

The Poems of the König vom Odenwald

Der König vom Odenwald (literally king of the Odenwald, a mountain chain in southern Germany) is an otherwise unknown poet whose work is tentatively dated to the 1340s. His unusual name may refer to a senior rank among musicians or entertainers, a Spielmannskönig, but that is speculative. Many of his poems are humorous and deal with aspects of everyday life which makes them valuable sources to us today.

The identity of this poet has been subject to much speculation. He is clearly associated with the episcopal court at Würzburg and likely specifically with Michael de Leone (c. 1300-1355), a lawyer and scholar. Most of his work is known only through the Hausbuch of the same Michael de Leone, a collection of verse and practical prose that also includes the first known instance of the Buoch von guoter Spise, a recipe collection. This and the evident relish with which he describes food have led scholars to consider him a professional cook and the author of the Buoch von Guoter Spise, but that is unlikely. Going by the content of his poetry, the author is clearly familiar with the lives of the lower nobility and even his image of poverty is genteel. This need not mean he belonged to this class, but he clearly moved in these circles to some degree. Michael de Leone, a secular cleric and canon on the Würzburg chapter, was of that class and may have been a patron of the poet. Reinhardt Olt, on whose edition I am basing my translation, assumes that the author was a fellow canon, Johann II von Erbach. The original text of all poems can be found in the newest extant edition by Reinhard Olt, *König vom Odenwald; Gedichte*, Carl Winter Verlag, Heidelberg 1988 and in an older 1910 edition by Edward Schröder available for free download.

(<https://archive.org/details/diegedichtedesk00schruoft/page/36/mode/2up>)

I Here begins the praise of the cow

Many men praise the love of their heart
So must I quietly and loudly
Bemoan that men toll bells
For those without virtue.
Men toll for old women
When they die,
That is great labour.
We should rather toll bells eagerly
For the good cow.
She gives us the white milk

Pure and clabbered (read *gelebret* for *gelebet*)¹
 Of which you are proud.
 At home when it is well salted.
 It also makes good cheeses
 And whey thick and thin
 That is the pleasure of children.
 Porridges (*mus und brye*)² made with milk,
 that is also a good cry,
 When one shouts out „It is ready“
 Many people are happy,
 No better food was found
 Between Bologna and Salerno³
 Than that, I am sure.
 She also makes good delicacies
 Which you lay by the beets⁴
 And treat people to them
 While you make lights with the tallow:
 Sausages of the brain
 And the forehead makes
 Tough leather for flails
 (That is also good)
 With which you thresh the grain
 Pure or mixed⁵.
 He who has a good beef roast
 Will (also) gain a soup if he has a roast
 She also provides a delicacy called marrow
 That makes people strong
 And from the bones you make
 Dice, big and small
 Those run over the board quickly
 And many a knave gambles away his skin
 Which makes him angry.
 From the horns we get
 Good combs;
 What young children there are
 You should attend to well with those
 As it should properly be done.
 Lanterns made of horn
 You are also glad to have
 If you put your light inside
 It is good against the wind.
 I also say more of the horn,

1 Coagulated milk, probably using a bacterial culture, was a popular food item. It was known as *Herbstmilch* or *Sauermilch* and very likely resembled mature yoghurt or skyr.

2 A *mus* describes a dish soft enough to be eaten with a spoon while a *brye* (*Brei*) is more specifically made with some sort of grain. Both could be cooked with milk.

3 The university at Bologna and the medical school at Salerno are cited here to represent the pinnacle of higher education. The expression means that even the wisest men can think of no better food.

4 That is: serving the meat with cooked root vegetables.

5 Mixed grain cultivation, known as *maslin* in English, was not common in medieval Germany, but clearly not unknown either.

Those who are aching in the back
Are scratched with it.
And the hunters have a custom
That they have chosen for themselves
They hold the horn by a strap
So they can blow it often.
And those who wish to raise birds
Larks or finches
Give them to drink from it.
You fit the (crossbow) bolt
In front with cow horn.
Of horn you work diligently
To shape knife handles.
Thus the scribes see
Their horns go empty
As they write for people.⁶
From the skin we make
Good wide boots
Those who work properly in leather
For feet and soles
And, in truth, for bags (*wotsecke*)
And covers over the pack saddle,
You would not want to be without those,
Chest leathers (armour?), funnels, helmet decorations (*helmshorn*),
You also strap spurs with it.
And I will not be silent
But talk of the waterskin
From which you pour the wine
That is also of the cow.
So are the useful collars
In which the draft horses pull things
And the straps for yokes
Nobody will gainsay
That cattle also pull things with those.
And many men will have
Belts, broad and narrow,
Those are worn everywhere
With buckles of bone on them
Women and men wear them.
Gloves and thimbles,
If you need those, you are happy,
And bags and pouches.
You make bottles of leather
And the funnels and stoppers in them
To keep the wine in.
Straps and scabbards
For both sword and knife
And the wide fodder container (*fuotervaz*).
I must make yet more verse

6 Ink was typically stored in horns that could be held in round holes made in writing desks.

The bellows must be here
That is what smiths demand.
Then there is their fine tail,
That makes a good whip
When you are to shoe horses
You shall control them with it,
The organ's high tones
All of that comes from the skin,
From the sinews the attachment
For the bell clapper,
Hawk hoods, wrapping bands
Armguards, leg wrappings,
Gauntlets of leather,
All of that is made of leather
Which came from the cow
As we all have heard.
I also speak of covers:
You make bags from skins
And covers and the helmet
As you carry it to the tourney
So it stays beautiful
And drives away rust.
You also cover
Shield and buckler with sinew
And with cow skin
That I say to the people.
The strap on the kettle helmet (*kezzelhuot*)⁷
Is worn well by knights and sergeants.
A (folding) chair of the skin
Is good for a cushion
A bishop sits on it
He cultivates a fine mind.
I also will not avoid saying
That the skin is used for catapults
And I will say more yet
In suspended carriages (*dem hangenden Wagen*)⁸
You have cow skins,
Brides sit upon it
I tell you more yet of the skin
You make large books of it
From which you sing or read.
What else is come of the skin,
drums big and small (*trummen und tammuren*)
you should not be sad when they are played.
And those are not dreams:
Whips, halters, reins,
Stirrups, saddle straps, rearstraps,

7 The *kezzelhuot*, as we will see later, is probably a broad-brimmed, open-faced helmet.

8 The author refers to travel wagons whose cabin is suspended from the frame on leather straps, providing a degree of cushioning. This was a luxurious mode of travel. Most wagons had no suspension.

chest straps and bags, understand this
Leather padding (?*gegenleder*), leather straps,
A man rides (in tourneys) the better,
And saddles are adorned finely
With leather and with bone.
I must now make an effort:
Children play with the knuckles
And I should also think of
The cushions on benches;
They are covered in skin
In that one is not mistaken.
The wooden pattens are exempted
On which you step up tall
But shoes, wide and narrow,
The short and also the long,
And leather patches, in truth.
From the hair you make
Stuffing, rope and felt
Thus you make *zaumgetilz* (adornments for horse harnesses)
And for the children a ball
For all of them to run after
Both forward and back.
You nail the tail to a door
And pull it open and shut with it
All of this comes from the cow.
The praise is not complete yet
Which I have thought of for the cow
For she bears young calves
That grow into cows and oxen
Fat calves innards
And the heads are not bad
Boiled and roasted
You take comfort with them.
None of this is a lie:
Crossbows and horn bows
Would not be worth half an egg
All would break into pieces
If it wasn't for the tough sinews
That you get from the cow.
The *Zerfe* (spanning string?) with which you string⁹,
As (?) someone who runs (takes to the field?),
A cover (*scheiden*) over your crossbow,
That is a joy to them.
And you take the hooves,
The black and the grey,

9 This couplet is translated variously by previous editors. I believe the *Zerfe* is a spanning string that is placed over an unstrung bow and wound back prior to placing on the proper string. It has also been read as a panning mechanism, but it is hard to see where sinew would be used on a goat's foot lever or cranequin. Also, the interpretation of "one who runs" (*der da rennet*) is unclear. *Rennen* can refer to running away, so this would mean shooting a fugitive or fleeing enemy, but that is not a very heroic action worthy of poetry. I suspect there may be a reference to *rennen* in the sense of riding into combat, though that is usually used for tournaments, not warfare.

