

Classic Poetry Series

Peter Suchenwirt
- poems -

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Peter Suchenwirt(1320 - 1395)

Peter Suchenwirt (c. 1320-1395) was an Austrian poet and herald. (Suchenwirt was the Medieval name for heralds of the Austrian dukes.)

He called himself "Knappe von den Wappen" which is a lower position as to the herald, with the duty to blazon and explain the arms of the nobles.

Suchenwirt was the most outstanding representative of the so called arms poetry (de: Heroldsdichtung). Since 1372 he lived in the Vienna court of the Austrian dukes. In 1377, he joined the campaign of duke Albrecht III to Prussia. His poems are full of heraldic blazon, documenting his proficiency in heraldic terminology.

Suchenwirt collected the material for his poems from the primary sources. For this reason he travelled a lot to the eminent personalities of his age. He was an outstanding observer, so his historical and cultural data proved to be authentic. He went to the location to give a laudation if he learnt about the death of an important person, or appeared there at the first anniversary of his death. He praised the tournament results, the virtues and field deeds of kings and nobles. As a rule, the speech ended with the description of the deceased person's arms.

He used gemstones to designate the tinctures, and to describe (c. 1355) the coat of arms of the Louis the Great (1342–1382), King of Hungary.

Writing

A writer of historical, biographical, allegorical, and didactic poems. He is a richer and more lively poet than Teichner. His verse was not confined to rhyming couplets, but he may be reckoned nevertheless among the "Reimsprecher." He attacks gambling, and lets us know how general dice-playing was in his day ; one of his poems celebrates the battle of Sempach, but among the variety of his productions those that come under the heading of "Heroldsdichtung" procured him the greatest notoriety. These poems commemorated the deaths of princes and nobles, and joined with the lament was a description of their coats-of-arms beside that of their deeds. These "Ehrenrede" were probably recited at assemblies of the nobles. Ed., Primisser, 1827; G. E. Friess, 1878. See F. Kratochwil, "P. Suchenwirt, Sein Leben u. seine Werke," "Scriptores rer. Pruss.," ii. 155, for poems referring to German order. Also a few in Clara Hatzlerin's "Lieder- buch." MSS., Suchensinn. A wandering singer like Suchenwirt and Teichner, who flourished end 14th and early 15th centuries. He does not hold so

prominent a place among the Meister- singers as Suchenwirt ; "he was unable to separate the didactic from the lyric."

Duke Albrecht's Crusade

When one counts from Christ's birth
thirteen hundred years
and seventy more
in the seventh [year of that decade] it happened
that there set out from Austria
the valiant Duke Albrecht,
courteous, honorable and gentle.
In his heart and his mind he desired
to become a knight.
He knew that for him gold
was better than silver. And this was true.
With him there rode many noble squires
and many high born knights.
Fifty of his excellent and worthy vassals,
longing for glory,
also accompanied him on the journey to Prussia.
There also went a fine company of
five proud and noble spirited counts,
who spared neither themselves nor their wealth
in the service of God, honor and chivalry.
Their hearts were generous and good.
One was from Magdeburg.
Count Hans is the one I mean.
He was noble by age and by birth.
Count Hugo of Monfort,
who was never lacking in loyalty nor honor, also went,
as did three counts of Cilly,
all most honored men.
First there was Count Hermann
and a/so his son and his uncle.
None of them had ever been nor would ever be touched
by any mark of dishonor.
Their hearts were filled with virtue.
The expedition set out from Vienna.
One first saw the assembled army at Laa
(the city lies on the River Thaya) .
Many a proud warrior
grandly set out for battle.
Display vied with display as

each in his own way
made himself ready for war
so that knights and noble ladies
might praise their courage.
Many a mouth proclaimed
that never before had there been seen so many warriors
so well armed and so well mounted.
No expense was spared
on horses and fine clothes.
The army set off from here without incident
in glory without blemish.
and traveled through city and countryside
to the city of Breslau.
There the count invited
the sweet, lovely ladies up to the castle.
They blessed the proud [knights]
with all manner of happiness
just as cool May
brings meadow and forest into bloom.
There was great joy
in joking, dancing and laughing
and the sweet ladies took pains to dispel
whatever cares might have burdened [those knights].
[All this], with proper decorum,
they bestowed upon the guests and noble princes.
From here the noble band
went to Thorn,
a city in Prussia (it is still there today) .
The fine and noble prince
was courteously offered
the ladies' hospitality.
Their dainty mouths and cheeks
were a shining splendor and
they adorned themselves
for the joyous occasion
with pearls, waistbands and brooches,
with tiaras, chaplets and wreaths.
And the dances!
How many there were, all fine and decorous
From here they went on
to Marienburg.
The grandmaster had his seat there.

