

FRENCH LITERATURE

CANFIELD

# FRENCH LYRICS

SELECTED AND EDITED  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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## PREFACE.

THIS book is intended as an introduction to the reading and study of French lyric poetry. If it contribute toward making that poetry more widely known and more justly appreciated its purpose will have been fulfilled.

It is rather usual among English-speaking people to think slightly of the poetry of France, especially of her lyrics. This is not unnatural. The qualities that give French verse its distinction are very different from those that make the strength and the charm of our English lyrics. But we must guard ourselves against the conclusion that because a work is unlike those that we are accustomed to admire it is necessarily bad. There are many kinds of excellence. And this little book must have been poorly put together indeed if it fail to suggest to the reader that France possesses a wealth of lyric verse which, whatever be its shortcomings in those qualities that characterize our English lyrics, has others quite its own, both of form and of spirit, that give it a high and serious interest and no small measure of beauty and charm.

The editor has sought to keep the purpose of the volume constantly in view in preparing the introduction and notes. He has hoped to supply such information as would be most helpful, if not indispensable, to the reader. And as he has thought that the best service the book

could render would be to stimulate interest in French poetry and to persuade to a wider reading of it, he has wished in the bibliography to meet especially the wants of those who may be inclined to pursue further one or another of the acquaintances here begun. It is of course not intended to be in any wise exhaustive, but only to present the sum of an author's lyrical work, to indicate current and available editions, and to point out sources of further information; among these last it has sometimes been accessibility to the American reader rather than relative importance that has dictated the insertion of a title.

The editor acknowledges here his wholesale indebtedness for his materials to the various sources that he has recommended to the reader. But he wishes to confess the special debt that he owes to Miss Eugénie Galloo, Assistant Professor of French in the University of Kansas, for many suggestions and valuable help with the proofs. Her assistance has reduced considerably the number of the volume's imperfections. For those that remain he can hold no one responsible but himself.

A. G. C.

LAWRENCE, KANSAS,  
Dec. 7, 1898.

## INTRODUCTION.

As literature is not a bundle of separate threads, but one fabric, it is manifestly impossible to give an adequate account of any one of its forms, as the lyric poem, by itself and aside from the larger web of which it is a part. The following pages will attempt only to sketch the main phases which the history of the lyric in France exhibits and so to furnish a rough outline that may help the reader of these poems to place them in the right historical relations. He should fill it out at all points by study of some history of French literature.\* No account will be taken here of those kinds of verse that have only a slight contact with serious poetry. Such are, for instance, the songs of the *chansonniers*, mainly of vinous inspiration, which followed a tradition of their own apart from that of the more sober lyric, though some of the later writers, especially BÉRANGER and DUPONT, raised them to a higher dignity. Such also are the songs so abundant in the modern vaudevilles and light operas, many of which have enjoyed a very wide circulation and great favor and have left couplets fixed in the memory of the great public.

\* Special commendation may be given to the large work by various scholars under the direction of Petit de Julleville now in process of publication, and also to the shorter histories, in one volume, of Gustave Lanson (1895) and F. Brunetière (1897). An English translation of the latter is published by T. Y. Crowell & Co., New York.

Neither will account be taken of the poems of oral tradition, the *chansons populaires*, of which France possesses a rich treasure, but which have never there, as so conspicuously in Germany, been brought into fructifying contact with the literary lyric.\*

The beginnings of the literary tradition of lyric poetry in France are found in the poetry of the Troubadours. No doubt lyric expression was no new discovery then; lyrics in the popular language had existed from time immemorial. But it was in the twelfth century and in Provence that it began to be cultivated by a considerable number of persons who consciously treated it as an art and developed for it rules and forms. These were the Troubadours. Though their poems did not, at least at first, lack sincerity and spontaneity, their tendency to theorizing about the ideals of courtly life, especially about the nature and practice of love as the ideal form of refined conduct, was not favorable to these qualities. As lyrical expression lost in directness and spontaneity it was natural that more and more attention should be paid to form. The external qualities of verse were industriously cultivated. Great ingenuity was expended upon the invention of intricate and elaborate forms. Beginning at the end of the eleventh century, the poetry of the Troubadours had by the middle of the twelfth become a highly artificial and studied product. It was then that it began to awaken imitation in the north of France and thus determine the beginnings of French lyric poetry.