And turn paternoster beads from them
To scare away the devil.
You think I would blush
If I forgot the bladder
This is a good bag for spices (*pfeffersag*)¹⁰
And once it has cured for four days
It becomes a toy.
If you want to scare a dog,
Tie a bladder to his tail
He will think it is hail
And cry out with anger.
And people learn to swim on them,
Both young children and older boys,
When they are on the water.
And thus the lute sounds further,
Those who have no glass for their windows
They take up frames
With many good *flemen* (the belly skin adjoining the back legs)
To cover their windows in
According to old custom.
Liver, kidney, lung
Heart, throat, tongue
Spleen, galantines, feet
The *mullin* (intestinal fat?) so pleasant
Many kinds of guts
Whiter than ermine.
And then I tell you plaintively:
I have forgotten the stomach
And the udder so very good
That you roast over the embers
And the fat rectum.
The ordure is taken away warm
And spread over the ground,
He who would clear poor lands
Needs much dung for that.
It is better to mourn a good cow
Than an evil old woman,
That young people are joyful
Was ever the displeasure of the old.
So many blessings (*genade*) come from a cow,
The king does not know to do better.
Thus ends the poem of the cow
I should not think this overly hard work.

10 We have references in cooking recipes to herbs and colouring agents stored in dried animal bladders.

II Of the chicken and the egg You will find many things to say

If I were not so lacking in art
I would want to write some verse.
Whatever may happen to me because of it
I will not forbear.
If I let the art go to waste
How could I earn
The favour and the gifts of lords
Of knights and servants of high spirit?
Now I will versify as I can
And begin with the seasons:
Beloved summer is coming
Winter is leaving us
We shall gladly let it go
Pale people rejoice
Who were sad before.
Each bird wants to build
Its nest again
And let go of sadness.
They lay eggs in it
And raise small birds.
The meadow is turning green
For them and for us (lit: those and these)
The forest is wearing leaves
Uncles and cousins
Aunts and female cousins
Enjoy the flowers
That rise from the ground
That has become pregnant;
Violets, lilies, green clover
You now see coming out
And the flowering of May
Shows the goodness of summer.
Hedges seek to
Cover themselves in roses
The heather is never pale
Stork and swallow return
Magpie and jay
Make it more beautiful yet.
You hear the cuckoo calling
That also belongs here
Larks, thrushes, nightingales
How they sing everywhere!
The small birds, too
Are no longer silent,
They are bold now
And their beaks are built
For singing with them now.

That is the custom when summer approaches
 But all the singing would be for nothing
 If there wasn't the clucking of the chickens!
 Now I will declare:
 The chicken is a valued bird
 The egg comes from it
 And that gives us
 Many good dishes
 I must make a poem about this!
 If you now say it is a useful thing
 For me to say what good comes from the egg
 I will then speak of this
 To men and women.
 One man goes on a journey
 And boils his eggs hard
 The other says "My dear,
 Fry my egg plain!"
 The third wants the yolks soft
 Otherwise he will hit him (the cook)
 The fourth does not want to poke around in it
 And makes a *kolhopfen* (Olt: *Kugelhupf*)¹¹
 This seems worthless to the fifth
 He breaks his egg into the pan
 The sixth wants his fried in fat
 And sprinkles salt over it
 The seventh calls for frying it in butter
 He will not change his mind about this
 The eighth likes it best
 To break his eggs over cracklings (*grieben*)
 Then the ninth speaks up
 "Hand me a pan
 And scramble it altogether"
 I am also of this number
 The tenth is so bold
 As to call for pancakes¹²
 The eleventh is so strange
 To break his eggs into milk
 And the twelfth has decided
 That he wants his eggs poached (*verlorn*)
 The thirteenth surely calls for
 Parsley and vinegar
 To cut his eggs into
 The fourteenth prepares a little drink (*süffelin*)
 His head hurts
 He wants the pain to go away
 The fifteenth wants the shells (?)

11 The word is unclear. Ott reads it as *Kugelhupf*, a cake, but that is unlikely at this point. There is a recipe for *kolhauffen*, a shell of fried egg that holds a filling like a pastry. It is unclear what is meant here, but very likely it means a cohesive dish made with fried egg.

12 Pancakes in the German tradition are primarily an egg dish, with flour and liquids added sparingly. They would most likely be unleavened, flat and fairly wide.

And calls for a *hirn wallen* (?)¹³
 The sixteenth calls for an egg porridge
 That he wants to sit over
 The seventeenth says “I do not care”
 And wants an egg fritter (*eyerkuochen*)
 The eighteenth wants to do it a different way
 And breaks his egg over a chicken
 The nineteenth fills chickens with it
 That is also a good custom
 The twentieth drops the egg into whey
 Easily it becomes two.¹⁴
 Further I will say
 They are also put into brain sausages
 That you want to be filled with eggs
 By someone who knows how to do it.
 Egg mus dishes, custards (*eyermueser, kachelmutzen*)
 Of those we must not be silent.
 They make women beautiful
 So you take pleasure in looking at them.
 If a man is wounded,
 an egg is good for him
 It is made into a plaster
 This is no shame.
 And egg is needed for ink
 For a man who can write.
 You dust and stiffen (fabrics) with it,
 Someone who makes clothes does this.
 You colour wine and crossbows
 With eggs, that is a joy.
 Eggs are used to treat
 Leather for wearing
 Gloves, know this,
 Are treated assiduously,
 And white, comfortable boots
 That you wear smartly (*kluokeit* can mean wisdom, but also fashion sense).
 You also break them into fish
 That you serve at the table
 Pastries large (*bastede*) and small (*krepfelin*)
 Are both made from eggs.
 Eggs “on the breach” (*uf dem scharte*)¹⁵
 You are glad to wait for.
 And still, another thing must be done:
 You fill the bellies of young (animals)
 Heads and feet, too¹⁶
 You should be happy to welcome with eggs.

13 This word is obscure. It literally means ‘brain boiling’ and may well refer to a dish of brains and egg described in other contexts as a *hirn mus* that is boiled in the eggshells, but that is a lot of interpretation heaped on two small words.

