehof" (At the Court of Love) Oswald describes his reception at the palace, how he paid homage to the fair Queen by offering her his beard, how she rewarded him by stringing a jewelled ring on it with her own white hands, and the whispered command, "never to unloose it" (*non may plus disligaides*); and next, how the gracious lady pierced his ears with a steel needle and fixed other two rings in them.

One is not surprised to learn that King Sigismund was much startled by his friend's adornments, thought he had gone mad, and anxiously asked if the rings did not pain him!

At all the fêtes given for the Kaiser, Oswald was lionized to his heart's content. His fine voice, his compositions, his playing were praised to the skies, and the general enthusiasm reached its climax at a court ball when, announced as the "Viscount of Turkey," he made his appearance in a gorgeous Arabian costume, performed Moorish dances, sang Moorish songs "as perfectly as any prince of Grenada," and was unanimously acclaimed a "royal poet."

Sigismund's visit to France, although barren of political results, was carried out with an imperial splendour ill suited to the state of the imperial exchequer.

We read that he rode into Paris with a train of eight hundred knights in full armour, and several hundred men. The Kaiser was bareheaded; he wore the grey cross of his newly instituted Order of the Dragon, and he kissed his hand to all the ladies thronging windows

and balconies. Wolkenstein rode at his heels, arrayed in his Moorish dress, bearing a zither in one hand, a naked sword in the other, and many glittering decorations across his breast. In fact, according to his diary, he attracted almost as much admiration as his master, the Emperor.

Did he write in this strain to his patient love, and relate all the mad frolics at Court, as well as his legitimate triumphs as a poet?

In the midst of these Paris gaieties, disquieting news came from Constance. Duke Friedrich of Tirol had made his escape. So Sigismund hastily left France, and our hero was restored to his expectant bride.

V

A FEW words of explanation are now required concerning the miserable condition to which Duke Friedrich had been reduced and why he had been obliged to seek safety in flight. Without entering upon the tangled tale of his relations with Switzerland and consequent friction with the Empire, it may be well to remind our readers that he had strongly opposed Sigismund's election, had given still worse offence by refusing to do homage to him for his territories, and then, accepting the overtures of John XXIII., had come to the Council of Constance as the standard-bearer and adherent of that schismatic Pope. There, as we all know, John was forced by the Council [1] "to promise to abdicate the Papal chair as a sacrifice to the peace of the Church. At the same time Friedrich being summoned by the

[1] *Vide* Coxe's *History of the House of Austria*, vol. i., p. 195 and *foll.*

Emperor to do homage, reluctantly complied, and received the investiture of his fiefs." But fearing that Sigismund would support the claims of the bishops of Trent, Brixen, and Coire whom he had attacked and despoiled, the Duke promoted the escape of Pope John who hoped by his flight to dissolve the Council. Accordingly Friedrich invited all the great world of Constance to a magnificent tournament outside the city, and while it was going on the Pope fled in disguise to Friedrich's castle at Schaffhausen, where he was presently joined by its owner. But their plans were soon checkmated by the attitude of the Council. Instead of being dissolved, it was declared permanent and superior to the authority of the anti-pope, by whom it had been convened. Friedrich was excommunicated, placed under the ban of the empire, deprived of his territories, declared a traitor to his suzerain and an enemy of the Church, while neighbouring states were incited to invade his possessions. Soon the whole empire was in arms, and a large force advanced upon Schaffhausen, whereupon

Friedrich and John hastily fled to Laffenburg. As most of the Swiss cantons rallied to the imperial banner, Friedrich's losses were severe, and even his family castle of Hapsburg was wrested from him. Still, his cause was by no means desperate, for his Tirolese subjects and his Black Forest folk remained staunch and were eager to come to his aid; Pope John sent large supplies of money, and the Dukes of Burgundy and Lorraine prepared to march to his assistance. But Friedrich was panic-struck, and despairing of success, listened to the pusillanimous counsels of Louis, Duke of Bavaria, and decided to deliver up the Pope and yield himself to the mercy of Sigismund.[1]

Accordingly he went back to Constance and meekly submitted to the indignities heaped upon him. His degradation was Sigismund's triumph, so no humiliation was spared him. Summoned to the Imperial presence, in the Franciscan monastery, he found the Emperor on his throne, in state array, with the chief

[1] *Vide* Coxe's *History of the House of Austria*, vol. i., p. 197.

princes of the empire, several ambassadors and the fathers of the Council in attendance.

He had to prostrate himself before the throne, implore pardon for his offences against the Kaiser and the Church, tender an oath of submission, make formal surrender of all his territories, from Tirol to the Brisgau, and finally after a humble appeal for mercy and vowing to hold as by favour whatever lands the Emperor might deign to restore, he yielded his person in hostage for the fulfilment of the conditions prescribed.

It must have been a terrible scene, and history tells us that most of those present were moved to pity. The painful ceremony concluded, Sigismund clasped Friedrich's hand, and turning to the Italian prelates, said in a loud voice:

"You well know, reverend fathers, the power and consequence of the dukes of Austria; learn by this example what a king of the Germans can accomplish."[1]

So while Sigismund went off to Aragon and

[1] *Vide* Coxe's *History of the House of Austria*, vol. i., p. 198.

France, his vanquished foe was held in safe keeping at Constance. Closely watched and barely supplied with the necessaries of life, his position was a most pitiable one.

Stupefied with despair, he seemed almost insensible to the threats and insults continually hurled at him in this hostile city. But on learning that his treacherous brother Ernest of Styria was trying to wrest his faithful Tirol from him, his apathy melted away and he was stung to vigorous action. With the aid of two or three devoted adherents he escaped from Constance on the 1st March 1416, and crossing the Arlberg made his way into the valley of the Eisack where a considerable body of Tirolese flocked to his standard. Welcomed as a saviour by this loyal mountain folk, his forces increased at every step, and thus his march was soon converted into a triumphal procession. A treaty of peace was presently concluded with his brother at Castle Krapfsburg in the Innthal; the discomforted Ernest withdrew to his own dominions and all danger of civil war was happily averted.

Such was the position of affairs on Sigismund's hurried return to Constance, and his costly pleasures in Spain and France having drained the treasury, he promptly sold all Friedrich's forfeited fiefs and even alienated his power of redeeming mortgaged lands. While absorbed in the pleasant occupation of refilling his purse he was interrupted by a sudden change of front on the part of Duke Ernest. For the latter unexpectedly appeared before Constance at the head of a considerable force and extorted Sigismund's consent to an amicable arrangement with Duke Friedrich of Tirol. As the new Pope, Martin V., strongly supported this proposal, a formal reconciliation was accordingly concluded and, for the third time, Friedrich swore fealty to the Emperor in Constance (25th May 1418), and having agreed to restore the lands wrested from the Bishop of Trent, and to pay Sigismund 70,000 florins—which sum was afterwards reduced to 50,000—all his territories were given back to him, excepting those ceded to the Swiss and various fiefs irrecoverably alienated by the Kaiser. He was duly reinstated as

prince of the empire, and honoured with the privilege of being one of the supporters of the papal canopy when Pope Martin departed from Constance in state.

There is no reason to believe that our hero Oswald was an eye-witness of these scenes, indeed, as the next chapter will show, it is almost impossible that he could have been in Constance at that date. Nevertheless the Emperor was not forgetful of his faithful friend and servant. One of the clauses of his deed of reconciliation with Friedrich bound the latter to restore to Oswald von Wolkenstein all that he had taken from him and to give him full compensation for all property or buildings which he had burnt or destroyed.

Where then was Oswald the reader may ask? His marriage had been achieved at last, some time in 1417. No details of the wedding have come down to us, but as we know that it took place in Constance and was probably consecrated by the much coveted blessings of fathers of the Church. Thereupon, obtaining leave from his emperor and discarding politics for a while,

he bore off his bride to his native land and settled down with her at Hauenstein in the forest at the foot of the Schlern.

This castle on a rock backed by the towering crags of the great Dolomite mountain, and encircled on three sides by a wilderness of velvet-topped pines must have been an ideal retreat for the newly-wedded couple. And better still, under the circumstances, it was a well-protected nest. For the guards on the watch-tower high above the trees could signal at need to friendly Seis down below, or to Kastelruth - town across the sunny plateau beyond; while their outlook also commanded every line of approach from the main valley of the Eisack, the Grödnerthal, etc. So the Minnesinger could ignore Duke Friedrich's threats for a space, and enjoy his love-idyll undisturbed. In fact, some of Oswald's tenderest lyrics, composed at this time, breathe the spirit and charm of sylvan life. Seeing that they comprise several "Spring Songs," hailing the moment when "the torrents freed from icy bond," our ears are once more gladdened by the

Gratl. Innsbruck.

Ruins of Hauenstein.

sound of running water and the music of carolling birds;—when snow-dazzled eyes again rest on budding flowers and delicate greenery, it seems probable that our poet's marriage had taken place during the winter months. But the exact date of it is uncertain, and we only know that 1417 proved a very eventful year for the Wolkenstein family.

By this time Duke Friedrich's position in Tirol was notably strengthened by the assured loyalty of the mass of his subjects. In fighting the tyrannous nobility, he championed the cause of the lower classes. The people at large knew nothing of his errors of policy in his dealings with the empire,—that was a question which nowise concerned them,—but their hearts had been deeply stirred by the news of his sufferings at Constance, they had welcomed his return, and vigorously assisted him to defeat the treacherous attacks of his brother Duke Ernest. Accordingly, Friedrich was now free to deal with the rebellious barons, to besiege them in their strongholds and reduce them to terms.

Thus far he had left the Wolkensteins alone; Michael was still undisturbed at the Trostburg, Leonhard in his manor below Kastelruth, Oswald on his Hauenstein crag. But storm-clouds were gathering over all three, and darkest of all over the head of our poet who as the trusted servant of the Kaiser was the best hated and most dangerous of the clan. There was already a muttering of thunder in the air, and—forewarned of his personal peril—Oswald seldom passed the boundaries of his forest which—at that period—stretched its dark mass almost to the gates of Kastelruth. Besides, these were honeymoon days and easy to spend in honeymoon fashion, regardless of impending trouble.

We may be sure that in spite of Oswald's remarkably varied experiences, he found complete happiness in the arms of his fair, young wife. For this "proud Swabian beauty" who had loved him so faithfully was a high-souled woman full of intellect as well as charm. We know that the poet humbly confessed his unworthiness of so rare a treasure, and that under

her influence all his noblest aspirations budded afresh. In those holiday weeks, the pair wandered here and there in the legend-haunted forest, rested on the banks of its numerous lakelets, climbed to the flowery meads of the Seisser Alp and penetrated the rocky wilds of the Schlern. And, although the fact is unrecorded, surely they explored the mysterious cavern behind the waterfall at the head of the gorge, once the passage to the Magic Rose-garden, and discussed Dietrich's mortal combat with the Dwarf King Laurin. Oswald's wonderful bridal songs—in the form of tender duets—were composed at this time, together with his praises of spring, and we can imagine the couple reclining at the foot of some giant pine, talking lovers' talk and pausing to listen to bird-voices, murmuring streams, or the mighty rush of wind through the trees. But the minstrel bridegroom was a man of action above all; the perils gathering beyond the forest were as wine to his fiery spirit and soon roused him from his idyllic dream. No messenger climbed to the castle gate without bringing evil news. This or that strong-

hold was captured, some other beleaguered; the circle of iron was closing round him. At any moment the watchers on the keep might detect the flash of Friedrich's lances in sunlit glades, or hear the tramp of horses in hidden forest tracks. Before long, Schloss Karneid was snatched from Oswald's kinsmen the Lichtensteins, next, Salegg surrendered. His brothers sent word that Trostburg being no longer secure, the Adelsbund had resolved to concentrate its forces elsewhere. So it was advisable to leave Hauenstein at once, if only to ensure the safety of his wife and the expected heir. But as the poet's blood was up, his fiercest passion aroused, no peaceful retreat was chosen. Skirting the jaws of danger, he conveyed his Margaret by devious ways to stout Greifenstein, on the precipitous crag beyond Bozen, where the Starkenbergs and the rest of the League were cheerfully preparing to resist attack. Oswald had escaped from Hauenstein at the right moment, for the ducal troops surrounded its walls a day or two after he had gone. His garrison maintained so vigorous a defence, that Friedrich failed to