Winrich von Kniprode was his name.
This noble and virtuous lord
most graciously received
the prince and his men,
showing them great honor.
They were most generously feted
with good drink and fine food.
Through generosity one guards himself
against the blemish of dishonor
and here there was a double show!
Then they went to Koenigsberg
and here too the great lords
gave great display of generosity.
Each vied with the other
in emptying his purse.
None wished to lag behind
and so hastened [to outdo the other].
Without surcease
the guests were welcomed
and received and entertained
most courteously.
Yet prudence held generosity within bounds
until it came to the turn of the prince.
That noble and virtuous duke
gave a banquet at the castle.
Trumpets and pipes played
between courses.
The dining was lavish.
Each course was fourfold:
spiced, gilded and decorated,
baked and roasted.
The table was bedecked with wine
from the South and wine from the East
and clear Rainfal. All were served
generously in fine vessels,
spotless and shining
precious, bejeweled [goblets]
of gold and silver.
Before the banquet ended
the prince displayed his noble generosity:
silver and gold were brought forth
to be given as signs of honor.

Two knights and a noble squire,
each renowned for their feats of arms
and acknowledged as the very best
of his land,
received the gift.
These men, never touched by dishonor, were
Heinrich von Bruchdorf
from Holstein and
Lord Berchthold von Buchenau
from Buchen.
They received the gold by knightly right.
The third was a noble squire.
Siegfried Forster was his name.
His family was from Poland.
Herolds and minstrels
rejoiced in the prince's generosity:
'Give it all away! ' they shouted in rowdy exuberance.
'May God reward him. I've gotten my share
and its quite enough for me,
if truth be told.'
The lords, knights and squires
stayed here for ten days and
were courteously entertained.
Then in keeping with old traditions
the grandmaster gave banquet
at Koenigsberg in the [chapter] hall.
The feast was lavish, you can be sure.
When places at the table of honor were assigned
Konrad of Krey was
seated at the head by unanimous acclaim.
He had earned this through his
feats of arms in many a land.
As a noble knight
he had often shed his blood
and undergone hardships
in the service of chivalry.
When the crusade to Lithuania
was proclaimed
people came [to Koenigsberg] for that purpose
from distant lands.
The marshal and the experienced men
instructed everyone to procure

full provisions for three weeks'
travel by horse and by ship.
No one objected.
The stewards hastened
to buy all manner of foods.
They bought twice the necessary amounts,
sparing neither gold nor silver.
The grandmaster joined in the crusade
in honor of the lord of Austria
and of the chaste Virgin,
the Mother of God.
The army rode through Samland
and came to the River Suppen
at Insterburg.
There were four bridges there,
where the water, as we saw,
was near spear-shaft deep.
On each bridge the press and noise [of the passing army]
was such that scarcely a soul could sleep.
From here the army moved without incident
to the Memel.
That river was bow-shot wide.
Here the army embarked on ships
and the sailors set to
eagerly and willingly,
exerting themselves in their labors.
From noon to vespers
more than thirty thousand men
were ferried over the wide river
on ships
which numbered
six hundred and ten in all.
The only casualties the army suffered
were three horses and one squire drowned.
Those we left behind there.
May God restore the loss.
The army hastened eagerly toward the pagans:
a thousand men making their way
through the wilderness' dense undergrowth,
skirting neither ravines nor clearings,
nor deep streams nor bogs nor creeks.
Not even in Hungary is travel

over level terrain so difficult.
The marshes caused us much travail,
yet the army traversed the wilderness,
pushing right across it,
horses jumping, slipping, forging on,
the branches slashing painfully
across our throats.
There were many large trees
felled by the wind
over which we had to force our way,
like it or not.
In the press many a man cried out,
'The Prussians are doing us in! '
Many of the horses and mules
carrying the food and drink
were injured,
their knees and forelegs sprained
from being so hard driven.
Jokes and laughter vanished.
The horses' [hooves] were so damaged that
many began to limp.
Day faded and
night came
and we made camp
but found little comfort there.
The horses had nothing but grass.
Thus we passed the night.
Early the next morning the army
joyfully rushed into the pagans' land
at full gallop.
The banner of Ragnit was at the head as was customary,
followed by those of St. George
and of Steierland.
Then came the ornate banner of the grandmaster
along with that of Austria.
Many noble flags
fluttered in the breeze.
Many of the proud heroes
who were in the service of love,
driven by their ardor and [hopes of] joy,
wore garlands and wreaths of ostrich feathers.
As signs of favor they had been given