14 This probably means that relatively expensive egg is bulked up with relatively inexpensive whey.

15 I have not yet located any recipe for this

16 This is a reference to stuffing them before cooking, not feeding animals.

Morels, crawfish, and young piglets
Are also filled with eggs.
Fladen (flat bread baked with toppings) succeeds,
The blessed meat for Easter,
Is brushed with eggs.
When it is carried along,
Underneath it, chopped,
Are eggs, the whites and yolks separately¹⁷
And spiced eggs
Are commonly turned over (stood on their ends?).
When young chickens come of them,
That run around everywhere boldly,
You see them happily,
And call them a new harvest.
It really needs no mention:
If you have a cherished guest,
Friendship will remind you
the hen that is nearest the rooster,
Is held for the best,
You roast that for your guest.
Neither is it forbidden,
To have a chicken boiled,
With parsley sauce over it,
Those who like it will have it.
And it would be stupid not to mention:
You boil an entire chicken completely,
And pound it in a mortar,
Then you call for a cloth,
To pass (literally: wring) it through,
That is good for sick people (*gesinde* – servants or household members).
A campaign turns out poorly,
When a chicken gives courage (*hohen muot*)
Counts and free men
They run and shout,
Be they armed or unarmed,
They clamour after the chicken,
With sticks and cudgels,
They throw at its wings,
Knights and sergeants,
Make a great noise,
All shout “Ha! Catch!”,
The chicken is what they seek,
Across fences and ditches,
Whoever grabs it wants to keep it,
One says “Surely,
it will hide in the bushes.”
Another hurries,
To crawl after it,
So he cannot come out by itself,

17 This is a practice for which we have evidence from the sixteenth century, but clearly it is significantly older

Unless someone else helps him to that purpose,
They are lucky,
That they are a large group,
And they carry it, sweating (*in dem sweize* – bloodied?)
Until they wish to eat,
All are out of breath.
All the inedible parts (*gehurwe*) are removed,
They stand and laugh,
Until a fire is lit,
They call for water to be put on (i.e. a cauldron hung over the fire),
Princes and counts stand and watch,
Until the chicken is plucked,
Scalded and skinned.
One or another then shouts out:
“Bring salt, the liver and the stomach!”
You must get it for them,
They are thrown on the embers,
And even before they are fully cooked,
Each one says “That is my piece”
And pulls it from the coals,
That gives them high spirits,
Those who burn themselves shout “Ow!” (*och*)
The chicken makes a cook of many men,
The feet and the head of it,
Are allowed the boys,
They can work on them over the day,
And have their pleasure until the night.
They go away and are busy,
While the others are busy roasting,
They are then ordered brought to the table,
The turnspit (*der breter*) is due the necks,
That are given to him.
They are stuffed with hay,
And stuffed into a travel bag (*wotsak*),
Until the third day,
Which serves them ill (lit: distresses them).
Each man will order his servant:
“Bring me a chicken,
See how flushed I am!”
One says to another “Come on (*zerra hin*),
Give me one of yours,
I will give you one of mine (at another time).”
You shall take pleasure in this:
People also set roosters on wagons,
So they call time
At night when they lie down.
The shiny rooster (feather tail),
Is put on for a dance.
And you see jumping about,
Girls and boys

And once it is no longer good for that,
You have the wisdom,
to take it off.
But the feathers are still useful,
You make a plume from them,
That is firmly set on the helm.
Of the (lords of) Seckendorf and Ehenheim,
They carry them, big and small .
Oh, and the capons!
The grey ones and brown ones,
The black ones and red ones,
Those are a fine roast!
Someone who has many of them,
Keeps a fine house,
Which he owes to the chicken.
You must also have their dung,
You use it to make,
Stiff bedsheets,
Which you lay above and below.
And that is also a miracle,
That the chicken announces the day,
I will not be silent about that.
Truly, I say this:
Many kinds of meat cause you revulsion,
Over the year,
Except for the chicken,
that is good all year round.
I will tell you clearly,
This I say:
You feed your hawks with it.
Coarse cloth (*wotmol*) and finest pieces,
The chicken brings both, believe me,
And the nightly chicken – that is their right -
So say knights and sergeants,
To demand from serfs
Who house them when they arrive.
That has God made for them,
And the king can only confirm it.
Here ends the fine tale,
Of the chicken that gives joy to many.

III In Praise of Geese

**This is the tale of the goose,
It is not empty talk.**

Some say of game
That it is plentiful.
Some speak of birdsong,
I will bring you something better!
Nightingales, thrushes and siskins:
I will praise something better!
Calandra larks, larks and blackbirds:
There is no meat on them.
Peacocks, chickens and ducks:
That is nonsense.
I will tell you quickly
How useful a bird the goose is!
Be it dark or light (meat),
It produces fine morsels.
Skin and thighs
I will not run away from
And the priest's cuts (i.e. the breast)
I will gladly sit down to.
Wings and neck skin
Are best roasted
Neck, feet and innards
Are not bad when boiled.
That drips into the (roasting) pan
As I can tell you!
Let that not dismay you
It will make a fine sauce.
And that (the goose) lays large eggs
From which you raise young geese
Needs to be said here.
If twenty men came to a house
Where a goose lay by the fire
The smell coming from it
Would attract them strongly:
All would think, there will also be enough for me.
O mind who increases my art:
The usefulness only just begins here
As I will describe to you.
People write with the feather quill
And use it as a needlecase:
You fletch bolts and also arrows
With which a man defends the home
In which he raises his children.
I also speak of this:
You use the bones to catch
Quail which people eat.

But even those who forgo these
Will still have use of it:
Tailors, too, must have them
As I will tell you;
They sew across a feather quill.
Some are pleased to use
A feather quill in their crossbow
So the nut does not come loose.
Those are still not all its uses:
The feather quill is so fine
That mercury is carried in it.
Further, it is the custom to use geese
To catch wolves with them
By tying them to a hurdle
That is a more promising manner
Than using pigeons.
You use the feather quill on a cap (*zuor huben*)
And a *slappe* hangs from it
Which the young squire wears.
It is also useful to the fisherman
He uses the quill for fishing
So that it holds up the line.
But the best is yet to come,
It is no lie
that the quill is used in a stone crossbow (*steinbogen*)¹⁸
To keep the strings apart
One should be equipped accordingly.
Weavers spool thread over the quill
To make clothes
And make their living from them.
To play the bagpipes (*blaterspiel*)
Someone blows through a quill
When piping to a dance
And people take each other's hands.
A bent leg feather
Is used to make bait for falconry
You cannot do without it.
The goose is also a good guard animal.
A feather duster
Is used on tables and benches
And fan the embers.
Those who need it call for it
And bind it to the helm¹⁹
Beneath it, the dust rises (from the field).
If someone does not believe me:
I call the family of Neuenstein to witness
Who defended their honour under it

18 These were small crossbows designed to shoot stones and used for hunting birds and small animals.

19 It is likely that the feather duster here refers to an entire wind used like a broom. This would function well to protect and adorn a helm.

On behalf of beloved, pure ladies
And those of Veinau
Who are looked at with high honour
They carry head and neck (in their armory)
It has long been allowed them.
Now begins the principal use:
You whistle on the bones
To raise people's spirits.
And hear what people do on the beds
In which the feathers are contained:
You make children on them
A man with his wife
Their pure, tender bodies
Make gentlemen and princes
Who shall strive for honour
Priests, knights, and sergeants,
I believe I speak the truth,
Burghers and peasants.
This poem became me ill
When I made it known
It is called the praise of the goose
And it was created boldly
By the *kuenig vom Otenwalde*
Here ends the poem of the goose
Let nobody make claims on me (i.e. punish me) about it.