take the castle itself and only succeeded in destroying the outer buildings. Meanwhile, brave Lady Margaret could breathe in peace in the Greifenstein eyrie while her husband and his friends were strengthening its defences. They had abundant supplies of every kind, plenty of men, and the hardy garrison was continually reinforced by other rebel leaders and their followers. To our modern ideas, this gaunt, wind-swept Greifenstein fortress would seem a grimly unsuitable abode for a delicate young wife. But Margaret von Schwangau came of a fighting stock, and had been reared amid alarms of war. One may be sure that with Oswald beside her, she was insensible to fear and perfectly at home in these martial surroundings. Doubtless her presence gave a touch of feminine grace to the mediæval arrangements of the Starkenberg household. We can imagine her consulting with the chatelaine on the question of stores and helping to prepare salves, simples and bandages in view of possible casualties. Hostilities would soon begin, and every spare moment must be turned

to account. Now that Heinrich von Rottenburg had been crushed, the Starkenberg brothers were the most influential and wealthiest nobles of South Tirol. They were absolute proprietors of no less than eight castles, inclusive of Greifenstein, and besides these domains held four others, Hoch Eppan, Schlanders, Ulten and Zufal in fee from the Duke. These fiefs being mortgaged (albeit for amounts much inferior to their value) their holders were bound to pay a certain quota of their revenues to the State treasury. This duty however they had hitherto evaded, and even when Friedrich offered to redeem Schlanders, sent them the amount of the mortgage money, and demanded the title deeds in return, Ulrich von Starkenberg burst into furious imprecations, slashed his sword through and through the ducal missive, and bade the messengers carry word to their master that the Starkenbergs refused his gold and would not surrender the deeds. The haughty brothers believed themselves to be invulnerable. At the court of Vienna, Ulrich had openly defied Friedrich's authority; whereupon

the Duke had reminded him that he was his sovereign lord and would speedily call him to account. This incident brought the famous "Starkenberg strife" to a climax. On his return to Tirol, the Duke promptly assaulted and seized nine of Ulrich's castles in rapid succession; but the brothers still defied him at Greifenstein, making raids in all directions, plundering peasants and traders and harassing the ducal troops close to the gates of Bozen. So now a fierce, personal struggle was imminent.

Frederic's banners were sighted in the valley beneath Greifenstein soon after his attack upon Hauenstein, and presumably his march had been hastened by the knowledge that all the Wolkensteins were gathered within the Starkenberg walls. Day after day masses of troops—with harness and weapons glittering in the sun—streamed up the valley from Bozen, invested the crag and formed a great camp. But Greifenstein had ways of communication unknown to the foe. Thanks to a warren of subterranean vaults and passages with hidden exits in woods

on the mountain side, messengers from the castle came and went as they pleased.

So the members of the Adelsbund collected on the ramparts above could laugh at the blockade, at Frederic's siege train and all the preparations for battering their walls. Down below there among the vines, the soldiers were as pigmies swarming over a giant's foot. Yet the Duke was no mean opponent and spared no pains to reduce this nest of rebels. For he presently attacked it from above as well as from below, stationing half his force on the cliff dominating Greifenstein in the rear and only separated from the castle-crag by a deep, narrow cleft. This plan ought to have succeeded, seeing that Friedrich's chief gunner was supplied with the marvellous, newly-invented powder that was soon to change the whole art of war. But apparently the guns were badly served, and a ponderous engine devised to hurl big rocks into the castle came to grief at the first trial. Then too the besieging force, although numerous, was untrained and badly officered, for as no nobles of great standing were on the Duke's side

Gratl. Innsbruck.

Castle of Greifenstein.

it consisted mainly of mercenaries and peasant-militia. Most of the latter would have done very good service in the field, but proved restive to camp-discipline, and wearying of the ineffectual siege, many deserted and the rest came and went as they chose. All knew that Kaiser Sigismund was favourable to the rebels and threatening to invade Tirol in their behalf.

On the other hand, the defenders of Greifenstein were in the highest spirits. They saw their foe wasting his strength against their impregnable rock and were paying him back for the ruin wrought on other strongholds. Oswald seems to have been the soul of the defence, although some of his companions indignantly charged him with having neglected to push their interests at the Imperial Court. Nevertheless, all found him invaluable in the present emergency. His military experience was naturally wider than that of home-staying nobles. He was full of resource, knew the use of gunpowder, and had brought from the East the secret of the dreaded Greek fire.

No chronicler records the exact duration of this first siege of Greifenstein, but evidently it dragged on for several months. At last the garrison determined to make an end of it, and sallying forth one night in two bodies, captained by Oswald and one of his kinsmen, attacked both the besieging camps at the same moment. Friedrich's troops were taken by surprise and, in the midst of the struggle, showers of rockets were shot from the castle walls and set both camps ablaze. In a few moments everything was in flames, and the panic-stricken soldiers fled from the field dropping armour and weapons, stripping off burning garments, and vainly trying to escape from the horrible Greek fire.

Thereupon Frederic was compelled to raise the siege and beat a retreat with the miserable remnant of his force. Oswald's War Song "Hu, Huss" is a graphic record of the scene, as well as of the rebels' bitter hatred of the Duke, and their resolve to fight to the death for their old privileges.

It may be roughly rendered as follows:—

I

"Tally Ho! cried Michael of Wolkenstein,
To the chase! cried Oswald of Wolkenstein.
Up and at them! cried Leonhard of Wolkenstein,
All shall be driven from Greifenstein.

II

"Now smoke and din, now raging flame
Poured down the gorge mixed with red blood,
The foe dismayed, shed arms and steel,
Flying for life, while *we* rejoiced.
The siege works all, the huts and tents
Were burnt to ashes in the camps.
Who doeth ill, shall ill receive 'tis said,
And thus we pay thee back, Duke Friedrich."

Other verses follow enumerating the various bands who had broken faith with the League and joined in the siege of Greifenstein. A note of triumphant defiance resounds in every rugged line, and the poem concludes with the words:

"They thought to bind us captive,
But theirs was the defeat."

VI

THE foe being completely routed, camp and war material destroyed, the assembled Leaguers left the virgin fortress safe in its masters' care and quickly dispersed—their rejoicing being tempered by sore anxiety as to the fate of their own possessions. Some of their castles indeed were already captured by the Duke, others half ruined, and as we already know, part of Hauenstein had been burnt and sacked. Meanwhile the disastrous siege of Greifenstein had taught Friedrich a lesson by which he made haste to profit, for with unexpected statecraft he now adopted fresh tactics. Although persistently hostile to our hero, he proceeded to make amicable advances to other members of the Bund and patched up a shallow peace with them. Through the mediation of Duke Ernest of Bavaria he even made truce with the Starkenbergs. But he was only biding his time until

the fit moment arrived for stamping out the rebellion. Already his position was improved by the election—November 1417—of Martin V. to the Papal Chair. For the new Pontiff was well-disposed towards him, and as Cardinal Colonna, had proved his good will at Constance by loudly protesting against the unjust treatment inflicted on him by the Council.

At this point we may digress for a moment in order to sum up the history of Greifenstein, for although that stubborn stronghold played no farther part in Oswald's life, it remained a focus of rebellion and a thorn in Friedrich's side to the end of the civil war. The terms of the truce notwithstanding, its lords continued to harry the surrounding country and raid the Bozen caravans, and when Wilhelm von Starkenberg also disregarded a summons to appear before the General Assembly at Siebeneich, it was decided to send special envoys to Greifenstein to settle the matter in an amicable way. Starkenberg promptly supplied the necessary safe-conduct, and relying on its efficacy, the Burgomasters of Bozen

and Hall climbed up to the castle. They were courteously made welcome, and treated to so lengthy a banquet that dusk had fallen before they issued from the gates. With hospitable care for their safety, Starkenberg insisted on sending retainers to guide his visitors down the steep mountain track, but the men had secret orders to pitch them over a precipice by the way. The crime was duly accomplished, and when Starkenberg knew that his commands had been carried out he clapped his hands and exclaimed, "Thank God! We have one foe the less; Niklas" (the burgomaster of Bozen) "wrought us much harm." But this abominable murder, added to past misdeeds, raised a storm of indignation and disgust throughout the land. Friedrich again laid siege to the treacherous castle, but it had been copiously provisioned during the truce, and held out for eighteen months. The confident garrison made frequent sorties, terrorising both Bozen and Meran by deeds of bloodshed and rapine, and it seemed impossible to reduce the eyrie by famine.

Once, either in mocking memory of their portly victim poor Master Niklas, or to show that their larder was well stocked, the Starkenbergs hurled down a fat porker into the besiegers' camp, and to this day the Greifenstein ruin is best known by its local name of the "Sauschloss" (Swine Castle).

Some time during the siege, the fierce Ulrich von Starkenberg died. His death was kept secret, but soon afterwards Wilhelm left the castle and fled to Austria. The garrison held out for a while, but, daunted by Friedrich's tremendous preparations for storming the walls, finally offered to surrender on condition of being allowed to march out scot-free, and opened the impregnable gates in 1426.

The fall of Greifenstein proved the death-blow of the League, for by that time most of its members were crushed and even the proud Wolkensteins had been compelled to swear fealty to the Duke. Wilhelm von Starkenberg —the last of his line—obtained a free pardon from Friedrich's successor, Duke Sigismund, and, about 1440, returned to his country, a

beggared, homeless old man. The rulers of Tirol left Greifenstein to decay and, nowadays, one or two ruined towers and fragments of walls are all that remain of this robbers' nest and virgin stronghold of the Adelsbund.

Oswald's return to Hauenstein in 1417 after the dispersion of Friedrich's army was by no means a joyful home-coming. Part of the building had been destroyed, much valuable property had been looted, and wholesale repairs were needed with no present hope of obtaining compensation. Domestic cares were pressing on him, and for all her valiant temper, his wife's health was impaired by her exciting experiences at Greifenstein. So he could no longer regard his woodland castle with honeymoon eyes. Now the place he had once loved so dearly became positively hateful to him, for it was practically a prison. He had less liberty there than behind the Starkenberg walls, and was hardly safe at a bow-shot from his own ramparts. His position altogether was worse than uncertain, for although Friedrich's wrath against him was kept in check for the moment by

Sigismund's commands, all his enemies were on the alert. Sabina Hausmann was noisily re-asserting her claims upon Hauenstein, and it was an open secret that Friedrich was her devoted slave and eager to do her will. So Oswald stormed and chafed; the glamour of life had vanished, and although an heir was soon to be born to him this fact only increased his anxieties. He knew that his foes were busy, both at court and among his fellow-nobles. Traps of every sort were laid for him, and efforts made to stir the peasantry against him as an enemy of the people and the adherent of foreign potentates. Terrifying rumours drifted up through the forest and swelled to exaggerated proportions in the seclusion of his home. Even his wife's loving care could not dull the sting of frustrated ambition, and at this period he seems to have been too much worried to find relief in literary work.

Certainly there were good grounds for anxiety and his fears were no phantoms of the poetic imagination. He had also incurred the enmity of a very powerful neighbour, the Bishop of Brixen: partly by certain public remarks made

at Constance on the corruption of the Church and the action of prelates in worldly affairs, and more, perhaps, by some scathing verses, descriptive of the Bishop's hypocrisy, which were very popular in Tirol. Therefore just now, instigated by Friedrich who—fettered by imperial orders—was glad to deal vicarious blows at the object of his hate, the Bishop was thundering against Oswald and threatening him with material as well as spiritual reprisals. With all these snares compassing him about it is no wonder that his soul was heavy with trouble or that he longed to escape from his mountain solitude. Both in diaries and poems, the desponding Minnesinger enlarges on the dreariness of his pine-girt rock, especially when blockaded by ice and snow. Winter-mountaineering being unknown in his day, he complains of the impossibility of traversing the frozen wilderness without climbing-irons on his feet. The deadly stillness, with every torrent ice-bound, was only broken by the screams of his peacocks and the braying of trains of asses bringing supplies to the castle. Now and then one could faintly hear the rush

of Eisack's flood in its distant valley, or some trusty friend would force a way through the snow-drifts to bring news from the city and warning of fresh machinations on the part of his foes.