\* A large number of the *chansonniers* are represented in the collection by Dumersan and Noel Ségur, *Chansons nationales et populaires de France*, 2 vols., 1866, to which an account of the French *chanson* is prefixed. Specimens of the *chanson populaire* may be read in T. F. Crane's *Chansons populaires de la France*, New York, Putnam, 1891; an excellent historical sketch and a bibliography make this little volume a good introduction to the reading of French popular poetry.

An earlier native lyric had indeed existed in northern France, known to us only by scanty fragments and allusions. It was a simple and light accompaniment of dancing or of the monotonous household tasks of sewing and spinning. Its theme was love and love-making. Its characteristic outward feature was a recurring refrain. The manner and frequency of repeating this refrain determined different forms, as *rondets*, *ballettes*, and *virelis*. But there are few examples left us of early French lyrics that have not already felt the influence of the art of the Troubadours. Even those that are in a way the most perfect and distinctive products of the earlier period, the fresh and graceful *pastourelles*, with their constant theme of a pretty shepherdess wooed by a knight, may have been imported from the south and have pretty surely been touched by southern influence.

From the middle of the twelfth century the native lyric in the north was entirely submerged under the flood of imitations of the Troubadours. The marriage of Eleanor of Poitiers with Louis VII. in 1137 brought Provence and France together, and opened the north, particularly about her court and that of her daughter Marie, Countess of Champagne, at Troyes, to the ideas and manners of the south. The first result was an eager and widespread imitation of the Provençal models. Among these earliest cultivators of literary art in the French language the most noteworthy were CONON DE BÉTHUNE (d. 1224), BLONDEL DE NESLE, GACE BRULÉ, GUI DE COUCI (d. 1201), GAUTIER D'ESPINAUS, and THIBAUT DE CHAMPAGNE, King of Navarre (d. 1253). There is in the work of these poets a great sameness. Their one theme was love as the essential principle of perfect courtly conduct, and their treatment was made still more lifeless by the use of allegory which was beginning to reveal its fascina-



tion for the mediæval mind. From all their work the note of individuality is almost completely absent. Their art consisted in saying the same conventional common-places in a form that was not just like any other previously devised. So the predominance of the formal element was a matter of necessity. Some variation from existing forms was the one thing required of a piece of verse.

This school of direct imitation flourished for about a century. Then it suddenly ceased and for another century there was almost no lyric production of any sort. In the fourteenth century Guillaume de Machault (1295-1377) inaugurated a revival, hardly of lyric poetry, but of the cultivation of lyric forms. He introduced a new style which made the old conventional themes again presentable by refinement of phrase and rhetorical embellishments, and he directed the pursuit of form not to the invention of ever new variations, but to the perfection of a few forms. And it is noticeable that these fixed forms were not selected from those elaborated under Provençal influence, but were the developments of the forms of the earlier *chansons à danser*, the *rondets*, *ballettes*, and *virelis*. The new poetic art that proceeded from Machault spent itself mainly in refining the phrase of the old common-places, allegories, and reflections, and on turning them out in *rondels*, *rondeaux*, *triolet*s, *ballades*, *chants royaux*, and *virelis*. The new fashion was followed by FROISSART (1337-1410), EUSTACHE DESCHAMPS (approximately 1340-1407), who rhymed one thousand four hundred and forty ballades, CHRISTINE DE PISAN (1363-?), and CHARLES D'ORLÉANS (1391-1465), who marks the culmination of the movement by the perfection of formal elegance and easy grace which his rondels and ballades exhibit.