IV This is about bathing Which never hurt anyone

From the treasure of my art
I must write about bathing.
For how many reasons do people bathe?
I will tell you if I am able.
My mind tells me
One man bathes for cleanliness
Another to escape the cold
More than dirt
The third thinks it is of some use to him
And bathes to combat boredom.
And who would criticise the fourth?
He bathes so he can sleep.
The fifth is of the opinion
To bathe so he can be bled.
The sixth bathes noisily
Because his skin itches
The seventh bathes quickly
To have his head washed
The eighth is not at home
And bathes slowly
Until his clothes have been washed
That is why he takes his time.
The ninth bathes in passing
To have his beard cut
The tenth also goes there
And bathes in order to save effort
The eleventh bathes knowing
That he will get paid for it
The twelfth is smart
And bathes so that he sweats
The thirteenth is of a nature
To want to bathe in company
The fourteenth bathes indoors
And thinks he should make love as well (*er suelle minne*)
The fifteenth is displeased and also bathes
To rest and escape his home (lit. the smoke, *den rauch*, meaning the hearth)
The sixteenth's shoes are coming apart
He bathes until they are repaired
The seventeenth is wounded and not happy
He bathes to heal
The eighteenth thinks himself clumsy (*ungeberde*)
He bathes to sober up.
The nineteenth says "may it do me good"
And bathes so that he can drink.
The twentieth must run to the bathhouse
To escape his creditors
If he cannot do them justice

He hides out in the bath.
The Duke of Saxony – free of shame
Has done likewise, he said so himself
Thus, bathing has many purposes
Thus said the *kuenig vom Otenwalde*
Adieu - adieu - adieu – adieu
This poem is about the bath.

V This is a poem about straw
Whoever is looking for it will find it here

One man gives out many parts
Another takes whichever he wishes
I have come to agree with myself
And taken one part for myself.
Trims of pure silk
I would avoid
Because those of straw
Make people happy
And this is noble material.
With straw, you light the fire
With which you bake for people
I will let this stand
And it is no untruth
That straw is used to make bundles (*schaube*)
With which you cover things
And bake in the oven
fine bread and rye bread (*shoenz und rueckin*)
With straw you singe pigs
And you put the hams (*bachen*) into it
That you hang under the roof.
You heat the home with straw,
You lie and sit on it.
And yet I know a trick:
Straw also makes the manure
With which you fertilise fields and gardens
I remind the gentlefolk of this.
I will speak plainly:
Straw is used to clean off horses
You brush, wipe, and rub them with it
So that riding them is as good as it can be.
You strew in straw for donkeys and cows
That bray and moo
For pigs, sheep and goats.
Wheat grows from straw
From which we make white *semeln* bread
That is good with mutton.
On straw, ears (*rispen*) grow
Those are better than hyssop (*ispen*)
They turn into porridge flour and groats
That is very useful.
Also food for horses,
That is, oat groats.
What else grows on straw
I will tell you more of
Otherwise it would be lost.
Barley, spelt, and rye,
Both chickpeas and rice

Retain their praise (through straw)
Peas, lentils, and vetches.
With straw, you can make plaits
Ropes to tie up
What you cannot wrap.
You put straw at your waist
To tie up vines.
Gladly I say
Baskets and fodder container (*fuotervaz*)
Are made of good straw.
Seats of straw plaits and sun hats (*schatehuot*)
And bathing caps (*badehuote*) of straw
Make people happy.
Writing chairs of straw
Warm and do not chill.
Bucklers and shields of straw
I never yet tired of.
Straw wreaths and rings
Are also good things.
The mats on the benches
Made of straw I must also consider.
You inflate bladders with straw
To give them to children
And women thrust spindles
Into a small bundle of straw (to hold them).
You tread straw into clay
So that it holds together.
Straw must be given to people.
You can lay out
Where to sow seeds (in a field) with straw
And where to cut or mow.
Fish are roasted over straw.
Oven wipes are made of straw
To clean out the oven
From which many bakers make their living.
And fine breads (*wecke*) bake on straw²⁰
Which the baker pushed into the oven
Smoke comes from straw
And you close bottles with straw.²¹
You light the way home at night with straw
So nobody should hurt their limbs.
I will say more of straw yet
You strew it (on the ground) to walk on
On the ice, that is a trick,
and where the path is dirty.
One thing I like especially:
You use straw to catch birds.

20 Straw being used to stop the bottom of bread loaves from burning is an interesting use. We know that Renaissance cooks used paper this way with cakes..

21 Corks were not yet in common use as stoppers, so various materials were used to close bottles.

I will not spoil it:
Straw is put on salt baskets
So they are protected above
And you put it on casks and barrels,
Those who can do so
Put smoked herrings (*buekinge*) into straw.
If you have no straw, you take leaves.
You also use straw bundles
To tie up venison and fish
When you bring them to the table.²²
And I will readily bet
Straw is put under the bed
I know this well
As it is properly done.
You also gladly wind
Sickles in straw at harvest time.
Good things come from straw
When beer is sold
You can tell that from a straw bundle.²³
Straw also makes valuable ash
Which you need along with wax
To rub into the tablets
On which you write.
You filter lye through straw
You make light with straw
And he who drinks through a straw
Can well grind what grows on it.
You shall heed my words:
Straw is used to graft trees.
Straw is laid under barrels
So they lie all the better.
And it shall not be kept silent
You strain through straw
Yeast that is called *grakoelikin* (*krakeling* – a fine baked good)
That is eaten by the Rhine.²⁴
Straw is put into a horse collar
All across the country
If I had forgotten this, it were bad:
Straw is used to protect windows
And it is stuffed into hats
I want to make that clear.
One thing makes me dizzy:
Vermin is killed with straw.
Straw put into the ashes
Extinguishes coals that are still live.
And another thing I have experienced myself:

22 This is an interesting touch in serving, though I am not entirely sure what the purpose is. It may be meant to retain the heat the same way covered bowls were used later.

23 A straw bundle roughly shaped like a broom was displayed outside houses where beer was for sale.

24 This is a very interesting reference, though unfortunately we learn little about the type of yeast strained here.

You use straw to poke between your teeth
And I still have to learn
To whistle with straw
And people wrap breads in straw
At Easter, if they have them
You strew them with straw
For someone who buys them.
And I say so without envy:
You transfer land ownership with straw
Whether high or low
And use straw (also) to give it in fief/rent.
From straw, fodder (*keffehe*) is made
That makes the cattle strong
And the leftover chaff (*agen*)
That shall be brought to the oven.
Straw seats for benches are also much used
And you need straw to keep score in games
You show on one straw
How much one has won off another.
Swabians, Franconians, and Bavarians
Stir eggs with straw.
It has not been sung of yet:
Straw is used as a needlecase
And you often mark horses with straw
When you wish to sell them.
You let wine run over straw
That becomes clear and fine.
Straw is put under the saddle
If you have ridden too much
In great heat
So the horses sweat
Straw is put into books
To mark the boundary (i.e. as a bookmark)
I cannot be silent about
Bambast (stuffing?) and straw pallets
And shoes that are stuffed with straw
So the feet do not suffer pain.
You also wipe your arse with straw
This is rarely a pleasure for travellers
Straw baskets and nests
Have long been known.
And it is a wise custom
To adorn bags and caps with it
And the chaplets of maidens
Which they wear everywhere.
Straw is also worn on helmets
On dusty fighting grounds (*in dem melm?*)
That is a proper habit
As the von Sahsenfluor family do.
And on campaign