In his fits of despair the poet must have been ill to live with, and his Margaret must have needed all her unselfish devotion and tact to soothe the notorious Wolkenstein temper. Probably, however, she was ignorant of the worst and never dreamed that even when her husband's love was most ardent, his admiration of her beauty and goodness most eloquently expressed, the poison of Sabina's spells still burnt in his veins. But now, as always, this high-souled woman was a guardian-angel to the restless, excitable man, in whose brain poetic visions, dreams of knightly perfection and mystic beliefs were so strangely interwoven with political ambitions and cravings for glittering courts and royal favours. Happily for her, she had seen something of the world, in her maiden days, and had probably observed that model husbands were rare. At any rate she adored her poet,

wrestled with his fits of depression and usually managed to charm them away. Even when furious moods were on him she was able to say with a smile "that the Wolkenstein rage was a good-natured thing (ein gutmüthig Ding)." Certainly Oswald's temper was mild compared with that of his younger brother, for when Leonhard was stirred to wrath, he exploded like a bombshell, and his household flew to shelter under tables, upstairs, out of doors—anywhere in fact—beyond reach of his fist.

At the close of 1417—that year of varied events, a son was born to the poet, and this first of seven children, Oswald II., was destined to be the founder of the present Wolkenstein-Rodenegg line. Paternal cares, as we have hinted, only sharpened the elder Oswald's anxieties; but his valiant wife roused his courage, and soon afterwards the production of numerous poems, grave, gay, amorous and idyllic, proved that he was making the best of his enforced seclusion. He again recurred to that favourite Minnesinger theme: the joys of spring, and his descriptions of the awakening of

Nature from winter's sleep are full of observant touches. Sterner subjects also drew his attention when the Hussites were in arms, for he had always abhorred their doctrines.

His fiery diatribe—

"Ich hab gehört durch mangen grauss,"

was written in 1419.

About the same time our hero also found vent for his energies in another direction. Duke Friedrich being too busy just then in attacking his obstinate foes, the Spaurs, to meddle with the Wolkensteins, Oswald profited by the opportunity to seize a small estate near Völs, a few miles from Hauenstein, belonging to Sabina's brother, Martin Jäger. And finding that Friedrich turned a deaf ear to the rightful owner's complaints and showed no intention of resuming hostilities against Hauenstein, the restless poet went off to Hungary, ostensibly for the purpose of serving in the campaign against the Hussites, but really to implore Sigismund to intervene in Tirolese affairs and appeal to the states of the Empire against Friedrich's rule.

The three envoys sent to plead the cause of the nobles were Oswald von Wolkenstein, Ulrich von Starkenberg and H. von Schlandersberg. The secret of their mission, however, was carefully kept, and they marched openly through Tirol with a considerable following to serve their Kaiser in the field. But, once across the frontier, the three delegates pushed on to Vienna to interview the ruling Duke of Austria, Albert V. This prince was a man of high character, renowned as a champion of justice and peace, and always sided with his father-in-law, Sigismund, against his cousin Friedrich. So after hearing the envoys' eloquent exposition of their case, he readily confirmed the Patent of "Special Privilege" that had been granted in 1406 to the nobles of the Inn and the Etsch by Friedrich's predecessor, Duke Leopold.

Seeing that the Tirolese nobles held most of their lands in fee from Duke Friedrich, who as Count of Tirol was their over-lord, it is clear that they had no right to submit their patent to Albert of Austria, nor he any right to confirm it. The delegates themselves were

fully conscious of the illegality of the act; so much so, indeed, that Oswald hastened on to Hungary to ask more valid support from the Kaiser. But on the day of Wolkenstein's arrival, Sigismund chanced to be holding a council of war, so our hero was kept waiting for many hours in the ante-chamber of the Council Hall. At last, tired of kicking his heels, he obtained the desired audience by a truly characteristic expedient. Noticing that the stove by which he was sitting served to heat the adjoining hall, he stoked it so vigorously from a pile of logs in the corner, that before long Sigismund came hurrying out with beaded brow to get a little air. Finding his old friend Oswald meekly waiting—at some distance from the stove, we may be sure—he welcomed him cordially and gave a patient ear to his petition. Then, after seriously warning him that Sabina was his worst enemy at Friedrich's court, he promised to assist the Bund at some future date; but frankly stated that he could give no attention to Tirolese matters with the Bohemian war on his hands. That once concluded, he would

do his best for the nobles. This seemed encouraging news to Oswald, for no one then foresaw that the Hussite war would drag on for years and absorbing Sigismund's energies for the rest of his reign, leave Friedrich a free hand in Tirol.

Together with one or two fellow-members of the Bund, Wolkenstein followed his Kaiser to Bohemia, fought in several battles and held the castle of Misserad against the Hussites for several months, repulsing every attempt of the besiegers to carry it by storm. But Sigismund's army being utterly routed while on the march to the relief of Misserad, the brave garrison was starved out and forced to surrender with the honours of war.

We have no space to follow our hero's steps through the many weary vicissitudes of this disastrous crusade. Even as his imperial chief, he emerged from them in an extremely battered condition, and in the autumn of 1420, was thankful to return to his own land. All was well at Hauenstein with his Margaret and the babes, but public affairs, as regarded the cause

of the nobles, were very disquieting. For during his absence, Duke Friedrich had profited by the cessation of imperial interference with his methods, and used his free hand to good effect against the rebel leaders. Lodron and some other of the confederates were practically crushed, and even the formidable Spaurs reduced to apparent submission. But old Peter von Spaur of Nonsburg proved a wilier foe than the equally irreconcilable Starkenbergs. After being stripped of his high office of Captain of the Etsch in 1418, Spaur continued to defy the prince's authority by raiding the lands of loyal subjects. Many of his adherents, however, fell off on the death of his ally, the aged Bishop of Trent, for the latter's successor sided with Friedrich and greatly increased his power by ceding to him all the fiefs of the diocese which had been formerly held by Heinrich von Rottenburg. So Spaur and Lodron being left almost isolated, had been forced to come to terms with their sovereign. Persuaded that he had cut their claws, Friedrich was content to deal gently with the worsted rebels. He

granted them peace on condition that they swore fealty and did due homage to him as their over-lord. A formal treaty was accordingly drawn up providing for the reciprocal restitution of captured territories and strongholds; for reciprocal pardon of injuries and exchange of prisoners, and authorising Spaur to retain possession of the family castle of Alt-Spaur pending the verdict of the civil tribunal. In fact, every clause was arranged as though the "high-contending parties" had been potentates of equal standing. This was an excellent stroke of policy on Friedrich's part, and the younger Spaurs willingly subscribed to his terms. But rugged old Peter, the head of the house, while seeing the obvious necessity of allowing his sons to conform to the new order of things, could not abase his feudal pride to the point of owning himself subject to the law, and at this moment it was announced that he had suddenly died of despair. Yet, while his sons swore allegiance to their sovereign and were ranked among the loyal of the land, old Count Peter was not only a

living man but, safely hidden in his inaccessible stronghold, eagerly plotting against Friedrich with all the vigour of his prime. For six years after his supposed decease, he was carrying on a correspondence with the Wolkensteins of Trostburg and his letters are still preserved in their archives.

It was only in 1426, on learning that Michael von Wolkenstein had made submission to the Duke, that old Spaur gave up the game and turning his face to the wall, died truly of despair. It is worth noting that, while one rebel lord shammed death, the genuine decease of fierce Ulrich von Starkenberg was kept secret for almost the same length of time, so that the defenders of Greifenstein might still benefit by the prestige of his name.

VII

Oswald's strength had been sorely tried by the hardships of his Bohemian campaigns and his spirits depressed by the impossibility of inducing the Kaiser to intervene in Tirol. It must have begun to dawn upon him that the Leaguers were engaged in a lost cause; that feudal power and privilege were already things of the past. So, for a time, he stayed quietly at Hauenstein, looking after his property, avoiding all contact with his offended ruler, and limiting his journeys to the family castles of Kastelruth, Trostburg, etc., with an occasional flight up the Grödnerthal to the remote Wolkenstein nest in the Langethal where the first poetic dreams had germinated in his infant brain. Dreams of a sterner sort, and anxious discussions with scattered members of the moribund League were the motives of his present wanderings.

As we have seen already, domestic ties never

held him long. Just for brief intervals, when weary of turmoil and strife, his home seemed a haven of rest; then he was content to bask in the sunshine of his wife's tenderness, was again her ardent lover, and took pride in the sturdy offspring clustering about his knees; for he was now the father of three children. But black care soon assailed him once more and robbed him of peace. There was always the phantom cause of the Bund to lash him to action, in the vain hope of wresting victory from defeat and restoring the ancient splendours of his caste. Then also there was the continual, gnawing worry of that inherited dispute with the Jägers and the necessity of fighting it out in order to secure the estates to his children. For, as it may be well to repeat, Oswald considered his title to Hauenstein to be absolutely flawless. His grandfather had paid a round sum for the domain, settled it on himself at his birth, *ergo* it was his own freehold property. He contemptuously dismissed all assertions regarding the original subdivision of the estate and the proportionate value of this or that

share as fraudulent pretences on the part of the claimants. Nevertheless the Jägers' preposterous demands were a continual annoyance, and became more clamorous than ever now that the malicious Sabina was pushing Duke Friedrich to support them by force.

One day, in the late autumn of 1421, just when the first frosts were heralding the approach of wintry desolation, a letter from Sabina reached Oswald at Hauenstein. It was a startling epistle considering all that had happened, for the lady wrote in the most persuasive terms, imploring the knight to come to see her without delay, and—for "old love's sake,"—bring their long dispute to a peaceful end.

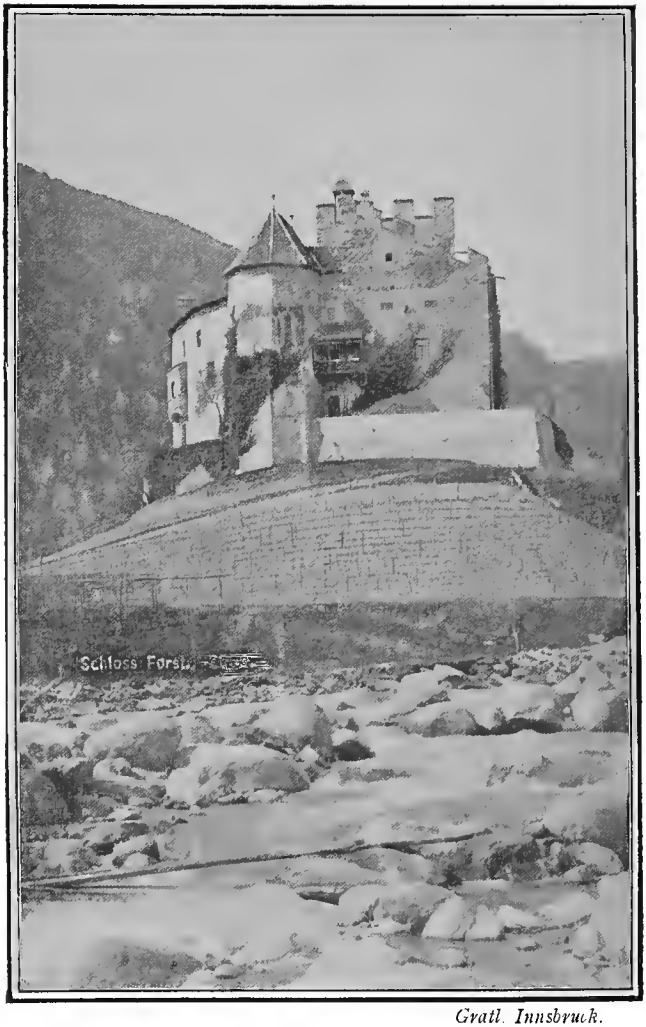
Oswald's heart throbbed with pleasure on receiving this missive. The vexed problem was solved at last! Nor, after the first moment, did he feel much surprise. His social triumphs as a minstrel and the devotion of his beautiful young wife had not prepared him to conceive doubts of his power over women. Of course, Sabina had never really hated him, although false to her vows. Womanly caprice, womanly

vanity had been the motives of her long hostility. He forgot to take into account the effect of his own scathing satires on the lady's mode of life! So he impulsively accepted the strange invitation. Had he been wise, he would have consulted his wife first of all; but either gratified self-love or a twinge of conscience sealed his lips on the matter. Probably the sight of Sabina's pen-strokes had stirred the smouldering embers of his former passion, and made the old spirit of adventure tingle in his veins. At any rate, he thought Sabina was clearly repentant. A friendly meeting might do wonders, settle the weary conflict, and besides there would be the additional triumph of outwitting Duke Friedrich! So he decided to say nothing to his Margaret. Even the best of wives might be unreasonable where another woman was concerned. Therefore, under pretext of fulfilling a vow of pilgrimage to some distant shrine, he left Hauenstein, unarmed and alone. The appointed place of rendezvous was the lonely tower of Enticlar, off the valley of the Eisack, some miles from

Trent. For so marked a rebel the journey thither was dangerous, but he accomplished it without molestation. The gate of Sabina's little manor stood open before him, and Oswald was about to cross the threshold, with some pretty compliment to his hostess on his lips, when he was suddenly attacked from behind by Martin Jäger and two other knaves, felled to the ground, and dragged bound and bleeding to Sabina's feet.