gold, silver, jewels,
pearls large and small,
wreaths and ornaments,
all of which they bore on their helmets,
glittering in the sun.
And so many noble guests
came with the army into Samogithia.
They found a wedding in progress.
These uninvited guests
took up a dance with the pagans,
sixty of whom died as a result.
Then they set fire to the village
and flames rose high into the sky.
I would not have liked to have been the bridegroom
there, on my oath.
The smoke and fire
would have easily driven me away from my bride.
Count Hermann of Cilly
drew his sword from its sheath
and swung it high in the air
and said to Duke Albrecht,
'Better knight than squire',
and struck the blow of honor.
Sixty-four others were also knighted
on that very day.
The prince, fearing no disgrace,
knighted with his own sword
whomever asked it of him.
He did this to the praise of Christendom
and to the honor and glory
of Mary, Virgin most pure.
The army began to crisscross
the land
and God helped the Christians
come unawares
upon the pagans and this cost the latter dearly.
We valiantly pursued them
Whomever we valiantly pursued, we caught.
we caught, stabbed and slashed. The country was rich and heavily populated
and so we had all we could desire.
The Christian's gain was the pagans' loss:
so tipped the scales of war.

A marvelous time and day!
The army camped on a field and
erected many fine tents
which shone splendidly in the sun.
One also saw many fine banners
of the lords and lands
and thus recognized
those who had joined the crusade.
The pagans gave us no peace that night;
rather, in grim determination
they raided the army in force,
stabbing, slashing, throwing spears.
The Christians tired of this
and drove them off.
Still there was little rest that night
for screaming loudly
like wild beasts the [pagans]
stabbed men, speared horses
and then fled back into the marsh.
They kept this up all night.
At daybreak
the army broke camp and began burning,
the flames rising high into the sky.
But the army's marshal in Prussia,
Gotthort of Linden,
ordered the men to stay with the main force
until each man, fully armed,
could gather at his own banner
and thus ride in the proper assembly.
By the time this was done
it was light enough so that
each one could see and recognize his comrades.
Then the army set out across the land
just like the seven stars of the Pleiades.
The pagans screamed in the thickets.
They were hard pressed
and many were slain.
The women and children were taken prisoner.
What a jolly band of retainers!
We saw many women
with two children tied to their bodies,
one in front, one behind,

riding their horses
barefoot and without spurs.
The pagans suffered greatly:
we captured many of them
and immediately tied their hands together
and led them like
[braces of] hunting dogs.
Then the army made camp.
The Prussians,
to their great distress, provided
an abundance of geese and chickens, sheep and cows,
horses, honey and other plunder.
Such was their festive day!
The marshal and the master
in wise and thoughtful counsel
devised a good plan:
each night they had a strong stockade
erected around the army
and manned it well with sentries.
This was done
and so we could sleep in peace
and the pagans no longer
attacked us at night.
On the third day the army
joyfully entered the land
named Rossenia.
There we laid waste and burned,
slew and speared, charging
boldly through thicket and meadow.
It was like chasing foxes and rabbits;
just so did they flee!
Konrad of Schweinbord
rode down the pagan chief
and struck him with his spear,
piercing him with the blade.
Thus did he slay him.
The Christians rejoiced
and the pagans tried to save themselves
[by fleeing] into the forest, thickets and marshes.
Whenever a [pursuing] knight strayed from the path
his horse would sink into the bog up to the saddle.
'Down here! , down here! '

he would loudly cry.
Then the pagans grimly
lay a knavish ambush,
waiting for the army to stray [into the bog].
But we were too clever for this ruse.
Instead the army immediately made camp.
The noble Count Hermann of Cilly
invited the prince of Austria
and all the newly knighted men
to dine with him that evening
in honor of their great valor.
The plans were made
and nothing was overlooked.
At the table sat
eighty-two men
who had won their knighthood
through the precious gift of glory.
There were nine splendid courses
at that meal,
foods the noble lord
had brought along with him.
The market place was far removed.
Let me tell you an amazing thing:
a stag
the knights ate at that meal
had been hunted down at another place
a good thousand miles away!
A strange fate for that game.
They drank only good wines,
Wippacher, Rainfal
and Luterberger.
I was witness to it all.
After the meal
many worthy knights
rode out to seek adventure.
They set the land afire
and burned it
until the smoke was so thick
one could hardly see.
I tell the truth!
We stayed in that land
for eight days.