Hard bundles of straw are used
Many go for them
To make shelter for themselves
You use them for chairs and tables
And nothing is confused
They use straw for a house (*huetten* as a verb)
I say that here and elsewhere.
Many lie on it at night
And in the morning shout "Lift it up!"
You can protect yourself with straw
When you are about to fight
And you mark out places for fighting with straw
It will be hot inside them
When tourneys are fought
Straw is used to adorn
The shining reins and the horses
That ride through the moss
On which you gain honour
And defend your worth.
I say to the best of my knowledge
Clean fruit grows from straw
Which lessens suffering.
Straw be praised!
You make love on it
That makes a crowd (of children)
Who grow into people.
It grows from the earth
And from straw comes joy
That does not come from silk.
He who is all-powerful
Has conceived of this work
And thought of everything
And has created it entirely
Thus we shall not refuse
The clean wafer (the Eucharist)
I say this without mockery
in it, noble God comes to us
In the hands of pure priests
He lets himself be turned (into flesh)
So that we people have him with us piously
And come to God
In whom we shall always trust
And not in lesser powers.
Truly, thus has spoken
the *kuenig vom Otenwalde*

**VI This is a poem of sheep
Nobody shall criticise it much**

I have invented a poem
A lady has brought me to do it
She has a noble husband
I shall not name her unless she allows it
Do not ask me
Since I made that promise!
So I begin straightaway
And speak of an animal:
I rhyme of the sheep
Whether awake or asleep
You profit from it and honour it
If anyone were turn around my words
He would do me an injustice
Even lords, knights and servants
Keep sheep nowadays
Princes and counts also seek
To have a share in sheep
And it is no great misfortune
To own many of them.
They bear the wool
That you wash and shear
From which rich clothing is made
You also tan the skins
And tease and dye the wool
Comb and spin it
People gain wealth with it
Wind and twist it
Before and behind
Spool, weave and full it
And they also defraud people that way
And are not ashamed
They put it on the tenter frame
Anoint it, card it, and smooth it
So they (the pieces of cloth) become one like another
Cloth merchants measure it out
And the wool is shorn with shears
And tailors put together many garments
That look differently
He whose sheep prosper
Will have full chests and casks
And also have gold and silver
(When) both rams and lambs
Prosper in numbers
So they can be blessed at Easter.
Whether they are big or small,
They dress legs and feet
In hosen and socks

And line tunics.
They clothe head and body
They adorn man and woman
Boys and girls
A feast for the eyes
As coats and tunics.
You know pelts (*kursenbelze*)
They are black and white
And many people are eager for Danish lamb fleece (*tenisch*)
Though it is not wise
To wear it against the cold.
What usefulness we have in sheep!
Tabards, long tunics and wide overcoats (*taphart, kutten, kotzen*)
Cowls (*schepeler*) for monks and nuns, too
That are often worn
You should also have this (garment) in church
Where a priest wears it.
Headwear, surcots, jackets (*huben, surkat, suphen*)
Overcoats, felt, and headscarves (*suknie, vilze, gufen*)
Coverlets (*tucher ubir bare*)
This I say truly
You hang them over a wagon.
This I must say
Front and rear horse gear and saddles
Are covered in woollen cloth
And many pieces from many places
So the skin does not rub bare.
Whey, curds and sheep cheese
And also the milk please people
Makers of hard cheese
Are good fellows
Also, sheep butter,
Should not be criticised.
Sheep lamb during Lent
And you also fertilise fields with sheep (dung)
Hear the broad list:
They also make gain (literally: fish) with sheep dung
Where they stable horses
I tell this to all of you!
More useful yet, I mean,
Are meat, feet, and bones
Innards, head, brain, and good galantines,
Tongues, tallow, horns and skin
All come from sheep in quantity
And many a sweet music of stringed instruments (*seitenspil*)
Is made with sheep gut
I tell you, rich and poor,
Also, the string of the *wollensleger*,
They should move it diligently!²⁵

25 This is a tool for treating wool with a tensioned string of sheep gut prior to carding and spinning.

You shall also hear
You find in the shops (*kremen*)
gloves, belts and bags
That can be used to barter.
Now I will explain
That the skins are turned into
Belts, pouches, and shoes
Points for hosen²⁶, parchment and books,
Fodder bags and carrying bags
In which you put clothes.
Sheep leather is healthy
If you have an injury on your finger
Where a bad blister is
A wool thread needs to go there.
If you have a mattress (*materaz*)
You will lie all the better when you travel
If it is stuffed with wool.
Take care of your cover
If the blanket is folded fourfold (*geviret*)
It adorns it best.
You also have a rough (one/side?)
That you draw over your shoes.
Leather sheets (*lederlaken*) are painted -
This is done by someone skilled -
With animals and sea creatures
You make love upon and underneath them.
The hands of gentlewomen
Work on (embroidery) frames
Cloth to cover walls
Throw rugs and wall hangings (*zyeichen und teppich*)
And chair covers, I say.
They have chosen (to make) belts
And especially one to hang a (hunting) horn from.
They also make many fine strings of wool
Which the braid into their hair
The short and the long
And attach hats to them.
And if they use woollen breeches
They wear them underneath
Thus they have taken counsel
Like their forebears did out of need.²⁷
From fine sheep
Come rich heraldic overcoats (*wapencleit*)
Blankets and horse covers (? *coopertur*)
Come from excellent sheep.
Many people profit from this
And look very well
Ram's horns are fitted to helmets

26 Clothing was often closed or tied on with leather points.

27 This may be a reference to woollen underpants worn for menstrual hygiene purposes, but it is not very clear.

Small and large ones
The rams also carry crooked horns
Those are suited as lamps
The kunig speaks much of sheep
But he himself has not even one
Very well, I will take care to be in the company
Of those who have them, here I am.
Each archbishop
If he comes to court
Must have a pallium
That must come from sheep
The sheep makes many people rich
Hear now who it is similar to:
When it is killed
it makes no sound
And be careful not to mock it
Our noble God did the same
He bore death willingly
May His kingdom be open to us
So we can all get into it
Thus help us His mother.