The tale of this woman's treacherous revenge recalls one of the most ferocious episodes of the Nibelungen Lied.

The sorely wounded man was loaded with chains, and in this state was put to torture all night, strung up to a beam by his arms, while the fiendish Sabina exulted at the sight of her victim's pain. This was her revenge for his satires, and one specially devised for the purpose of extorting the amount of her Hauenstein claims. The torture went on until the sufferer's fortitude finally gave way and he consented to give all she demanded: either Hauenstein itself or 6,000 gulden. Then he



Gratl. Innsbruck.

Castle of Forst, near Meran.

was taken down from the rack and "chained with irons three fingers thick," was thrown into a damp dungeon. For some weeks he lay there in agony, half-starved and almost done to death. But then, dreading lest their prisoner's kinsmen should come to the rescue, his captors secretly conveyed him to Schloss Forst, near Meran, where Jäger filled the post of commandant. It was the last place where his brothers would be likely to seek him, inasmuch as it belonged to the Starkenbergs, and no one would suppose that any subordinate of theirs could dare to use the stronghold as a prison for their own best friend and ally. In fact, though sorely alarmed by Oswald's disappearance, some time elapsed before his wife and kindred got wind of the atrocious outrage committed on him, or learnt where he was to be found. To lodge the prisoner in Castle Forst was an exceedingly crafty stroke. For it was devised to kill two birds with one stone, by provoking a rupture between the Wolkensteins and Starkenbergs, and likewise giving Duke Friedrich a pretext for charging the latter with a breach of the patched-up peace.

That Friedrich actually knew and approved of the crime is shown by the fact that Sabina only released her victim in order to hand him over to the Duke, who kept him long shut up in a state prison near Innsbruck.

Meanwhile, the first person to stir in Oswald's behalf was Dame Ursula von Starkenberg. Her husband being absent from Tirol, she immediately despatched two nobles to Forst, commanding Jäger to release the knight at once and severely reprimanding him for daring to utilize a Starkenberg castle for a private feud of his own. To which Jäger had the insolence to reply that he was detaining Oswald in order to extort redress for injuries received, and required a week's delay to study the matter. Thereupon, Dame Ursula's friends, who had been accompanied to Forst by some leading burghers of Meran, insisted on seeing the captive and were much surprised to find him in tolerable spirits and decidedly unwilling to be removed elsewhere. He evidently knew that his real jailor was the Duke and that his own friends were powerless to set him

free. Life, at least, he added, was safe within Starkenberg walls, whereas *anywhere else* it would be gravely imperilled.

Also, when the envoys urged that, meanwhile poor Dame Ursula was in sore danger, seeing that Oswald's brothers were raging against the Starkenbergs and vowing vengeance on them all, root and branch, the poet philosophically remarked that his kinsmen's threats couldn't break his prison bars; that he was pledged to pay ransom, and would write on the matter to his brothers, and, necessarily, to the Duke. His visitors were amazed by Oswald's stoical resignation to his fate, but, probably, his diplomatic reserve was caused by uncertainty as to Friedrich's actual share in the outrage. Doubtless he had strong suspicions on that head but deemed it wiser to conceal them for the nonce. Though sadly changed in appearance, his wounds were now healed; he made no complaint of ill-treatment and was decently lodged.

It was a puzzling situation altogether, and the zealous friends who had hoped to bear Oswald away in triumph, were constrained to

leave him in his cage and take their departure baffled and furious. We can imagine how Jäger showed them to the gate with mocking courtesy and respectful excuses to his most noble Lady Ursula, and also with what feelings the party spurred back to Meran to recount the failure of their mission, and the incomprehensible apathy of the victim.

In reality, Oswald's resignation was only a mask imposed by prudence, for he was suffering intensely, torn by contending emotions of rage, indignation and above all remorse for the sinful folly that had led him blindfold into the cunningly devised trap. His true sentiments are expressed in certain appeals to heaven written during his detention at Forst. In another poem of the same period he mocks at his woes, relating how, once upon a time the fair Sabina had twined a fine golden chain about his arm in token of her love. But now, those tender passages all forgot, she showed her favour in a different guise, binding him with iron chains "three fingers broad."

While Dame Ursula's envoys made their

fruitless journey to Forst, the poor lady herself was hurrying to Innsbruck to assert her innocence as to Oswald's capture, little guessing that her sovereign was rejoicing over the brutal device that had lured his enemy into his hands. But the Wolkensteins, having discovered that their brother had been kidnapped with the Duke's sanction, lost no time in planning characteristic reprisals.

The Arch-priest of Neustift, one of Friedrich's most trusted counsellors, was deputed by his master just then to attend a court of justice in Bozen to decide an important case as his representative. He set out, accordingly, but never reached Bozen. Leonhard von Wolkenstein pounced on him by the way and conveyed him to his castle of Aichach. Then, mounting the prisoner's horse, he rode over the hills to Völs, seized the parish priest of that place, who was also devoted to the Duke, and after sacking the parsonage carried off his second prize to share the other's captivity. Next, Michael and Leonhard sent a politely worded missive to Friedrich informing him that his deputy was unavoidably

prevented from attending the Bozen tribunal, and would remain in their hands until Oswald was released and the Jägers brought to account for his capture. Provided the Duke complied with these requests, the Wolkensteins' best influence should be exerted to obtain the Kaiser's pardon for the Duke's share in the outrage committed on an officer of the Imperial Court.

Friedrich's reply is unknown to us, but as the imprisoned ecclesiastic was quickly released, it seems to have been satisfactory, unless indeed, on reflection, the Wolkensteins deemed it best to trust to the prince's honour. At any rate they were deceived, for instead of setting Oswald free, Friedrich merely transferred him to a state prison "there *to be detained until judgment should be delivered on the Hauenstein suit.*"

This breach of faith naturally raised the Wolkensteins' fury to the highest pitch, and Michael's next step is a striking illustration of the attitude assumed towards their sovereign by the nobles of Tirol. For he promptly sent an open challenge, or rather declaration of war, to

Duke Friedrich in which after setting forth his wrongs, he proceeds to say: "for the which reasons, I do hereby proclaim myself your enemy and in alliance with all your foes."

Meanwhile a bull of excommunication had been launched against Leonhard for his illegal seizure of the Duke's consecrated envoy; and although he professed total indifference, declaring that the ban of the Church had loosened no stone of his castle walls, he was not sorry when it was finally removed by the intercession of friendly prelates. In spite of preceding family quarrels, both Michael and Leonhard rallied staunchly to their brother's support at this juncture. But neither their personal efforts nor the liberal bail offered by the friendly burghers of Meran could loosen the grip of Friedrich's claws. Next, a formal appeal was made to the Kaiser which gave a new turn to the affair. For, stirred to the hottest indignation, Sigismund regarded the outrage done to his faithful servant as a personal insult, declared that the Duke had no case against Oswald and insisted on the latter's immediate release. He also ordained that the Starkenbergs

should be reinstated in the possessions "of which they had been unlawfully stripped," and again threatened the Duke with the ban of the empire.

Friedrich replied that, as over-lord of Tirol, he was entitled to deal as he chose with rebellious vassals, while professing, nevertheless, the truest allegiance to his Emperor. And regardless of all menaces he firmly refused to nullify the advantages gained over the nobles by restoring the Starkenberg strongholds. As he probably knew, Sigismund was too impoverished to be able to fulfil his threat of arming the Swiss against Tirol.

So the barons in general being left to their own resources trembled for their landed interests in case of war, and as the Duke's resolute attitude was staunchly backed by the third estate, all danger of invasion was averted.

The Wolkensteins however were of a different mind. They determined to resist Friedrich's pretensions to the last extremity, and Trostburg became the centre of a fresh conspiracy that developed into the Nobles' League of the 18th

July 1423. About the same date, Sigismund, equally determined to reduce the troublesome Duke to submission, ordered Haupt von Pappenheim to march against Friedrich and take possession of his territories on the Inn and the Eisack as reverted fiefs of the empire. This step encouraged the rebel barons to count on the restoration of the old privileges and "immediacy" enjoyed by their caste in Tirol, previous to the downfall of the Rottenburg house. But, after all, the imperial campaign was never undertaken. As usual, the Kaiser's money-chest was empty, and so the princes of the empire promptly vetoed his plan. Friedrich, meanwhile, had stormed a stronghold of the rebels in the Vintschgau, and defeated their old ally, Paris von Lodron and his Italian mercenaries in the Val di Non, thereby proving to the nobles that it was time to make submission. And the argument was clenched at the next Assembly of the States at Meran, when the Bund was proclaimed as a criminal association, and its immediate dissolution decreed. But a rider was tacked on to this

decree in the shape of a general amnesty to all rebels, the Starkenberg brothers alone excepted.

Thanks to this opportune measure, Friedrich's victory over the nobles was assured.

VIII

During all these stirring events, our hero remained in durance and was only set free when the amnesty took effect towards the close of 1423. The story of his imprisonment is so tangled a skein, that on many points it is left hopelessly involved. According to all modern ideas of justice and law, it would be obvious that, as the victim of a private and peculiarly atrocious act of vengeance, Oswald was entitled to protection from the ruler of the land, in spite of past offences as a rebel, and in spite of having served his Kaiser better than he served his own sovereign. But, since Friedrich also was wreaking a private revenge, there was no question of justice in the matter. Sabina's treachery having betrayed Oswald in his power, he held him captive for his own satisfaction and used every pretext to retard the day of release. Imperial threats and Wol-

kenstein reprisals only heightened his fury against the poet, and we may be sure that "the woman in the case" envenomed the question with stings of retrospective jealousy. For the Duke's eagerness to support the Jäger claims on Hauenstein was the emptiest of pretexts. Whether just or unjust, they mattered nothing to him; but they served the purpose of keeping a formidable opponent *hors de combat*, during his struggle with the barons. In fact, when the amnesty set Oswald free, the Hauenstein suit was practically ignored, although, during the interim, Michael and Leonhard had made so many forays on Jäger lands that Martin was continually urging the Duke to settle the case, alleging that the prisoner's kinsmen were always threatening his life.

We are told nothing of Dame Margaret's attitude during her husband's captivity. Even so large-hearted and indulgent a wife may have found it hard to excuse Oswald's silence as to the goal of his unlucky pilgrimage. In the midst of her alarm at his strangely prolonged

absence, the fact of learning that he had gone to visit the woman who had blighted his youth, was surely enough to stir resentment in even the meekest of her sex. And Margaret of Schwangau was no meek Griseldis. Oswald continually styles her "his proud Swabian." She loved greatly, greatly forgave, but thoroughly realised that she had much to forgive. This, however, was the usual lot of good wives in those days, and she never seems to have expected that her restless poet-politician should live up to the beautiful sentiments expressed in his verse. Probably her just anger with him had long merged into hot wrath against his persecutors before he returned to her. Besides, he came home to Hauenstein in a pitiable state, limping on crutches, with one leg permanently lamed by Sabina's cruel fetters. During his confinement, he had had time for self-examination, had repented the errors of his ways, and was full of remorse for all his offences against his dear wife.

His faded ideals now bloomed afresh and in subsequent poems he dates the end of his

"sinful doings" from the beginning of his captivity in 1421.

Soon after his release Sabina Hausmann suddenly died, and Oswald was moved to tears by the news. "May God forgive her all the ill she wrought on me, body and soul," was his dirge for the evil genius of his life. Was this pious sentiment echoed by his wife?