All this lyric poetry had been the product of an aristo-

cratic and polite society. But there existed at the same time in the north of France a current of lyrical production in an entirely different social region. The bourgeoisie, at least in the larger and industrial towns, followed the example of the princely courts, and vied with them in cultivating a formal lyric, and numerous societies, called *puīs*, arranged poetical competitions and offered prizes. Naturally in their hands the courtly lyric only degenerated. But there were now and then men of greater individuality who, if their verses lacked something of the refinement and elaborateness of the courtly lyric, more than atoned for it by the greater directness and sincerity of their utterance, and by their closer contact with common life and real experience. Here belong the farewell poems (*congés*) of JEAN BODEL (twelfth century) and ADAM DE LA HALLE (about 1235-1285), of Arras; here belong especially two Parisians who were real poets, RUTEBEUF (d. about 1280) and FRANÇOIS VILLON (1431-146?), who distinctly announces the end of the old order of things and the beginning of modern times, not by any renewal of the fixed forms, within which he continued to move, but by cutting loose from the conventional round of subjects and ideas, and by giving a strikingly direct and personal expression to thoughts and feelings that he had the originality to think and feel for himself.

But no one at once appeared to make VILLON's example fruitful for the development of lyric verse, and it went on its way of formal refinement at the hands of the industrious school of rhetoricians, becoming more and more dry and empty, more and more a matter of intricate mechanism and ornament. No more signal proof of the sterility of the school could be imagined than the triumphs of the art of some of the *grands rhétoriciens* like MESCHINOT (1415?-1491), or MOLINET (d. 1507), the

recognized leader of his day. The last expiring effort of this essentially mediæval lyric is seen in CLÉMENT MAROT. He had already begun to catch the glow of the dawn of the Renaissance, but he was rooted in the soil of the middle ages and his real masters were his immediate predecessors. He avoided their absurdities of alliteration and redundant rhyme and their pedantry; but he appropriated the results of their efforts at perfecting the verse structure and adhered to the traditional forms. The great stores of the ancient literatures that were thrown open to France in the course of the first half of the sixteenth century came too late to be the main substance of MAROT'S culture.

But it was far otherwise with the next generation. It was nurtured on the literatures of Greece, Rome, and Italy, which was also a classical land for the France of that day; and it was almost beside itself with enthusiasm for them. The traditions of the mediæval lyric and all its fixed forms were swept away with one breath as barbarous rubbish by the proclamations of the young admirers of antiquity. The manifesto of the new movement, the *Défense et Illustration de la langue française* by JOACHIM DU BELLAY, bade the poet "leave to the Floral Games of Toulouse and to the *puis* of Rouen all those old French verses, such as *Rondeaux*, *Ballades*, *Virelais*, *Chants royaux*, *Chansons*, and other like vulgar trifles," and apply himself to rivaling the ancients in epigrams, elegies, odes, satires, epistles, eclogues, and the Italians in sonnets. But the transformation which this movement effected for the lyric did not come from the substitution of different forms as models. It had a deeper source. Acquaintance with the ancients and the attendant great movement of ideas of the Renaissance reopened the true springs of lyric poetry. The old moulds of thought and

feeling were broken. The human individual had a new, more direct and more personal view of nature and of life. That note of direct personal experience, almost of individual sensation, that was possible to a VILLON only by virtue of a very strong temperament and of a very exceptional social position, became the privilege of a whole generation by reason of the new aspect in which the world appeared. The Renaissance transformed indeed the whole of French literature, but the first branch to blossom at its breath was the lyric. Of the famous seven, RONSARD, DU BELLAY, BAIF, BELLEAU, PONTUS DE THYARD, JODELLE, and DAURAT, self-styled the *Pléiade*, who were the champions of classical letters, all except JODELLE were principally lyric poets, and RONSARD and DU BELLAY have a real claim to greatness. This new lyric strove consciously to be different from the older one. Instead of *ballades* and *rondeaux*, it produced odes, elegies, sonnets, and satires. It condemned the common language and familiar style of VILLON and MAROT as vulgar, and sought nobility, elevation, and distinction. To this end it renewed its vocabulary by wholesale borrowing and adaptation from the Latin, much enriching the language, though giving color to the charge of Boileau that RONSARD'S muse "*en français parlait grec et latin.*"

Of this constellation of poets RONSARD was the bright particular star. The others hailed him as master, and he enjoyed for the time an almost unexampled fame. To him were addressed the well known lines attributed to Charles IX.:

*Tous deux également nous portons des couronnes :  
Mais, roi, je la reçus : poète, tu la donnes.*

His example must be reckoned high for his younger con-

temporaries beside the ancient writers to whom he pointed them.