VII Of the long beards of people that they wear nowadays for ten reasons

Hear of the rare tales
That I will relate
They walk about in the world;
As many ideas as there are heads.
I saw in a dream
Underneath a tree
A beautiful woman met me
And received me honourably
I thanked the virtuous lady
She spoke to me politely:
“Say, kunig, what is your wish?”
I said “Lady, I would sit with you.”
She said “I would ask you one thing
If it does not make you overproud
You shall tell me one thing
This I ask of you, kunig.”
I said “Lady, ask me
I will tell you if I can.”
She said to me quietly:
You shall counsel me on this:
Men who wear long beards
You shall tell me about those
What they mean to signify
That you must answer me.
If a wearer feels it a pleasure or a pain (*als sur siech oder als suz*)
Or whether he is forced to wear it.”
“Lady, I will not say that of them”
Said I “I know of a different meaning”
The lady said properly
“You shall let me know this, then.”
Why the first one wears a beard
I said: “Lady, one man bears another ill will
Who has lost his friendship
For he did him an ill deed
And so he vowed by himself
That he will never cut his beard
Until he has avenged himself.
That is why he wears his beard
Whether others like or dislike it.”
Of the second beard
The lady said “So tell me more
What is the matter with the other one?”
“The second has a different intent
For he is guilty of a transgression
And he will not cut off his beard
Until he has made restitution
And he intends to hold himself to this

So he will not cut his beard.”
 Of the third beard
 The lady now asked mannerly
 “Now tell me of the third.”
 “The third would go on pilgrimage
 That is why he is wearing his beard
 So he will not be rid of it
 Until he has completed his pilgrimage
 And therefore he wears it
 On smooth roads and on crooked ones.”
 Of the fourth beard
 The noble lady then asked me
 What the fourth was thinking
 “The fourth thinks himself too tender (of age)
 And lets his beard grow out
 To signal his manhood
 That is why he is now wearing a beard.”
 Of the fifth beard
 The lady said “Then tell me now
 Something of the fifth man.”
 “The fifth thinks highly of his beard
 And is free in his choice
 He thinks to do it for other people’s sake
 And wears his beard boastfully
 My simple mid teaches me so
 It is said of him, so it is.”
 Of the sixth beard
 The lady said “Then tell me quickly
 How is it with the sixth?”
 “The sixth is a prisoner
 Who longs to be free
 So he wears his beard until
 He is at liberty again.”²⁸
 Of the seventh beard
 Then the noble lady said gently
 “What motivates the seventh beard?”
 “The seventh man wears it
 For the same reasons as anyone (lit: this and that one)
 So he thinks by himself
 To also wear a beard (i.e. copy the fashion).”
 Of the eighth beard
 The lady said: “Now say,
 How does the eighth live?”
 “The eighth is crazy within himself
 He foolishly resolved
 To make love to a lady
 And he has her on his mind
 So he resolved not to cut his beard

28 Nobles taken captive in war or feuding were often allowed limited liberty during their captivity. It would not be unusual to meet one of them in a courtly context.

Until he has had his will with her
That is why he wears his beard
And see how hard it is on him.”
Of the ninth beard
The lady said: “Tell me now
How do you like the ninth?”
“The ninth wears it for his love
And is no secret admirer (*minnendieb*)
For he seeks nothing else
But to also be lovely in her eyes
And thinks of the lady of his heart
When he shows himself with a beard
In her service at all times
See how much it affects him.”
Why the tenth wears a beard
Then the honoured lady said
“Now tell me this finally
If you know anything of the tenth
You shall not keep silent”
“I tell you, lady, quickly,
The tenth is obliged to
Those who wear beards in his order
Suffer such pain for God
I cannot think of any other reason
Why they should be bearded.”
The lady said: “I am richer
To have learned this from you.”
She said: “Kunig, may God reward you”
She turned around and walked away
When I could no longer see her
She called to me and said:
“Kunig, you forgot one thing
That you must also consider”
“I said “Lady, gladly,
Tell me, what is it?”
She said: “I would be pleased
If they did not let their beards
Hang in the wine as they drink.
So that it drips off them.
It is better to drink
From clean twigs
Of sage or hyssop
Than from the hair of their beards.”
I said: “Lady, very well,
So go forth and tell them
I, my gentle lady,
Will not need the reminder.”

**VIII This was made by the kunig von dem Otenwalde
Of the council of mice against the cats,
Of those who counsel others, but will not act themselves.**

A rich man had a house
That many mice lived in
The cat did much harm to them
And caused them great trouble
When a mouse escaped it
It thought it had already succeeded
The cat lived in the house
And the mice were of a mind
To deal with the cat
So as to have peace.
Many mice came together
And held a council
They met together to decide
How to be safe from the cat.
A noble shrew (*spizmus*)²⁹
Who knew the house very well
Said "I thought of something good
That could make us all safe."
The others said: "So tell us
You always give us courage
So now give us your true counsel
That we are in such a pitiable state!"
It said: "Be glad then
For I will tell you
I can think of nothing better
Than that we should hang
A bell on the cat
That will ring loudly
When the cat comes here
So we can hide
When the bell sounds.
That is what we should do."
The others rejoiced: "Cheers to you!
The hour we thought of you
Was a fine hour.
Since you gave us
Such teaching from your noble mouth
That we shall guard our lives
And all is well thought-out!
If only we had already done it!"
An old mouse who was wise
And grey a grizzled
Said: "It is a smart idea

29 In German, the shrew is referred to as Spitzmaus and traditionally classed with mice, though it is a different kind of animal. It is thus not an outsider to a meeting of mice.

If you all agree with it
I will tell you what I think.”
The others all said “Yes”
And it continued
And said: “You should also consider
When you hang a bell on the cat
That it must not fall off!”
See, they were all silent now
And held their breath
It seemed to them not to be such a good plan now
And those who had cheered it greatly
Felt great reservations against it.
The old mouse said to them:
“Take counsel amongst yourselves until tomorrow
And whoever wishes to hang the bell on the cat
Shall do so.”
Not a single one appeared in the morning
The mice all stayed away
This example (= fable) tells the advisers
Who tell people to do this or that:
When a thing needs doing
Everyone holds back.
Many give advice to others
That they would not use themselves
You can see that with flatterers
They bring themselves forward with words
But when it comes to serious things
None of them hold up.
If you cannot live up to your advice
Do not give it to anyone.
But someone who stands by his word
Gives sound advice properly
And none will avoid it.
You lords, think of this!
Support those who stick with you
And will not be driven from your side.
It is good for lords
When they have loyal servants
That have true courage
To share their worldly goods with them.
Send away the overthinkers (*vederlesen*)
What good are they?
If you are generous to them
They leave you when it counts.
Those who dare life and wealth
With friends and with family
But themselves avoid the risk
They will leave you behind
Send away the flatterers,
You are not safe with them.

This was made by the kunig
And the cat still walks without a bell.

**IX This is a poem about the pig
And its usefulness
And it was made skilfully
By the kunig vom Otenwalde**

As I have nothing new at this time
Many people say: “Very well,
We should have something new,
Kunig, make us a new poem!”
If I have to write something new
I will write about the pig.
Their squealing should gladly be tolerated
Sour liver (*lebersoln*) come from them
Filled and roasted
Happy are those who have them!
Boiled and smoked
They lose none of their virtue.
Now I should look at
Sausages in four manners³⁰
Made with brain and with blood
And also hot liver sausages
And sausages of sheer meat (*brod = brät*)
Those last long
Roasts by the embers
Give you joy
Bread catching dripping (*betreift sniten*) underneath
It is no wonder
Head, ears, tail, feet
And one part it digs with (the snout)
And the four pig legs
In vinegar and galantine
Tongue, spleen, and stomach
Of this, I, the kunig, must say
Of this come side dishes
Now hark what I say!
You also use the bladder well
Wherever it is useful.
You have bacon with peas
In your chickens and on a spit
And where there are boiled chickens
You must have bacon and parsley with them.
Further, I always serve
Fried lardons (*grieben*) in mus and on porridge.³¹
Pancakes and filled fritters (*krepfelin*)
All come from the pig
Dumplings from the rump (*buzl*)

30 Liver sausages, blood sausages, and muscle meat sausages are still classed as separate types in German tradition today, though lung sausage is not common any more.

31 Serving various savoury soft dishes – porridges, purees and custards – topped with crisp fried crackling was common, though we mainly learn of the practice from recipes for Lenten substitutes.