Oswald could pardon a dead foe, but his enmity towards Friedrich was as determined as ever. He was soon engaged in fresh plots to restore the old order in Tirol, and being obstinately mediæval on this head, failed to comprehend the movement of the times. Nevertheless, Friedrich made various amicable advances to him; and in 1424 specially invited him to attend a Diet called for the purpose of settling the Starkenberg case. But Oswald was far from Tirol when the gracious summons reached his gates. Leaving domestic matters to his wife's able management, and the everlasting Hauenstein-Jäger strife to his brothers' mailed fists, he had gone to Germany on a fresh attempt to rouse the states of the empire to

arms against Friedrich. Halting at Salzburg, he was eagerly welcomed by the Prince-Archbishop, and although nearly sixty years old, crippled and suffering, astounded the brilliant court by his youthful spirit, his fine verses, and his wonderful voice. At Munich, Augsburg, and Ulm grand entertainments were held in his honour; so, dazzled by social homage and some vague words of sympathy for the Tirolese nobles, he felt assured of succeeding in his mission. As usual, his artistic temperament beguiled him with false hopes and extravagant ideas of his personal influence. But, one day at Ulm, a rough disillusion compelled him to see himself from another point of view. When one of his warmest admirers eagerly presented him to his young wife, the lady glanced disdainfully at the famous Minnesinger and brusquely exclaimed:

"That fellow! What is there to admire in this shabby old cripple?"

With a courteous bow poor Oswald retorted:

"True, honoured Lady, I am half blind and

meanly clad. Yet it is scarce seemly to measure a man by his outward appearance."

He then went on to Heidelberg where his old friend the Pfalzgraf Ludwig received him with open arms, gave him a bed in his own chamber — possibly on one of those sleeping shelves for guests which one usually finds attached to mediæval German bedsteads—and replaced his mean clothes with purple robes and rich furs. As great festivities were going on and five prince-electors assembled at Ludwig's court, Oswald hoped to gain many votes for the Empire's intervention in Tirolese affairs. But although heartily welcomed and flattered as a poet, he had to be content with artistic triumphs. While all applauded his minstrelsy no one espoused his political ideas. Nevertheless, he lingered six months in the hospitable Rhineland before carrying his suit to the imperial tribunal at Presburg. This time, however, his Kaiser was not glad to see him and was decidedly cold. For, being at odds with the electoral body, and his prestige weakened by the obstinate Hussite rebellion, Sigismund re-

cognised the necessity of conciliating Duke Friedrich even to the point of sacrificing his "faithful servant." So Oswald's best entreaties fell on deaf ears, and in February 1425 Kaiser and Duke concluded a solemn pact of amity at Schloss Hornstein. After this, however, Sigismund undertook to call a Diet at Vienna to forward Oswald's views and finally granted him a long-implored safe-conduct. But dreading the results of the Hornstein convention Oswald failed to appear at Vienna. Thereupon Friedrich sent him a furious letter censuring his insolence in absenting himself from the Diet, and charging him with unlawful detention of the Hauenstein domain regardless of the pledges he had given on being released from prison. For, as might have been expected, the announcement of the new Diet had encouraged Jäger to press his claims more urgently than ever.

Friedrich's power was growing apace, the Adelsbund almost stamped out, and, presently, when cautious Michael, head of the Wolkensteins, voluntarily tendered submission and under-

took to make his brothers do the same, the Duke must have felt that his sovereignty was assured. Details are lacking, but—probably with the Kaiser's assistance—Oswald came to terms about this time with his offended ruler, since early in 1426 we find him acting as mediator between the Duke and the Starkenbergs. But the latter were stubborn; their flag still waved defiance from the towers of Greifenstein, and Oswald withdrew into private life harassed by presentiments of evil. By this time his last illusions must have vanished with regard to the League, and the death of his dear friend and father-in-law, stout Ulrich von Schwangau, was a sore grief to him as well as to his wife. But this sad event brought one pleasant novelty in its train. Henceforth, our poet and his family spent many months every year at Schloss Neuhaus, now inherited by his wife. This estate is in the Taufers Thal, which, in Duke Friedrich's time, was beyond the Tirolese border. Neuhaus is charmingly situated on the sunny side of the mountains near the mouth of the valley,

looking across a cheerful river to castled slopes, and commanding grand views of the Pusterthal Dolomites. Even now its ruined towers have a friendly air. A cosy farmhouse nestles within its broken walls, and the ancient church, being too small to accommodate the inhabitants of a widely scattered parish, mass is served at an altar in the porch, while the congregation assembles on the green that was once the castle-yard. But Oswald's first sojourn here was short enough, for towards the end of 1426 even this retreat beyond the border was no safe abode. The surrender of Greifenstein had destroyed the last stronghold of the Bund in South Tirol, and now Oswald's brother-in-law, Parcival von Weineck, the chief of the rebel party in the Innthal, had been brought to his knees, forced to sell fortress and lands to the Duke and to swear allegiance at Innsbruck. Oswald was counselled to do the same and warned that the victorious Duke would make short work of all remaining rebels. What was to be done? It was impossible to continue the revolt single-handed! Another appeal must be

made to the Kaiser! Should that fail, well, he could go on to Spain and fight as before for the Cross.

Crusading, as we know, was Oswald's panacea in every crisis of his life. So, once more bidding farewell to wife and children, he started off secretly through Tirol. But the watchful Jäger was on the alert and apprised by his spies of Wolkenstein's movements, obtained the Duke's leave to seize him as an absconding debtor, on account of the still unsettled Hauenstein claims.

Accordingly our hero was only a few miles north of Innsbruck and just congratulating himself on having covered unmolested the worst part of his journey, when he was suddenly set upon by a band of armed men, unhorsed and dragged a prisoner to Schloss Vellenburg. The unlucky knight was very roughly handled by Jäger's hirelings, who, regardless of his rank, to say nothing of his position in the Kaiser's service, hacked the spurs from his heels, loaded him with chains, and thrust him into an underground cell. Again the victim of a private feud, he lay some days in this damp hole racked

with rage and despair and in real danger of an ignominious death.

Recounting this episode in verse, he declares that "the capture of an imperial officer is no less a crime than the theft of imperial treasure." Farther on he writes jestingly of his plight and of the precautions used to prevent his escape, adding that although fettered so straightly he can still comport himself with knightly courage.

Then, one evening, he was brought out, hoisted on horseback, roped to the saddle and led through the darkness to Innsbruck. "Truly a fine Prussian crusade to court," he says, in allusion to his earliest campaign.

This time also Jäger's men served as Friedrich's sleuth-hounds, for they conveyed their prisoner straight to the Duke's palace. Hustled in like a criminal through the backyard, he was lodged in a dark narrow den too low to allow him to stand upright. Condemned to a crawling posture, he tried to find comfort in recalling a certain brilliant festivity at the French court when he voluntarily approached Queen Isabel

on his knees. He spent three weeks in this wretched cell, with the added torment of his jailor's company, "who stuck to me like vermin," and was a man of the coarsest and dirtiest habits. But it is clear that Oswald had the use of another room at meal times, inasmuch as he tells us that various menials, male and female, sat with him at table and that his jailor usually got drunk. So being forced to eat from the same bowl, the poor poet turned with loathing from his food. "But a short while ago," he writes, "I was a guest at the Pfalzgraf's board, and have also had the honour of sitting beside the Kaiser and being helped to salad from the imperial plate."

It was a strange imprisonment, specially devised, it would seem, to wound Oswald's pride, and it throws a curious light on the manners of the time. If there was any good reason for the knight's arrest, he should have been sent to a fortress; but to keep him confined in the servants' quarters, forced at night to share his miserable bed with a tipsy ruffian and to associate with rough varlets by day, was

either a refinement of malice or a mediæval joke of the kind usually practised on jesters and fools. In any case, Friedrich's treatment of his former intimate, a man of high birth, European renown, and the trusted friend of his Kaiser, showed a despicable, personal spite altogether unworthy of the ruler of Tirol. Sabina was dead, it is true, but her influence still worked for ill. Her favoured lover was taking revenge for the scathing satires addressed to his concubine by the man who had loved her in vain. And the malice struck home.

A Wolkensteiner, a knight of the Holy Sepulchre in the hands of kitchen varlets! Rather the torture chamber! The ignominy of it all inspired the worst forebodings in the victim's mind. In fact some of Oswald's bitterest foes were in high favour at court and rumours had reached him that his death was decreed.

Fortunately Friedrich's leading advisers were opposed to violent measures, and several foreign potentates pressingly insisted on the poet's release.

Then Michael von Wolkenstein and other kinsmen came to intercede for him in person, and —also very fortunately—many former friends, still rebels at heart, refrained from any effort in his favour, deeming that the overthrow of the Bund was entirely due to some mismanagement on Oswald's part of the final appeal to the Kaiser. For some time the Duke refused to listen to a word in his prisoner's favour, next began to hesitate between mercy and revenge, and then, suddenly discovering one day that all anger was spent, recalled his old love and admiration for Oswald, and when a courtier, thinking to please him, urged the necessity of making an end of "the pestilent rebel," he impulsively cried:

"Dost think that men such as Oswald are easy to replace? 'Tis a fool's thought, *mein Herr*." And turning to one of the Council, he shouted:

"How long is Oswald to be kept in a cellar awaiting judgment? His misery does no good to us. We yearn for some lively hours with our minstrel. We must sing and make

Gratl. Innsbruck.

Innsbruck.

verses together in praise of fair women. If the oath of allegiance he has to swear in return for our pardon be not yet drawn up, have it made ready at once."

Thereupon a friendly chancellor hastened to the prisoner with the ducal message and removed him from his wretched den.

Oswald's first impulse was to reject Friedrich's advances; but the chancellor used strong arguments, and on adding that his master had been "sore troubled to lose thy songs," the poet meekly followed him to the presence chamber. Friedrich welcomed the haggard old man with such gracious friendliness that some of the courtiers murmured at the prince's condescension.

So Oswald was pardoned, and Friedrich had the pleasure of sparing a redoubtable adversary on terms that cut his claws and made him harmless for the future.

The deed of agreement was finally signed and sealed at Innsbruck on the 1st May 1427. It comprised many documents, set forth the Duke's reasons for showing mercy to so pro-

minent a rebel, and enlarged on the conditions subscribed by Oswald. The most important clause was that prohibiting the Ritter von Wolkenstein from serving any foreign power, or joining any league without his sovereign's consent. And, in token of gratitude for his release, he was pledged to make a campaign against the Hussites or other enemies, at the Duke's pleasure, contributing a certain number of men-at-arms, and in case of being physically unable to obey the command in person, was to appoint some blood-relation as a substitute.

The Duke, on his side, restored the bail-monies paid by Oswald's sureties in 1422. At the tail of this agreement came a summary decree putting an end to the Jäger *versus* Wolkenstein suit after sixty years of litigation and strife.

Although verdict was given nominally for the plaintiffs, Oswald practically won the case, inasmuch as the 6,000 *gold* florins claimed by the Jägers were cut down to the modest sum of 500 ducats with restitution of the Grotthof farm near Prössls that Wolkenstein had un-

lawfully seized. The Jägers grumbled sorely, but in vain. They were forced to accept the verdict and formally renounce all pretensions on Hauenstein, while their opponent paid them the adjudged compensation on the spot. At last Oswald was a free man and his children's inheritance secured. For the first time after many years he could breathe unoppressed by care. Full of gratitude for his sovereign's decision, he raised his head proudly, and cried in a sounding voice:—"I thank Duke Friedrich and will ever thank him, so long as I have breath in my body."

The few days he remained at court were illumined by an afterglow of the old friendship with his lord and master. By common consent all bitterness was forgotten; they were comrades again. The minstrel's songs were once more applauded in Friedrich's halls, although the "beautiful tenor voice" was now sadly enfeebled by age and pain.

With characteristic generosity, the first use Oswald made of his renewed privileges, was to plead for the release of an unlucky baron

who—for some slight complicity in a former rebellion—had been confined for nine years in Schloss Vellenburg. There Oswald had been his fellow-captive and moved to pity by his sufferings.

The Duke readily granted the poet's prayer, but only on condition that Oswald should stand surety for the man and keep an eye on his future proceedings. Accordingly, when Oswald rode forth on his homeward journey, the liberated baron went with him as his guest. We may be sure that he was well received by the kindly Dame Margaret and had his share in all the family rejoicings on Oswald's return. For now, the civil war ended, all danger ceased, life and property secure, Hauenstein was freed from its phantoms and at last a home of peace.

IX

ALTHOUGH from this time forth Oswald was a faithful subject to his sovereign, his activities were by no means at an end. While still enjoying the first rapture of recovered freedom in his forest-home, a legitimate quarrel was forced upon him by Ulrich von Petsch, the aggressive Bishop of Brixen; and with Friedrich's full sanction and support, he finally brought that bad neighbour to terms.