But his authority was of short duration. RÉGNIER and D'AUBIGNÉ, who lived into the seventeenth century, could still be counted of his school. But they had already fallen upon times which began to be dissatisfied with the work of RONSARD and his disciples, to find their language crude and undigested, their grammar disordered, their expression too exuberant, lacking in dignity, sobriety, and reasonableness. There was a growing disposition to exalt the claims of regularity, order, and a recognized standard. A strict censorship was exercised over an author's vocabulary, grammar, and versification. Individual freedom was brought under the curb of rule. The man who voiced especially this growing temper of the times was MALHERBE (1555-1628). No doubt his service was great to French letters as a whole, since the movement that he stood for prepared those qualities which give French literature of the classic period its distinction. But these qualities are those of a highly objective and impersonal expression, seeking perfection in conformity to the general consensus of reasonable and intelligent minds, not of an intensely subjective expression, concerned in the first place with being true to the promptings of an individual temperament; and lyric expression is essentially of the latter kind. MALHERBE, therefore, in repressing the liberty of the individual temperament, sealed the springs of lyric poetry, which the Renaissance had opened, and they were not again set running till a new emancipation of the individual had come with the Revolution. Between MALHERBE and CHATEAUBRIAND, that is for almost two hundred years, poetry that breathes the true lyric spirit is practically absent from French literature. There were indeed the *chansonniers*, who produced a

good deal of bacchanalian verse, but they hardly ever struck a serious note. Almost the most genuinely lyric productions of this long period are those which proceed more or less directly from a reading of Hebrew poetry, like the numerous paraphrases of the Psalms or the choruses of RACINE'S biblical plays. The typical lyric product of the time was the ode, trite, pompous, and frigid. Even ANDRÉ CHÉNIER, who came on the eve of the Revolution and freed himself largely from the narrow restraint of the literary tradition by imbibing directly the spirit of the Greek poets, hardly yielded to a real lyric impulse till he felt the shadow of the guillotine. It is significant of the difficulty that the whole poetical theory put in the way of the lyric that perhaps the most intensely lyrical temperament of these two hundred years, JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU, did not write in verse at all.

That which again unsealed the lyric fountains was Romanticism. Whatever else this much discussed but ill defined word involves—sympathy with the middle ages, new perception of the world of nature, interest in the foreign and the unusual—it certainly suggests a radically new estimate of the importance and of the authority of the individual. It was to the profit of the individual that the old social and political forms had been broken up and melted in the Revolution. It could seem for a moment as if, with the proclamation of the freedom and independence of the individual, all the barriers were down that hemmed in his free motion, as if there were no limits to his self-assertion. His separate personal life got a new amplitude, its possibilities expanded infinitely, and its interest was vastly increased. The whole new world of ideas and impulses urged the individual to pursue and to express his own personal experience of the world. CHATEAUBRIAND made the great revelation of the change

that had taken place, and in spite of the fact that his instrument is prose, the lyric quality of many a passage of René was as unmistakable as it was new. But the lyric impulse could not at once shake off literary tradition. It needed to learn a new language, one more direct and personal, one less stiff with the starch of propriety and elegance. The more spontaneous and genuine it became, the closer it approached this language. DELAVIGNE won great applause by his *Messéniennes* (1815-19), but the lyric impulse was not strong enough in him to make him independent of the traditional rhetoric. MME. DESBORDES-VALMORE, less influenced by literary training and more mastered by the emotion that prompted her, found the real lyric note. But it was especially LAMARTINE whose poetic utterance was most spontaneous and who recovered for France the gift of lyric expression. His *Méditations poétiques* (1820) were greeted with extraordinary enthusiasm and marked the dawn of a new era in French poetry.