Appear to be so small
But they are noble (like) venison (*wiltbreht*).
I will tell you more about the pig:
Shoulders and hams
Nourish nursemaids and women in childbed
Fat cabbage (*kruot*) come from the pig
Bride and bridegroom eat of that
This is common custom.³²
All foods are improved with it
Adding a little bacon to fish
I never forget to do this
Use your teeth if you can
Women and men both!
To use the large bellies and lard
You must have salt
You use it to smear on many things
Wagon sides (*leitern*) so they become smooth
Books, saddles, bucklers,
are protected steadily (by greasing)
And smiths always wear
A (pig)skin apron over their skin
Straps on the helm
Are carried on the field
Points and straps
Are inexpensively bought
The strop for the razor
I have heard and seen this
Is needed to swipe over often
When you wish to shave beards.
You also find, made of the skin
Belts, broad and narrow
I also tell you of the bristles
That they are used to brush hair
And every cobbler
Cannot be without bristles
Weavers and painters, too
Have need of bristles
And also every goldsmith
Works with them.
With bristles you make
Glasses clean, if you know how
And the noble bristles are
Put into the holy water sprinkler
Which is used in good intent
So God may have us in his protection.
The kunig has made this poem
Whoever can write a better one should do so.

32 There are numerous references to rich, fatty dishes of *kraut* – leafy greens, usually cabbage – being served at weddings. This may be a regional or indeed universal custom.

X Of the wolf, the dog, and the donkey And of their confession

Whatever gives rise to a good mood
And causes people to laugh much
wherever I was able to learn this
That is what I want to make verse about.
Three animals wanted to go on pilgrimage
I will tell this to you all
And if you would not forgo the tale
I will tell you who they were.
A wolf, a donkey, and a dog
Bared their sins
One would confess to the other
And lighten their sins.
His sins especially burdened the third
So hear now this wondrous tale:
The wolf spoke to the dog
Hear what he said now
“Hear me, dog, as I will hear you”
The dog said “I will gladly do that.
Behold, wolf, I will give you comfort
So you will be relieved of your sins.”
The wolf said: “So I will begin
When I came across the geese
I bit to death all I could get
I did so eagerly
No matter if they were crooked or straight.”
The dog said: “You did right.”
“At night, I broke into the stables
And bit all the sheep to death
What I could not eat, I let lie.
See, dog, that is what I am suited for.”
The dog then said: “Leave it be.
It is all done well.”
“I bit a pig, a horse, a cow...”
The donkey stood and listened
“When I ran among the livestock
I did not heed what the herdsmen shouted
I had no care for that
Whatever I could catch, I carried off
I fell upon it and ate my fill.”
the dog then said “That is your right.”
“No more will I confess to you”
Said the wolf: “Now, dog, confess to me, too.”
The dog then said “I will do so
Let me have your forgiveness.”
The dog said: “I will admit
that I often saw you
Carrying away something

that was large and heavy
And I was set upon you
But you escaped unharmed
I let you run away
My desire was different.
Men and women scolded me
For not wanting to attack a wolf
My master and his servant were angry.”
The wolf then said: “It would not be right
For anyone to take vengeance on you
Because you had kept your word.
“Whenever people did not watch me well
I waited until the day was past
And whatever cheese I found in the room
I ate it all immediately
Be it cake, meat, or bread.”
The wolf then said: “You had need of this.”
“I bit a piglet and a chicken.”
The wolf said: “that is what you are supposed to do.”
I will not confess any more,
Ask the donkey how things stand with him.”
The wolf then said: ”Now tell me
donkey, how did you fare?
All your sins
You shall make known to me.”
The donkey said: “What shall I say?
I carried large bags
I suffered many blows
And was ridden saddlesore
And carried baskets that were heavy.”
The wolf said: “What is the point of these tales?
You are overburdened with sin.
Tell me, whom did you hurt?”
The donkey said: “Then I will confess more.
One morning it was very wet
I was walking up a high mountain
And carried a heavy load on my back
My master walked before me
And hay stuck out of his shoes
He had put it in there
And I could not resist
And bent down
And plucked a little of it:
Hunger compelled me
It was all I thought of
That is the greatest sin I ever committed
I confess it to you now.”
The wolf said: “If you did this
Woe, how you must suffer
This will be avenged on you.

You broke your loyalty
To your lawful master
Your suffering will grow!”
“If I merely plucked a feather from a goose
People would say I’d eaten leather!” (said the dog)
The wolf said: “Dog, you shall tell me:
What penance should the donkey bear?”
The dog replied immediately:
“With that, he has set fire to the Rhine.
The pope himself could not forgive him
I think it may cost him his life.
I can give no other counsel.”
Then the wolf said: “I think so, too.”
The wolf then bit him from the front
The dog attacked from behind
There was nothing to be done against it
The donkey went down.
Thus does might go before right today
And the crooked breaks the straight
Whoever can defeat another
Puts him in the sack
If you would excuse what someone is doing
It is called a jest (*spil*)
If you would not forgive it
Nobody will join him in joking.
If a stone falls on a pitcher
It will often enough break.
Thus it was with the wolf and dog:
Greedy they ate the donkey.
The kuenig was quite busy
Until he had assembled this (story).

XI A poem by the King about *widereffen*³³ (following bad examples)

While I can make poems
I will not cease
I write about how things are in the world
One man acts with honour
The other pursues vice
That is an unequal way of living.
I will warn of the dishonourable
And stay with the good
Who hold on to steadfast loyalty
And act virtuously.
I write of the cunning of the world
That is often concealed
But also found in the open
Among poor and rich.
One scheme is known as *widereffen*
Nobody shall attack me over this
Widereffen is so widespread
That nobody can ever
Understand or describe this behaviour fully.
Every day people find
New schemes
There are fathers and their children
Looking to have evil strife among them
And yet call themselves Christians.
Many can no more be trusted
You cannot rely on them
Brother stands against brother
Everyone has a scheme
A child stands against the father
He must suffer greatly over this
A wife also assails her husband
If he cannot guard himself
There is also infidelity
And many women are innocent of it
Their names should not be spoken then.
Many wives are full of virtue
Their husbands encourage them
And are safe from dishonour.
One *widereffen* I must touch upon
These days, people swear the greatest oaths
But pray rarely
May God weed out the evil growths (*sweren*)³⁴
From the progeny of good people.
Those who are of good parentage

33 In modern German, *nachäffen* means to copy someone, including the children's game of repeating everything another says. Here, the meaning is clearly broader. It seems to mean following bad examples as the poet generally deplores the spirit of his time.

34 This is a linguistic joke based on the similarity of the words *sweren* (to swear) and *swere* (a cancerous growth). No more needs be read into it, certainly no exterminatory intent.

Should avoid swearing improperly
To safeguard their souls.
Another kind of *widereffen* will I mention
This custom affects many people
Robbery and devastation is their custom
They seek to garner praise with it.
Whoever does most of this
Is freely of good cheer
Lombards, Brizzi and Tuscans
Have little care in this.
They want to be companions (in this)
And dig under thresholds.
Before, you used to step over thresholds,
Today they slip under them³⁵
That is also *widereffen*
With which the afflict many people.
If this is not enough *geeffet*
The kunig would not be clever.
Thus spoke an old vinegar crock³⁶ (final line is later addition)

35 This is a reference to the widespread wars in Northern Italy, often fought by means that the poet considers dishonourable, including recourse to siege engineering.