Then, in 1430, he fulfilled the pledge given in 1427 by marching to Hungary to do battle with the Turks, after the end of the campaign accompanied the Kaiser to the Reichstag at Nuremberg in 1431, and subsequently served under the Markgraf of Brandenburg in the Bohemian war. This latter expedition entailed severe hardships on our veteran knight, and when the German force was put to rout on the 1st August by Procopius the Great, he barely

escaped with life from the victorious Hussites. Nevertheless his appetite for adventure being still unsated, we presently find him, in his quality of imperial chancellor, attending Sigismund during that monarch's blundering progress through Italy for the purpose of assuming the iron crown at Milan and the symbol of empire in Rome. The enmities and hindrances blocking the Kaiser's path are matters of history too well known to call for detailed account in the present sketch. That Sigismund should have managed to achieve his purpose—after a fashion—despite the open hostility of Pope Eugene IV., the opposition of Venice, Florence and Savoy, the perfidious advances of Duke Visconti of Milan and the desertion of his eight hundred Swiss guards, says much for the bull-headed tenacity of this German prince. Our chief concern is with Oswald's experiences in the imperial suite. Owing to the emptiness of the Kaiser's purse, his faithful followers fared badly. Hungry, shivering, and friendless in the Italian palaces so grudgingly opened to them, they thought with yearning of their well-warmed northern

homes. As usual, Wolkenstein's moods are reflected in his poems, where he speaks bitter words of Italian bad faith and lack of hospitality. "Wouldst starve, lie on straw and end thy days in strife, then come to Lombardy."

In Tuscany the expedition fared no better until, in spite of Pope Eugene's endeavours to check his advance, the Kaiser reached Siena on the 11th July 1432. Here, at least, he was a welcome guest. The city received him with open arms and made high festival in his honour. But as Sigismund tarried there ten months, at the State's expense, the public rejoicing finally changed to loud outcry over the cost of the monarch's entertainment. His visit was ended at last by an opportune shifting of the pieces on the political chessboard, when the firmness of the Council of Basle, the enhanced power of Visconti and the latter's reconciliation with Florence and Venice, left the Pope deprived of allies. Accordingly, in 1433, Eugene signified his willingness to crown Sigismund in Rome; whereupon the States of the Empire despatched a guard of honour to escort their Kaiser to the

Eternal City, and towards the middle of May Sigismund departed from hospitable Siena with a comfortably increased train. Nevertheless, the march was by no means peaceful, owing to the natural hostility between Germans and Italians. When halting for the night at Ronciglione in the house of a local magnate, sixteen members of Sigismund's suite were murdered by a mob of peasants and *bravi* who forced the doors and surprised the guests in their beds. Our hero, fortunately, had been billeted elsewhere; but his friend and colleague, Kaspar Schlick, only escaped assassination by climbing from a window on to the roof.

At long-last Sigismund entered Rome, received the coveted crown at the Vatican, and re-crossed the bridge of St Angelo side by side with the Pope. In August he set out on his homeward journey and passed through Tirol on his way to Basle. But his faithful chancellor, finally wearied out, now resigned office and gladly withdrew from public life. By this time Oswald was sixty-seven years

of age and burdened with sore infirmities. But even at home little rest was allowed him. Domestic affairs had fallen into some confusion during his lengthy absence, and his children cost him much anxiety. They were seven in number and only two of them girls, so, as may be easily imagined, five sturdy, mountain-bred boys now demanded firmer guidance than their mother's gentle rule. Besides attending to family affairs, Oswald was occasionally recalled to public service as arbiter of difficult cases in which his knowledge of Tirolese law and usage and known sense of justice specially qualified him to pronounce judgment.

His good wife, Margaret, whose wisdom equalled her tenderness, undoubtedly favoured these official journeys. She had learnt by experience that domestic quiet tended to irritate rather than soothe the restless Wolkenstein spirit, and that prolonged seclusion made him feel too cruelly the pains of old age.

In fact, one of Oswald's later poems contains a realistic description of his physical decay: fail-

ing eyesight, and so forth. His mind was still vigorous, and after a period of self-analysis and various attempts to achieve Christian resignation, he sought comfort in Aristotelian philosophy—which was far more congenial to temperament—and also turned his attention to the doctrines of Plato. An aged knight-errant who had seen so many strange lands, experienced such alternations of splendour and poverty, of dazzling success and crushing humiliation, whose mind, first imbued with mediæval prejudices, mediæval mysticism and poetic dreams, had subsequently gleaned much learning, much practical knowledge of mankind, and was able to assimilate in old age some of the love and statecraft of the Renaissance, must, certainly, have found it hard to realize that the fulness of life was past, and the grave already yawning at his feet. No wonder that the wealth of his memories had sometimes dimmed his perception of the realities and duties of life. But in his declining years this mental chaos was at last reduced to order. Then, he surveyed the past dispassionately, recognised the errors of

reckless ambition, the miserable results of his frenzied love for the unworthy Sabina and humbly repented of his ill-doings. Indeed, throughout his turbulent career, he had always remained, at heart, a God-fearing and somewhat superstitious Tirolese. And never being one to do things by halves, his repentance was almost fierce in its thoroughness.

His devotional poems are full of scathing reproval of the worldly aims once so dear to him, and their bitterest notes express the woe of loving a wicked woman. Evidently the spells of his false Duessa endured beyond the grave, for the aged singer was still haunted by the memory of her seductions. This would be pathetic, were it not so painful to know that his true-hearted wife was still persecuted by the malignant shade of her dead rival.

Several letters from Margaret to her husband, found in the Wolkenstein archives and published in 1880,[1] prove the writer to have had all the enchanting qualities attributed to her in Oswald's love-songs.

1 Vide *Anzeiger für Kunde der Deutschen Vorzeit*, 1880.

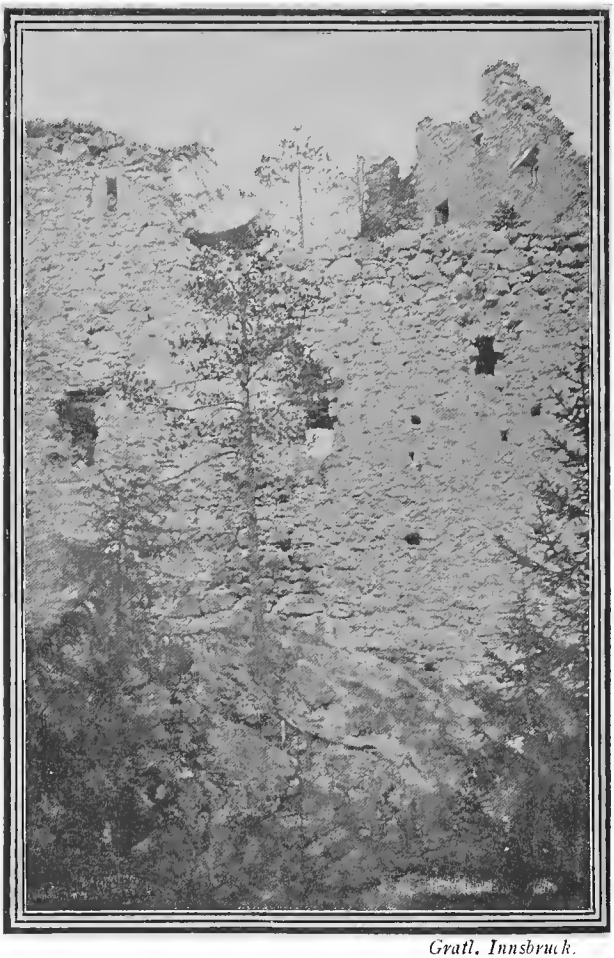
As a member of the Council of Regency during the minority of Friedrich's successor, Duke Sigismund, Wolkenstein was often called to Bozen towards the close of his life, and went there for the last time in June 1445. His wife was very anxious about the state of his health as he had been attacked by serious symptoms, and she knew that he was making strenuous efforts to defeat the plots of certain fellow-counsellors. So, in one of her letters, she tells him all she has heard of hostile intrigues on foot against him at Kastelruth, warns him to beware of certain men, consults him on domestic affairs, implores her "heart's dearest" to be careful of his health, and says in conclusion:

"Should you have to stay longer at the Council, pray, pray send for me, so that I may come to your help. I cannot bear to be parted from you any more, either here or elsewhere."

And the missive is addressed:

"To my beloved husband, The very noble Knight Herr Oswald von Wolkenstein."

Shortly afterwards her Oswald came back to



Gratl. Innsbruck.

Ruined Keep of Hauenstein.

her, rode—for the last time—up the steep forest track to Hauenstein, and after some weeks of great suffering, expired there in her arms, 2nd August 1445.

There is a certain dramatic fitness in the fact of his dying in the castle that had played so important and evil a part in his life. Without that fatal birth-gift of Hauenstein he would have escaped Sabina's wiles, and, as a portionless younger son, probably lived and died a knight-errant, unconcerned with home politics, and content with triumphs of minstrelsy as "the idle singer of an empty day."

* * * * *

The last of the Minnesingers was borne to his rest at the loveliest moment of the mountain summer, when the mighty peaks of the Schlern were glowing under an August sun. Down through the dark aisles of the mystic Hauensteiner Tann, where scarce rays of light could pierce to banner or crucifix, the procession passed silently over a carpet of pine-needles, across fell, and field, through mourning Kastelruth and by steep mountain tracks to the

place of burial at Neustift near Brixen. No trace survives of Oswald's grave; but the monument he had built for himself, before going to the East in 1408, still records the memory of the crusader-poet in the cloister of Brixen Cathedral.

Oswald von Wolkenstein stands as a representative link between two notable periods of the world's history. A mediæval man, touched by Renaissance influences, the old feudal spirit of Tirol was, so to say, buried in his grave.

The two royal contemporaries, the threads of whose lives were so closely interwoven with his own: King Sigismund and Duke Friedrich, had both preceded him to the tomb.

His elder brother, Michael ("the Prudent"), only died in 1451, at ninety years of age. The three Wolkenstein brothers all left children to continue the race, and Oswald's descendants founded the present line of the Counts of Wolkenstein and Rodenegg. Dame Margaret survived her husband many years, and, as the mother of five boys and two girls, had ample scope for the strength of mind and

soul that had so nobly sustained her through manifold trials.

Some biographers, relying on Beda Weber's authority, have not only asserted that Margaret died at an early age, during Oswald's first captivity, but attributed a second short-lived wife to the poet. This theory however has been triumphantly refuted by Noggler's recent researches. Besides the letter we have quoted, written by Margaret in the summer of 1445, a later document has been found in the archives of the von Trapp family of Churburg, bearing the signature of "Margaret von Wolkenstein born von Schwangau, *relict* of the late Herr Oswald von Wolkenstein."[1]

Hauenstein has been long deserted and in ruins. All that remains of the famous stronghold is a shell of broken walls rising like a grey shadow above the pine-tops of the tangled forest. Peasants belated in the woods by night, make the sign of the cross as they pass the castle-rock, for they declare that Oswald's

[1] *Vide* Brachvogel, *Bilder aus Sud-Tirol.* München, 1888.

spirit still walks at Hauenstein and sometimes, when the moon is at the full, may be heard playing wild, sad music on his lute. At any rate, some echo of his songs still survives in German poetry.

X

THE hardest part of our task has now to be attacked, *i.e.*: an attempt at some appreciation of Wolkenstein's poems and their due place in literature. One reason for the long neglect of his verses lies in their linguistic obscurity. To the bewilderment of many philologists, Oswald made no use of the Middle High-German rightly to be expected from him, nor was he greatly influenced by his native South Tirolese dialect. On the contrary, he wrote the best High German spoken by the cultured class in his day, with the phraseology and arrangement of sentences then colloquially in vogue. It was the rough, expressive speech of a transition-period, very different from the soft, melodious Middle High-German, and having more resemblance with the diction of the sixteenth, than of the fourteenth or fifteenth century. In fact, the original text of Walter von der

Vogelweide (born 1170) is easier to understand than that of Oswald von Wolkenstein.

All this is clearly set forth by Herr Johannes Schrott in a learned preface to his modernized selection from Wolkenstein's poems.

The present writer is too slightly acquainted with early German song to analyse the genesis of the Minnesinger's art or the intricate niceties it afterwards developed. But for our purpose, it may suffice to say that, of all Germanic lands, Austria produced the richest harvest of popular poetry during the Middle Ages, and that her pre-eminence in the field is owed to two causes. Firstly: to the mixture of races within her borders, and secondly, to the number of her wealthy monastic establishments which acted as centres of culture and zealously fostered native talent.