Many men were knighted,
indeed,
fully one hundred and eight.
Nor does this amaze me in the least
since I saw it with my own eyes.
The army punished the pagans,
laying waste to three entire lands,
whose names were
Samogithia, Rossenia and Eragolja.
We were beset by terrible cold,
wind, rain and hail,
which ruined armor and provisions.
It poured down on us for three days and nights.
and both man and horse suffered greatly.
The weather turned so cold
that many horses, having shivered all night,
could eat neither leaves nor grass.
The cold was dreadful!
And so we left that land,
crossing valley and ravine, marsh and beach,
hastening toward the Memel,
and when we came to that river
many a man looked toward heaven
and prayed, 'Mary, Virgin pure,
help me safely reach the other shore'.
At the place the ships were there was
a deep and sandy marsh covered with thick reeds
and so some swam, others rode [out to the ships],
but finally the Cod of Heaven
helped us cross over safely.
The ships the duke
and many of the other lords were on
were born by the wind to Koenigsberg.
But those who were following after them
had scarcely sailed five miles
when a strong wind drove them
far out into the Kurish Haff.
Many thought his grave
was to be in the sea.
Yet God showed His mercy.
Ulrich, Wulfinch and Friedrich
of Stubenberg

were in great distress.
They prayed to Christ in heaven
Yet God showed His mercy.
Ulrich, Wulfinch and Friedrich
of Stubenberg
were in great distress.
They prayed to Christ in heaven
who had suffered bitter death
to save them from their peril
and He who had redeemed Adam and Eve
came to the aid of these lords.
And so the army moved overland,
but, I venture to say, few of them galloped,
since the horses were all exhausted,
weak and sick with catarrh.
There was a wilderness there called the Gauden
and in all my journeys, to the west and to the south,
I never rode a worse stretch.
I swear on my honor!
Whenever a horse stood up to the saddle
in marsh mud
with a wide creek before him
one had to goad him with the spurs,
forcing him to cross over.
Otherwise death would have overtaken him.
We hurried on to Koenigsberg
where we found rest and comfort.
The duke graciously cared for
and extended his hospitality to
Jeschko Schwab of Pechin and to the count of Has.
The third was the count of Kolbrad.
Also included were Heinrich List and Albrecht Meisner;
a noble squire;
from Cologne a lord named Ruprecht Kraft,
a pious and well-known knight;
Lord Eckhard of Scotland;
William and Richard
and a Frenchman
named Louis.
In noble fashion the duke,
led by his generosity, sent these men
golden cups and silver bowls

filled with golden coins.
They received the silver and the noble gold
as rewards for valor.
Conrad of Krey was commander
and the army of Austria
was under his able leadership.
For this many a noble offspring is grateful yet today.
The master and the Order
praised the great glory of
the [duke] of Austria and thanked him
for bringing with him
an army so well disciplined
that never once had a weapon been drawn
in anger or rashness.
For this he was praised and honored.
Then it was loudly proclaimed
throughout all Koenigsberg
that whosoever were deserving of reward,
be it gold or silver,
should come straightaway to the court and there he
would be well paid.
Sweet sounds of praise rang out.
Then the army set out
in honor unblemished.
At Riesenburg a messenger came
to the young and virtuous prince
[with word] that his lovely wife had given birth
to a child, a male,
a fair and sweet little boy,
who was later to be named Albrecht.
His heart was freed of all cares
for this was his first offspring.
Then they moved on to the Sweidnitz,
which pleased the duchess there.
Her heart rejoiced in the young prince,
for she had been born in Austria
of the same family and lineage.
The noble and splendid princess
had many maids and lovely ladies,
noble by birth and also by nature,
who served as gracious hostesses.
For four days

there was courteous and high-spirited joy.
The princess graciously and nobly entertained
the guests and the prince
and gave them all they required,
amply and generously.
Whatever one needed, she gave it to him twofold.
No one had to buy so much as an egg!
She gave thirteen
horses and geldings
and sixteen golden cloths.
Her name stands in Lady Honor's book:
'Agnet, known for her kindness'.
We did not stay there longer
but rather set off for Austria
by way of Poland' and Moravia.
In my poem
I have described in simple words
the course of this expedition.
I now give noblemen this advice:
Whoever wishes to be a good knight
should take Lady Honor as his companion
and also St. George, truly!
'Better knight than squire.'
Let him bear these words in his heart
for as long as he shall live
[and serve them] with his thoughts, actions and good
In this way he will avoid all dishonor deeds.
and crown his name with glory.
I Suchenwirt, respectfully urge
the noble to be worthy and brave.
Now follow my advice!

Peter Suchenwirt