36 A vinegar crock, of course, is sour.

XII A speech by the king about the *ungeliph* (the decline of good customs)

Before, people fought for loyalty and honour
This still happens, but not much
A new custom (*reht*) was found
Before, a knight or his serjeant
Announced hostilities to his foes
Before he went after them
They have a different custom now:
“I never saw his tiled stove.”³⁷
One says – and burns out the other
He thinks this way.
Another is overeager
“I have never eaten a peacock with him.”
He says at one point
In no other way does his mouth announce the feud.
That is an evil custom.
The third then says
“He is neither my relative nor my godparent
I will be upon him as soon as any messenger
Who announces hostilities:
I will seize his cows!”
Before, a noble prince rode
Bravely with counts and gentlemen
On heath and grass
And then he had passed by.
A brave knight was hiding nearby
“How many horses may there be?”
He asked “Who will scout it for me?”
A brave man said “I will go and see.”
He rode there and looked
And returned and said
What he had gone to find out
He said so precisely.
Horses have become much less common
I have heard a new question today:
You should look out for crested helmets
Those have become half commonplace.
Bascinet (*bekelhuben*) and *slappen*
Were worn by knights and squires.
Their attitude has changed
Kettle hats (*kezzelhute*) are coming up
They are praised everywhere
And their number is counted.³⁸

37 The tiled stove, heated from another room, was used to heat private living quarters of the wealthy. Thus not having seen someone's stove meant that you were not close friends. Construing this as an insult is, of course, preposterous.

38 This is a rather convoluted way of saying that the customs of warfare have changed for the worse. Crested helmets and horses would be signs of knightly status, and counting them would be a good indicator of a unit's fighting strength at a time knights were the primary combatants. The *kezzelhute*, on the other hand, was a broad-brimmed helmet worn by footsoldiers. An increasing number of these, and the habit of knights to fight dismounted, displease the author.

Well, I will leave off here:
They are good against rain
And give shade in the sun
And inside is protective wadding.
But – so help me Holy Christ -
It is a shameful equipment
For a wealthy knight!
Unless one wears it out of poverty
There is no good reputation (to be had) here
And it is properly called *ungemlimph*.

XIII Of Household Goods

My songs and my poems
Have all come to nought
Before, I had in mind only
Joy and lovemaking
But householding has converted me
And taught me truly
That I must leave behind love
I have entered another live
That is certainly true:
My beard grows and my hair is turning grey
I am getting quite old
But not (too old) for a householder
Now I think of salt
And I fret over lard (*smalz*).
And pots and casks
You will find few with me.
Of buckets and pitchers
I do not have enough.
Vats and ladles
I need not pay dues on (i.e. I have too few).
Both bowls and spoons
You will rarely hear clattering
Around my hearth
I feel this lack acutely.
Spit and griddle
I have long done without
Stone(ware) pots (*Havenstein*) and poker
I have none to show
Kettlehook and firedogs
Have left me.
Pepper mill and stone mortar
I have none anywhere.
Bellows, trivet and iron grater,
I have to beg for those.
Vinegar crock and saltcellar -
I need to recollect what that even is.
Benches, chairs, seats,
Harps (*rotten, harpfen*) and fiddles
You hear little of from me.
I do without these things.
Of earthen pots and pitchers
Washbowl and ewer
Small pitchers, small pots (*kruoselin*) and glasses
You see few in my house
Because they have all fled it.
Neither table nor trestle³⁹
Do I have anywhere.

39 Dining tables would be put up on separate trestles and could be taken down as required.

From good towels and tablecloths,
I am quite safe.
If I could make blankets and bedsheets
By myself
I would make enough of them
And put the ell
Over linen cloth.
But my shirt and breeches
Are torn everywhere
I am often shamed for that.
Mattresses, pillows and beds,
If I had many of them
That would make a fine bedroom.
Though I never gained any worldly good
From any friend (female form: *fründinne*)
I will be silent about this.
But first I will tell you my sorrow
And tell you another thing
Of the great suffering
That has entered my home:
I tell you that the sheep
Do not rob me of my sleep
Neither goats nor cows
Require my effort
Ducks, chickens, or geese
Don't cause me trouble
Neither piglets nor young pigs
Squeal in my home.
That is why under my roof
You rarely see meat hanging.
Chickpeas and peas,
however much I struggled,
I could not acquire
For I had nothing to buy them with.
Oats, spelt, groats,
Would be very useful to me
If I had them in my house.
Nothing will remain in it.
That I had figs, almonds, or rice
That would be quite unknown to me.
(Even) Chard and cabbage
Have fled from my home.
Parsley and leeks,
The cuckoo has cried over (i.e. have grown prematurely)
So now I have none.
Thus it is with me:
Root vegetables and onions
I have no plenty of.
And nobody can ask me
For dried pears or for lentils.

Fruit from the garden
I can expect little
I have already lost it
The worms have eaten it.
The good food of the König (i.e. that this poet usually writes about)
Is quite unknown to me
Though I would like to enjoy it
I am ruled by poverty.
It is also quite rare
That my cat lies by the fire.
Where my fire should be
Lies my dog who is called *Grin* ('barker')
My cat is called *Zise* ('siskin')
My kitchen boy *Wise* ('clever')
My horse is called *Kern* ('breadgrain')
It does not like to fight.
If I am called on to go to battle
It does not like to go there at all.
My kitchen maid is called *Metze* (referring to a woman of low status and moral standing)
She always fusses with a rag
And has a very old skin (i.e. is old).
She would rather take care of porridge flour
Than take care of beans
Because she wants to spare her teeth.
She has less than the chaff
Two cats and two mice
Could not live on it
Unless they were very economical indeed.
It is to my dishonour
I must furrow my brow greatly
When guests come to my home
It is no good to me.
Though I would like to feed them well
If poverty let go of me.
Fish, meat, bread, and wine,
I must mourn all of them.
I am always worn down by worry
As soon as day begins in my house
I feel great sorrow.
It is the same in heaven:
If you bring something with you, you fare better
For there is neither this nor that (i.e. nothing) there.
Whatever is suited for household goods,
Flees from my house soon.
You should also know certainly:
It is smoky in my house
As though two men were forging a pickaxe
This can well displease me
And I am sad about it.
The clothes on the stand (*gericke*)

Sadly are very thin
My joy and all my pleasure
Are in the hands of a beloved maiden
What I mourned sorrowfully
She can give me if she wants to
So that I may live joyfully.
She soon gives me possessions
Soon gives me tender hope
Of love and of desire
Open and concealed.
The more she gives this to me
The more I think of her
Because a joyful hope guides me
That I may expect good (material) things (from her).
With her looks, she can
Liberate and unbind me.
What good does it do me to always complain?
I will tell you a different story now:
Nothing but the powerful faith
in my beloved nourishes me
Without it, I would surely die.
Oh Lord God, protect me
And guard me in this sinful life
Until I pass into another
But love that makes a man die
Is good for nothing.
Here ends the tale of household goods
Of which a rich man has enough.
It truly ends here,
May God send us better gear
Than the poor man had in his life
Who is described above
So that we improve so much
That we need not have complained
Whether man nor woman nor child.
Now fill the cups and let us drink!
And let the lame stumble along (i.e. walk at all)
And the blind see.
To this end, may the poem help me. Amen.

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