All this store of popular German poetry with its simple delight in trees and flowers and the joys of spring-tide, gradually changed into the "worship of love" (*Minnedienst*), since love was the fairest flower of spring.

"When woods are decked in softest green,—

when bird-notes fill the air and all is bliss,—comes love, the crown of May.

"Who would not fain be young at this all magic time?—heart's love, lady mine,—weave me quick a garland fine."

In course of time this "Minnedienst" became the choicest flower of chivalry. For the worship or service of love easily changed to the worship or service of women in general, and most easily among people on whose reverence for women—in old heathen times—the worship of the Virgin had been firmly engrafted. Every true knight was vowed to the service and championship of women and, theoretically, his worship of her was platonic. A kind word or smile from the lady whose badge he displayed was held as sufficient reward for a life's devotion. Naturally however the relations between brave knights and fair women frequently sank to a more earthly level. So too the love songs inspired by this worship gradually lost spontaneity and were hampered by strict rules of form and metre tasking the best hair-splitting powers of contending minstrels. So, finally,

these songs tripped, as it were, in fetters, and the invention of some new device, or unexpected juggling with words became an indispensable condition of success.

In the early days of Walter von der Vogelweide's career, his simple, unstrained, melodious verse raised him to the highest pinnacle of fame; but in later years we find him complaining that fashions had changed, that now men only cared for artificial, over-elaborated verse and prized verbal quips more than sweet sounds or lofty sense. Certainly the joyful Art had sunk to a very low ebb when—nearly two centuries later — Oswald von Wolkenstein assumed the minstrel's lyre. He, however, had been nourished on the old songs in childhood, and while often adopting the style of the new school, preserved the freshness and graphic force of an earlier period. But in pure poetic quality he was vastly inferior to Walter, for his diction was seldom musical, save in a few love songs struck out in the white heat of passion. Nevertheless, he had distinct and original merits of his own, and was the most renowned Minne-

singer of his time in South Germany, towering head and shoulders above his fellow-knight and fellow-poet Count Hugo von Montfort of Bregenz. For Oswald's songs always ring true, and the realistic strength with which they portray not only his own temperament and moods, but likewise the events and manners of his day, endues them with great historical significance. Roughly speaking and solely with reference to style, one may rank the twelfth century poet as the Tennyson, Oswald as the Browning among Minnesingers, seeing that the former excelled in melodious arrangement of words and delicacy of technique, while the latter, full of dramatic strength, satirical wit, and a marvellous power of invective, is often so wilfully rugged and careless of metrical effect that his lines beat like sledge-hammers—at least on modern ears. Yet our Wolkenstein was a born musician, a skilled performer on many instruments besides the traditional lute, harp and fiddle proper to minstrels. His fine tenor voice and exquisite singing conquered all hearts, while as a musical composer, experts

have adjudged him the title of "the pioneer of modern melody" on the strength of his few surviving songs.

By most of Wolkenstein's biographers his poems are divided into three categories: historical, erotic, and devotional; but the first of the number is also auto-biographical and supplies many curious details of his chequered career.

In spite of the well-nigh hopeless impossibility of rendering the spirit of Oswald's verse in bald English prose, we will attempt the translation of a few typical poems.

By way of preface, here is the verdict pronounced on Oswald by the learned biographer and critic, Herr Johannes Schrott, to whom the reading world is indebted for an excellent modernized selection from our hero's works.

"No poet of the Middle Ages, Walter von der Vogelweide excepted, had so wide a range of thought as Oswald von Wolkenstein. The well-nigh marvellous extent of his wanderings, his habitual intimacy with the loftiest potentates of his age, his participation in so many notable contemporary events served to cultivate his mind,

enrich his store of experience, and brace his strength. Gifted with extraordinary force of will he rushed into the battle of life while still a child, and undismayed by frequent dangers and defeats, always came out victor in the end. The versatility of his powers and a happy sense of humour rescued him from every difficulty: he always knew how to adapt himself to circumstances and sit firmly in any saddle. Owing everything to himself, inasmuch as he gleaned profit from life's roughest lessons, he carved out his own path and stood on his own feet. In all dealings with princely patrons, he maintained a sturdily independent attitude, never stooping to the whining, supplicatory tone that so painfully impresses us in the case of Walter von der Vogelweide. In financial matters he was a good manager, and had no trace of the unpractical temper of Walter and other happy-go-lucky mediæval Minnesingers, since his knightly expeditions and artistic travels were invariably undertaken at his own expense. Notwithstanding his long conflict with Duke Friedrich, and the heavy loss incurred by the issue of the

Hauenstein inheritance suit in 1427, the inventory of his personal estate (as attested by Dame Margaret after his death, 2nd August 1545) proves that his castle must have been a sufficiently luxurious abode."

With reference to Oswald's youthful love ditties and popular ballads, Herr Schrott, after noting that many of these have been left inedited as too coarse for reproduction, then goes on to say "that the total revulsion of ideas and horror of past transgressions manifested by Oswald during his cruel imprisonment in Sabina's dungeon, led to no weakening of his poetic power; but that, on the contrary, his subsequent poems are, both in matter and form, the ripest and most beautiful effusions of his genius."

* * * * *

TRANSLATIONS

Late Autumn at Hauenstein

"With grieving am I deaf and blind since the first bitter blasts proclaim that winter is enthroned again. From window and door I see his approach and feel small joy thereat. For the rough fiend brings nought but cold and frost and snow—choking with ice the stream that falls from 'Böseier's Haus.'[1] An evil name! Since no bird's warmth can hatch good fruit from rotten eggs.

Green clover, grass and flowers are vanished all, flown the winged choristers, since the woods are stripped bare and the sullen sun forgets to shine on Hauenstein."

Spring at Hauenstein

I

"Eased is the load from my heart now that the snow drifts are gone and speeding down

[1] Probably the familiar name of one of the small ice fields of the Schlern. "*Böseier*" signifies rotten eggs.

from Seiseralp—so Mosmair [2] brings me word. Earth's vapours sleep no more—the waters leap with mighty rush, from Kastelruth to Eisack's bed, wherefore gladness is mine! I hear the bird-folk great and small about my woods of Hauenstein—sweet music swells their throats. They sing, as if from notes, from Do to La—and bravely down to the depths of Fa—their clamour runs through every scale:—welcome, sweet heralds of spring!"

2

"Gone is the pain from my heart, since at the field's edge up there by the beech, the first nightingale's trill touched my ear.

Four hours long I've heard two sing as for a wager, instead of picking food from the well-stored earth. All ye that in dreary winter lie hidden from men in sullen woe, now hail the verdant days that May will bring. Poor little beasts, come forth! The table's spread

[2] Mosmair is a person frequently mentioned in Oswald's poems, and evidently a trusted friend. Probably he was an old servant, or gamekeeper or tenant.

with dainties in your home. Mountain, meadow, vale are green and wide. Brave fare awaits you."

The Morn of Bliss

"O, blissful, fair-deckt May! thy cry of joy brings much delight, and more than all when—to the measure of the dance—a couple moves with twinéd hands.

Green is the woodland, mountain, pasture, vale. The nightingale and all bird-voices, in countless choir, make music everywhere! The season of gladness drives away pain.

O! wake to love—Be swift not slothful,
Quickly go to seek thy maid,
For long thou hast not seen her—
Now may her white arms clasp thee close."

A Wooing

I

"A well-born, noble knight went wooing a gentle maid, and sought to win her love with honourable intent.

Oswald. O Lady mine, lend ear of grace awhile

—and hear my humble prayer. Sorrow and pain o'erwhelm me—no joy is mine—I know not where to turn. Take pity on me, Lady!

2

Marg. Your words make mock of me,
Are you so ill, God help you!
He can well free you of pain.
From me small aid could come,
No redemption could I give you,
Elsewhere must you seek joy.
No helpmate I—as all may see—
A little maiden I—what could you make of me?

3

Oswald. O Lady, treat me gently,
No mock nor jest speak I.
Full many a year I've borne sore grief
In serving you with silent zeal.
The Lord of Heaven knows it well,
How vain my deepest plaint of yearning.
No diviner, fairer form hath pleased my heart so well.
Therefore body and soul are sick and suffer cruel pangs.

4

Marg. Say plainly ever what you want.
The maid that pleased you dwells not in this house,
That know I well, unless my wits deceive,
For I have no fair form and count already four and twenty years.
'Twere an ill bargain to desire my love
Nor words nor wisdom have I
Fitting to give you joy.
Were I this day your sweetheart
You'd rue it sore the morrow.

5

Oswald. Why speak you thus with crafty pride.
Your beauty stabs me sore.
E'en your demeanour hath forced my heart.
So, hear me, high and lovely maid:
It ever pierced me to the core
When any false tongue hurt thee.
O blessed woman! when thy bright eyes are dim with tears
My whole frame's torn by pain that makes my locks turn white.

6

Marg. My warmest thanks for this—
All praise and gratitude be yours—
For feeling stung when a damsel's name's reviled—
Small pain it giveth me;
Comfort I find in solitude where no evil cry can pierce.
Who slandereth a maiden without cause—
And boasteth of his deed,
Will surely reap just chastisement
And see his fair name soiled.

7

Oswald. Believe me, thou high-minded Maid,
By your tender, virgin honour
I would do naught to bring you ill
But,—can my daily torture aid you?
Fain would I be your humble slave.
Sore anguish mine, unless you grant that boon.
Marg. Of no servant have I need
Too lofty your attendance for me.
Oswald. Yet mercy whispers in your words
I see it in your face."

The Fair Swabian

1

"Not many a man finds happiness in his wife of noble race. What land or town or castle gave her birth I scarcely ask. From the depths of my soul I cast forth gifts of all climes. For I prize best a rosebud mouth down there in Swabia: her voice so sweet, her face and form so rare.

2

Such the proud Swabian maid,
In whom no fault I found;
Her have I chosen for my bride
Above all women known.

Her lips, eyes, nose, her throat and chin—are finely formed, just to my taste. Her skin is white and flushed with pink; small hands and arms are hers. Her bosom fair, oh endless joy, so white, so round, so pure!

3

With slenderest waist, her lower parts are finely built and curved. Her hips are strong, her graceful limbs end in two tiny, narrow feet

—her gait is chaste and stately—all faultless everywhere.

She's prompt to hold a middle course with judgment, to do and leave undone. She alone hath vanquished me."

A Prayer and its Answer

"*Oswald.* Treasure of solace who may comfort me?
Darling, how long must last this ban?
Why so chill? It pains and grieves me sore.
Wherefore I crave help, grace and counsel, with short delay.
Companion, friend, delight and blessing! I burn with longing night and day.
My heart with bitter sighs is bursting—so sore its burden.
And yet it may not doubt continuance of thy favour.
Thy blossom lips curve temptingly, thy small teeth gleam,
Who enters in between them, drinks the sweet fount of song.
My heart, how may my heart live without thee!

Thee have I chosen, thou wondrous woman, in
honoured love and grace.
I've sought to make escape from eyes that pierce
my soul
With love-arrows, and fill me with sweet dread.
Lady, thy net hath caught me, encompassed me
with dearest toils—
None can free me save thou alone, thou blame-
less one.

2

Marg. With joy I'll save thee, man of my soul.
Thou alone hast o'ercome me!
And all the more that since long time, I'm thine
at all hours—as thou art mine.
Wholly and not in part my favour's thine.
All wretchedness be his who jeers at us, and
stabs for envy!
Thus much shall come to pass.
From knavery God shield thee.
Thine alone be all that's mine,[1]

[1] "Nur Dein—Allein—Soll sein—Mein—Ein—Und Alles gross und klein!—In williger Treue schenk'ich dir—Den Dank dahier—Und vollgezählt!" (Modernized Version, p. 97.)

Thine and mine, great and small!
In hearty troth I give thee thanks and full paid debt.
The day-long burn I too with fondest yearning.
Hotly too, as thou, I crave more wealth of joy.
Have faith, submit when my love cries alarm—
And sternly warns us, thee and me—
Warns us to love with honour."