But other influences making for a poetic revival were multiplied. A very important one was the spreading knowledge of other modern literatures, particularly those of England and Germany with their lyric treasures. Presently there began to be a union of efforts for a literary reform, as in the Renaissance, and the Romantic movement began to be defined. Its watchword was freedom in art, and as a reform it was naturally considerably determined by the classicism against which it rebelled. The qualities that it strove to possess were sharply in contrast with those that had distinguished French poetry for two hundred years, if they were not in direct opposition to them: in its matter, breadth and infinite variety took the place of a narrow and sterile nobility—"everything that is in nature is in art"; in its

language, directness, strength, vigor, freshness, color, brilliancy, picturesqueness, replaced cold propriety, conventional elegance and trite periphrasis; in its form, melody, variety of rhythm, richness and sonority of rhyme, diversity of stanza structure and flexibility of line were sought and achieved, sometimes at the expense of the old rules. By 1830 the young poets, who were now fairly swarming, exhibited the general romantic coloring very clearly. Almost from the first VICTOR HUGO had been their leader. His earliest volume indeed contained little promise of a literary revolution. But the volume of *Orientales* (1828) was more than a promise; it held a large measure of fulfilment, and is a landmark in the history of French poetry. The technical qualities of these lyrics were a revelation. They distinctly enlarged the capacity of the language for lyrical expression.

There are three other great lyric poets in the generation of 1830: DE VIGNY, DE MUSSET, and GAUTIER. De Vigny annexed to the domain of lyric poetry the province of intellectual passion and a more impersonal and reflecting emotion. De Musset gave to the lyric the most intense and direct accent of personal feeling and made his muse the faithful and responsive echo of his heart. Gautier was an artist in words and laid especial stress on the perfection of form (cf. *l'Art*, p. 190); and it was he especially that the younger poets followed.

By the middle of the century the main springs of Romanticism began to show symptoms of exhaustion. The subjective and personal character of its lyric verse provoked protest. It seemed to have no other theme but self, to be a universal confession or self-glorification, immodest and egotistical. And it began to be increasingly out of harmony with the intellectual temper, which was determined more and more by positive philosophy and



the scientific spirit. LECONTE DE LISLE voiced this protest most clearly (cf. *les Montreurs*, p. 199), and set forth the claims of an art that should find its whole aim in the achievement of an objective beauty and should demand of the artist perfect self-control and self-repression. For such an art personal emotion was proclaimed a hindrance, as it might dim the artist's vision or make his hand unsteady. Those who viewed art in this way, while they turned frankly away from the earlier Romanticists, yet agreed with them in their concern for form, and applied themselves to carrying still farther the technical mastery over it which they had achieved. Their standpoint greatly emphasized the importance of good workmanship, and the stress laid upon form was revealed, among other ways, by a revival of the old fixed forms. The young generation of poets that began to write just after the middle of the century, generally recognized LECONTE DE LISLE as their master, and were called *Parnassiens* from *le Parnasse contemporain*, a collection of verse to which they contributed. They produced a surprising amount of work distinguished by exquisite finish, and making up for a certain lack of spontaneity by intellectual fervor and strong repressed emotion.

But the rights of subjective personal emotion could not long be denied in lyric poetry. Even LECONTE DE LISLE had not succeeded in obliterating its traces entirely, and if he achieved a calm that justifies the epithet *impassible*, given so freely to him and to his followers, it is at the cost of a struggle that still vibrates beneath the surface of his lines. Presently emotion asserted its authority again, more discreetly and under the restraint of an imperious intellect in SULLY PRUDHOMME, readily taking the form of sympathy with the humble, in FRANÇOIS COPPÉE, or returning to the old communicative frankness