The Hour of Parting

I

"*Oswald.* True love's might holds my spirit captive—
A maiden's form hath vanquished me!
Lady, have mercy on thy slave!
Give me thy troth, take me for thy loving spouse!
But none should see our passion's pearl.
Tell me, sweet joy, what saith thy heart?
Gentle and mild declare thyself,
No hurt shall e'er touch thine honour!
Marg. Yes, dearest treasure! Then so shalt have me without fail,
But 'twere well in truth to keep our love concealed.

2

My giver of joy—sweet prize
Of my heart—the wife of thy bosom
I'll willingly be—my loving companion
Ever dear to me—ne'er sore.
Be always true—and doubt me not,
And keep thee far from knavish tongues.
Oswald. Lady, in sleepless nights I wandered long.
Often, truly mine the fault, thou yearned for one!
That only gave some ground for meddlers'[1] lying tales.
They read things wrongly. They bring me grief.
Now, grant me grace, I must begone,
The hour's already late.

3

My heaviness is lightened, new hope is mine—
Thy sweet embrace bringeth me joyful pain.
I'm sworn to thy service, and prompt to dare all.
No travail can daunt me, full of ardour for thee,
Heart's love mine, by night and by day.

[1] Allusions to scandalmongers and gossips abound in all early German love songs, and in this as in some other respects, Oswald adhered to old models.

Marg. But never mistrust me!
Tell me outright, without grudge:
Why dost so often leave me alone?
Much peril lies in the quest of adventure.
(Hereupon the words died in her throat, yet only for brief space.)
May all danger 'void thee:
Come back quickly safe and whole."

The Chosen M.

I

Red and white, a smiling face
Soars above a dusky robe;
About her brow a veil is twined
And droops in simple folds.
Seen through it, softly barred,
Her rosebud mouth laughs forth
Studded with small white teeth.
The flashing beams of two dark little eyes
So stir my heart to joy—that deep in
My breast it quivers and hope's on the scent.
Her glance, her words dispel all pain
When I see her near and well

And the gracious spirit of her youth
With song and play creates delight.
Rejoice in this, beloved Lady!

2

My thoughts oppress me
And yet may not be told to her.
A fear dwells in me, that well-nigh saps my strength:
I dare not call her "Thou!"
My rough ungainliness hinders me
From winning the fair maid's favour.
My hair is white with trouble—
My heart lies on the rack,
And burns with cruel pangs;
Needs must be patient.
Her glance, her words, etc., etc.

3

Stolen glances, murmured speech,
Such plain German, yet—she will not understand!
I'm wearied out with striving
My lessons to impart—
That also must I suffer!

My honourably chosen M!
Thou nestlest in the core of my heart.
Cease, high Lady, thy stern rule;
Let me proclaim my joy.
To plead my suit were all in vain
Did I not strongly press it.
Her glance, her words, etc., etc."

At the Court of Love

"The lovely Queen of Aragon, she was so kind to me—I knelt before her gladly and did homage with my beard. She strung a ring upon it, with flashing snow-white hands—and softly murmured, 'Shalt unloose it never more.' Then taking in her fingers a slender brazen pin—as custom wills—she pierced my ears with skilful touch and threaded them with rings.

These wore I long, in duty to my vow. That same hour, I entered Sigismund's presence, and he was fain to cross himself at sight of me.

'Ho, ho!' he cried, 'why thus adorned? Hast lost thy wits, strange playmate mine?'

Then said in friendly tone, 'truly the rings must pain thee?'

I was a show for man and maid,
A thing of laughter;
Nine were here of royal state—
A noble ring—in Perpignan
Alertly watching[1] De Luna.
The tenth was Kaiser Sigismund
With the lords of Praides."

Oswald's Self-mockery in Remembrance of his Treacherous Capture by Sabina Hausmann in 1421

I

"If suffering hath made me old
And wise too late when mischief's done
I owe it to the prize my dear love gave me.
That I long space enough for love of her
A slender golden chainlet bore, hidden
Around my arm, she quite forgot.
The difference to mark, she gave
Me now an iron band three fingers
Broad in guerdon of her grace.
And—worse affront—I had to see

[1] The Anti-Pope.

Pressed to her heart the very churl
Who tortured me so sore.
This turns my food to gall.

2

Why blindly fell I in the trap?
Drawn by the force of love.
Hence the cruel anguish—
That fatal journey cost me.
The pilgrimage seemed all too fair
Since my flame bid me to her home
And no saint-like word I sent her
Lest she might ride away.
I've pondered well the matter,
It befell for my salvation:
Were I right safe in Heaven
I would offer prayers for her.
Since she gave me of her bounty
Two iron rings of two pounds' weight
That chafed and cut both shin-bones.

3

Suffer this in cheerful mood
No love-offering doeth harm;

To best-loved child give stoutest rod,
She cares for thee so fondly
I know she's staunch and true.
Love fancies pretty ornaments
For this was I so finely stretched
My feet upon the bar.
Her heart craved marks four thousand
And Hauenstein to boot; that was a joke!
A fine joke sure, as racked with pain
My tears dripped on the halter.
She granted me cat's guerdon,
I squeaked in mouse-like tune,
Five irons held me up—and so
I long bore traces of her favour."

Exhortation to the Three Estates

I

"Ye Popes and Kaisers, peasants too,
Why remiss in righteous deeds?
Yet have ye God's command thereon
To do your duty in the state of life

In which His will hath placed ye.
Be zealous in appointed tasks
He hath ranked ye in due order
Three noble titles counts the world,
Labourer, noble, spiritual Lord.

2

Thou, Holy Father, day and night
For all Christendom in common
Raise thy prayerful voice to Him,
Jointly with all thy priests,
To God who all ye creatures made,
Redeemed, and gave salvation
Through the bitter anguish
That in likeness of a man
He suffered on the Cross.

3

O Kaiser, guard with thy sword—
For that wert thou anointed—
All that's true to right and faith
With mighty strokes at every need.
The poor protect in fitting wise

And take good heed that none
Beguile ye aught to do that
Bringeth hurt to Honour.
Rather pour out your blood.

4

He that's born to labour
Should work for worthy hire
Else were his labour wasted
Nought would he win here or above.
But he that serveth truly
As befits the peasant man
To him, if dying well-assoiled
Full joy's vouchsafed above
In all eternity.

5

O world, how haltingly dost move
On righteous work, in light of God!
All jointly, each true to the duties
Of his state: ye Emperors, Popes
And princes, knights uncounted
Burghers, rustics, hand in hand,

Cardinals, bishops, prelates,
Lords spiritual and temporal, give special ear
'Tis good to act justly in this world."

The Courtier of the Day

"Meanest of all crawling beasts on earth, I deem the true courtier
Who body and soul belongs to his lord for scanty hire.
A jackass, were he free, would never do so much.
Now here, now there
Must stab, smite, steal and burn,
Nay, even play the spy.
Seize cattle, waggons, cocks and hens.
Spare no man! Then for such
Noble spoil, thy lord will give
Thee gracious looks.
Stay now before his eyes, now
Close behind—attend him the day long—
Be he a prince, take utmost pains that he
May see thee, throw thee a gentle word.
Such boon thou deemest Heavenly treasure."

THE WOLKENSTEIN SONG OF VICTORY ON ROUTING DUKE FRIEDRICH'S BESIEGING FORCE BENEATH THE WALLS OF GREIFENSTEIN IN 1417

I

"Tally Ho! cried Michael von Wolkenstein.
To the chase! cried Oswald von Wolkenstein.
Up and at them! cried Leonhard von Wolkenstein,
We'll drive them to flight from Greifenstein.

II

Now smoke and din, now roaring flame
Poured down the gorge, stained with hot blood.
The foes dismayed shed arms and steel
Flying for life, while we made glad.

III

The siege works all, the huts and tents
Were burnt to ashes in the higher camp.
Who doeth ill, shall ill receive, 'tis said;
And thus we pay thee back, Duke Friedrich.

IV

'ith cut and thrust and bolts we made quick work of all,
own in the bog, beneath the Raubensteiner steep.
eel-tipped shafts, over a good span long,
ed from our bowstrings, pierced through many a breast.

V

ıe rustics from St George and all the village folk
ad sworn to serve us truly, but their word was false.
ur brave comrades drove them down from Raubenstein[1]
nd cried: 'God save ye, neighbours,' your faith is small.

VI

hurtling down and shooting, a rushing, crackling sound
ıddenly rose with a clangour as of tongues of brazen bells.

[1] The popular name for Castle Greifenstein.

Now stir ye, noble knights, haste away or fall
With roofs ablaze on all sides scant shelter will ye find!

VII

From Bozen and the Ritten, from Meran came the bands
The Hasling and Jenesier men essayed to scale our rock,
From Melten and the Sarnthal came almost every soul;
They thought to bind us captive, but theirs was the defeat."

God Almighty

I

"Who soars above—and moves below,
Who strives before, behind, within
And lives eternally, had no beginning.
Who young yet old, in majesty possesses
Full Unity in Trinity incomprehensible yet plain.
Who truly died, yet was not dead,
Whom the Chosen Virgin purely conceived
Painlessly begot and gave to us;

Him, who wrought great marvels,
Who broke the walls of Hell, and stifled
The Devil therein—who lightened
The darkness and renewed the source of all
created things.

II

"Whose glances pierce to every secret place,
Who reads the thoughts in every heart—
However tightly closed.
All men to Him are subject,
Even as sun and moon, the firmament
Earth's plane and river's course
And ocean's tides.
He, the source of every Art
To every creature fitting form assigned,
For every season wondrous raiment.
Wherefore all beasts both tame and
Wild, give praise to Him
Who hateth not their image and
In His goodness gives them bounteous food.

III

"The stars above, the earth below
No resting have nor base,

And waters flow by unknown ways.
To sing the countless wonders
Of mountain top and vale, my art
Is thousandfold too scant.
I'm bound with shame perplexed.
The giver of my mind, soul,
Body, honour, worth and every righteous deed,
Be He my Counsellor
How best to prove my thanks.
So may I bar the path of foes
That none o'ercome me here nor there.
O, stainless Virgin Mother,
Defend me thou, that I ne'er be confounded."[1]

* * * * *

This address to the Almighty styled by Schrott "eine kleine Theodicee *in nuce*" is the only specimen of Oswald's religious compositions that we have ventured to translate. Others seem to us finer and of higher poetic

[1] First lines of stanza ii. (Modernized Version): "Er sieht hinein—In jeden Schrein, In jedes Herz, mag's noch so fein—Verschlossen sein:—Er schauet die Gedanken.—Ihm unterthan—Ist jedermann,—Wie Sonne, Mond, der Sterne Bahn,—Der Erde Plan—Der Flüsse Fall, der Wogen Schwanken."

value, but could not be rendered adequately save by a poet's pen. Indeed, none of the translations attempted above can give more than a shadowy idea of the force and swing of our hero's verse.

Readers willing to grapple with the original German text will be rewarded by many vivid glimpses of early fifteenth-century life in Oswald's descriptions of the doings at Constance, in the long and graphic narrative of his second captivity, and in the realistic poems on domestic life at Hauenstein.

In one of the latter we behold the moody poet driven to exasperation by nursery pranks, and see the fair Margaret rushing to the rescue and admonishing him "not to vent his fury on his babes." "I was called sharply to account," he adds, "for what I had done to them, and, as usual, there was much scolding."

In spite of Oswald's close observation of certain aspects of nature, he shared the general blindness of his age to the beauty and suggestiveness of mountain forms. Reared amid the

fantastic limestone giants (now named Dolomites) of the Grödnerthal, and dwelling at Hauenstein shadowed by the huge towers of the Schlern, he has no word of praise for his native peaks, save in one line of his "Address to God" and, stranger still, is completely silent regarding their legendary fame.

Yet the tale of King Laurin's rose-garden, the feats of Dietrich of Bern, and the host of supernatural beings supposed to people the recesses of the Schlern, and the tangled forest beneath, seem to have made no impression on his mind and are unmentioned in his works. Nevertheless, we know that, previous to becoming a hard-headed realist, he cherished many mystic, mediæval beliefs, had a genuine cult for King Arthur, dreamed of the Holy Grail, and made more than one—quite ineffectual—attempt to tame his hot blood and lead the life of a pure and perfect knight.

But his failure in this is our gain, inasmuch as the real man, the mediæval chieftain, breathing the first breath of the Renaissance, has a higher interest for us than the visionary ideal

he once sought to grasp. With all his inherited prejudices, all his blunders, Oswald von Wolkenstein is a striking figure in the history of old Tirol, and has a special niche of his own in the temple of German song.

TURNBULL AND SPEARS, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH