

# The Provençal Lyric

Louis F. Mott, Ph.D.

# Cornell University Library

THE GIFT OF

*The Author*

A. 151177

24/9/01

Cornell University Library  
PC 3307.M92

Provençal lyric /



3 1924 027 291 362

olin



Cornell University  
Library

The original of this book is in  
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in  
the United States on the use of the text.

<http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924027291362>

THE  
PROVENÇAL LYRIC

BY

LEWIS F. <sup>freeman</sup>MOTT, PH.D.

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT THE COLLEGE OF THE CITY  
OF NEW YORK

---

NEW YORK

WILLIAM R. JENKINS

851-853 SIXTH AVENUE

1901

II

M

COPYRIGHT, 1901 |  
BY LEWIS F. MOTT  
*All Rights Reserved*

---

PRESS OF WILLIAM R. JENKINS, NEW YORK

### *NOTE*

*This lecture was delivered in the Chapter Room of the Carnegie Building, December 1st, 1900, before the Comparative Literature Society.*





## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

---

In the ancient land of vintage and dance and sun-burnt mirth, there resounded during the Middle Ages a sweet chorus of song, which was the delight, not only of the native lords and ladies, but of cultivated society in all neighboring countries. Spreading to France, Spain, Germany and Italy, its underlying ideas and fancies furnished the basis of much that is greatest in mediæval literature. Its sudden appearance, its rapid development, its brief glory, and its untimely extinction, invest this lyric outburst with a special, almost tragic, interest. In fifty years from the first recorded song of Guilhem de Poitiers (1090),

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

it entered upon the period of its perfect bloom; then for a century it flourished, manifesting its spirit most completely in Bernart de Ventadorn, Bertran de Born and Arnaut Daniel; by 1250 the decline, already pre-figured in the verses of Guiraut de Borneil, had begun, and, before the fourteenth century opened, this brilliant creation had perished in didacticism and commonplace.

What was the source of this efflorescence? Where did it first bud? In what popular element did it strike its roots? These are still matters of learned speculation. What seems practically certain is the fact that no external impulse generated this poetry or influenced its early growth. It stands absolutely by itself. Classic literature, which had continued more or less to occupy the attention of the

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

learned few, had no part in its origin or development. It was the spontaneous product of the conditions surrounding its birth.

The poetry of the troubadours was essentially social in character. Unlike Goethe's minstrel, who sang as the bird among the branches, these bards exercised their art for the sake of applause and gain,—a recompense which could be won only by pleasing the knights and ladies gathered at the court of some wealthy and noble patron. Of the three classes into which feudal society was divided—commons, clergy and nobles—the last alone possessed either the means or the desire to reward literary and musical skill. It was to this class, therefore, to the Counts of Provence and Toulouse, to Eleanore of Aquitaine and Ermengarde of Narbonne, to Richard the

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Lionhearted and Alfonso of Aragon, that the Provençal lyric was addressed.

In the eleventh century the nobility, which had previously been terribly rough and barbarous, began to grow more refined. Under the influence of favorable conditions, chivalry was developed. Particularly in the south of France, where wealth had long accumulated and where, through rights, taxes and the sale of privileges, it flowed largely into the hands of the great lords, the delight in life became conspicuous. Prodigality was the fashion. As in the Elizabethan age in England, the love of splendor manifested itself particularly in gorgeousness of dress and magnificence of entertainments. A host of attendants accompanied the man of rank, and the ideal prince bestowed gifts lavishly and

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

without thought upon knights, squires, and, above all, upon jongleurs.

These jongleurs—the successors of the Latin Mimi—supplied entertainment to the commons at the fairs and to the higher classes at their feasts. The meaner kind not only recited, sang and played on musical instruments, but performed as jugglers, dancers, acrobats and exhibitors of trained animals. But the courtly singers were not of this order. Though mostly professional minstrels, they were not infrequently the friends and companions of princes. When they wandered from castle to castle, they were honorably received; when they attached themselves to some particular patron, they were caressed and richly paid. We are told that one great lord was so highly pleased with the first song of Aimeric de

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Pegulhan that he gave him his own palfrey and the very clothes he wore.

Guiraut de Borneil avers that, for good singing, four conditions are necessary—love, a favorable time, a favorable place, and applause. These conditions were found combined at the feast in the castle hall, before and after which the entertainment consisted of music, song and story by the jongleur or by the guests themselves. In a *novas* by Raimon Vidal, we are told of his visit to Uc de Mataplan in Catalonia. It is spring. Without reigns the charm of flowers, fresh leaves and the soft, sweet air; yet it is pleasant also within the house. Many rich barons and many fair and courteous ladies are there congregated. Some are playing checkers or chess, others are engaged in conversation; laughter,

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

joy and high spirits abound. Presently a jongleur enters, graceful, gentle, and richly attired. He sings many songs and presents other diversions. When he ends, each returns to his former pleasures.

Such is a contemporary picture of the society which inspired and moulded the Provençal lyric. Illiterate and yet cultivated, these lords and ladies demanded of their poets a strict adherence to generally recognized conventional forms, and, at the same time, an elaboration of artificial conceits and an originality of metrical complication, which gave pleasure in the feeling of difficulties overcome.

The conventionalism, both in ideas and in forms, must be obvious to every reader. Instead of the description of nature, we find vague references to green meadows, fragrant

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

flowers, and singing birds. It is the same with the expression of love. The griefs and joys of the lover, his hopes and cares, are set forth in general terms. The detail that would give life to the picture is conspicuously absent. Even in the most personal songs of affection, sorrow or hatred, there is the same indefiniteness of image. A fund of materials was accumulated from which all could draw. The chief demand upon the poet was that these materials should be perpetually rearranged in slightly varied combinations.

Just as the ideas settled into a system, so the free forms of popular poetry also hardened into categories, so that later writers were enabled to set down a code of almost absolute laws. Even very early care for form became excessive. As a general rule, the rhymes of



## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

every stanza throughout a poem are identical;\* there was an effort to devise new kinds of poetry; complicated rhyming schemes were invented; to these were added word-play, alliteration and forced constructions; difficulties of every kind were sought. Some poets even boasted it as a merit that they could not be understood.

This artificiality and elaboration seem strange when we remember that neither the poets nor their audiences were really educated people. Some few authors, it is true, possessed a slight acquaintance with the Classics, —enough to make an occasional allusion to Ovid,—but there were many who could not even read their native tongue. These, of

---

\* In the versions which follow no attempt has been made to preserve this peculiarity.

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

course, transmitted their songs orally to the jongleur, who preserved both words and music in his memory.

A jongleur was one who, either as author or performer, made poetry and music a profession. The name troubadour, on the other hand, was reserved for him who composed, whether for money or merely for pleasure. It is among the troubadours, therefore, that we find the greatest variety of personages. Some were peasants or townsmen, some poor knights, some unfrocked priests or monks. Such made a living by song. Their rivals in fame, though not in pecuniary reward, included powerful barons, princes, and even kings. Music and verse, it must be remembered, were inseparable, and the author was almost invariably the composer as well. Those

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

who could sing, moreover, produced their own compositions to the accompaniment of the fiddle or the harp; others employed professional singers, who frequently carried the song to a distant patron or friend. Papiol, who performed such services for Bertran de Born, has had his name preserved in his master's verse, and we learn from the biography that Guiraut de Borneil always traveled with two musicians who sang his works.

It would be wearisome to mention all the varied kinds of Provençal lyric; a few of the most important must suffice. There was the *vers*, a simple, early form, which developed into the *canço*. This was an elaborate poem, of from five to seven stanzas, dealing always with the subject of love, and requiring a melody of its own. On the other hand, from

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

the *sirventesc* love was properly excluded, and it was written to fit some well-known and popular air. The subject was moral or religious, political or personal. In the *planh* the poet lamented the death of his patron, or his lady-love. A most curious form was the *tenso*, a play of wit, in which, usually with great personal bitterness, two poets debated, in alternate stanzas, such questions as: Which are the greater, the benefits or the ills of love? Which contribute most to keep a lover faithful, the eyes or the heart? Which loves the more deeply, one who can not keep from speaking to everyone of his lady, or one who does not speak of her at all, but thinks of her night and day?

Such questions of love causistry are thoroughly characteristic of the social element in

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

the troubadour poetry. They are questions of which the knights and ladies seemed never weary. The brilliant and worldly society, before whom the Provençal lyric was sung, lived under the domination of the ideals of chivalry, ideals which demanded that men should fight and that men should love. The poetry that would please this society must, therefore, bear the stamp of these same ideals and subject itself to the tyranny of the same narrow circle of thought. Religion could mostly be left to the close of life, except as it stirred warriors to battle for the Holy Sepulchre. The vast range of emotion open to a Burns, a Heine, a Hugo, lay in an untrodden, if not undreamed, region. The courtly singers, be their birth royal, noble or base, treat, with hardly an exception, of

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

two subjects, and two subjects alone—of war and of love.

The love, indeed, was of that peculiar sort termed lady-service. The object of affection was almost invariably a married woman of high rank, to whom the poet addressed his homage and his humble supplications. How much of real passion and how much of simulated adoration this relationship represented, it is impossible to discover. It is reasonable to believe, however, that, in general, the limits of propriety were strictly observed.

Without doubt the burning phrases of the earliest troubadours expressed their true sentiments, and we can hardly believe that even the later poets were always confined to emotions purely Platonic. Yet, on the whole, the exaggerated anguish and the equally exag-

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

gerated joy, the unlimited praises, the assurances of absolute devotion and unchangeableness, the wishes, the hopes, the despairs of these lovers must be interpreted as we interpret the same sort of language addressed by needy suppliants to Queen Elizabeth of England.

In Provence, rich heiresses married young, and after marriage they enjoyed much liberty. Becoming social queens, they patronized the poor singers, who in turn gratified their ladyships' vanity by prolonging and spreading the fame of their beauty. These singers, while professing love, professed also the deepest humility, a humility most strongly marked in those of much lower birth than the ladies they addressed. Every one of them proclaimed himself his lady's vassal, until this convention

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

became so firmly established that even a king (Alfonso II.) sang: "Her man, warranted and sworn, shall I now be, if it please her, before all other lords."

As the love itself was so largely a conventional social function, so the expression of it grew into artificial formulas. It may, indeed, be said that there was a system of courtly love.

The feelings of the lover alone are portrayed; the lady is commonly cold, or even cruel, as in the following characteristic dialogue by Aimeric de Pegulhan:

Lady, for you great torment must I bear.  
Sir, you are foolish, for I do not care.  
Lady, for heaven's sake to me be kind.  
Sir, quite in vain your empty prayers you'll find.  
Good lady, I do love you faithfully.  
Good sir, and I dislike you utterly.



## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Lady, my heart is therefore in distress.  
Sir, mine is ever light with happiness.

Lady, all comfortless, I die for you.  
Sir, 'tis a task it takes you long to do.  
Lady, to live is worse than to have died.  
Sir, since it harms me not, I'm satisfied.  
Lady, by you I am discouraged merely.  
Sir, do you therefore think I love you dearly?  
Lady, one glance my saving could effect.  
Sir, hope or comfort you need not expect.

Lady, I go elsewhere to beg for grace.  
Sir, go! for who retains you in this place?  
Lady, for love of you I cannot go.  
'Tis no affair of mine, sir, as you know.  
Lady, you answer me so harshly still.  
Sir, 'tis because I wish you every ill.  
Then, lady, I shall never see you kind?  
Sir, as you say: at last you know my mind.

The unfortunate lover now turns to address  
the powerful being who has made him so  
wretched:

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Love, you have cast me where I have no heed.  
For heaven's sake, my friend, do what you need.  
Love, you reward at last for every wound.  
Friend, I will therefore make you safe and sound.  
Love, why compel the choice of such a one?  
Friend, I will show you what had best be done.  
Love, I can't bear the pain that rends my heart.  
Friend, I will choose another for your part.

Love, all you do I see is of no use.  
Friend, you do wrong to utter such abuse.  
Love, must I part from her? Then tell me why.  
Friend, 'tis because I grieve to see you die.  
Love, do not think my heart from her to lure.  
Friend, then resolve in patience to endure.  
Love, may I hope my happiness to gain?  
Friend, yes! at last, through service and through pain.

The season for love is the spring-time. This is so well established a fact that the description of gardens, flowers and birds becomes purely conventional. Bernart de Ventadorn,

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

one of those who helped to establish this convention, sings:

When flowers I see, and fresh green through the land,  
And in the woods the song of birds resounds,  
From th' other joy which in my heart abounds,  
My welfare springs two-fold, its buds expand :  
And in my view no man has any worth  
Who now longs not for love and joy, when earth  
And every living thing is bright and gay.

Love is all-important, it is the highest good, the climax of all blessings. "A man without lady-service," says Peire d'Alvernhe, "can be worth no more than an ear of corn without the grain."

That love was all-powerful was universally recognized. Very generally, indeed, Love was personified as a being who drives the lover to hopeless destruction and against whom no force could prevail. This god or goddess

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

binds and imprisons the poet, who is compelled to fulfil every command. Only when Love wills does he sing. To quote Bernart de Ventadorn again:

Never believe I shall be recreant found  
And cease to love, for all his injury;  
Power to escape is nowise left in me,  
For Love assails and smites me to the ground.  
Where'er he wills, my love is in that place.  
If I love her who can not show me grace,  
'Tis force of Love makes me do vassalage.

The cause of love is beauty, and, under the circumstances, a troubadour might naturally be expected to exert himself to the utmost in praise of his patroness. We indeed grow weary of hearing of her tender person, beautiful eyes, sweet glance, clear, fresh complexion, blonde hair, and beautiful smiling mouth with white teeth. Without equal in

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

beauty, she also excels in good sense, courtesy and kindness. She is the most refined and gentle creature that one can choose in the world. Rather more original than the general style is the following stanza of Pons de Capdueil:

If every joy and meed,  
The finest, highest worth,  
Each courteous word and deed,  
Of all the best on earth,  
Were by God's will combined  
And set in one alone,  
Her merits would be known  
A hundred-fold behind  
Those which my love has shown.

The beauty of the lady, penetrating the lover's eyes, smites his heart. This wound causes infinite suffering. He weeps, grows pale and certainly will die, unless she shows

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

mercy. He cannot sleep. Day and night her image is constantly before him and he can think of nothing else. Thus love is conceived as a sickness, and there naturally results a metaphor, often repeated and extensively elaborated, in which the lady appears as a physician. Thus Peire Raimon sings:

I have learned how love can wound,  
Grievously his dart I feel,  
But how, sweetly, he can heal,  
That I never yet have found.

The physician well I know  
Who alone can cure my pain,  
But to me what is the gain,  
If my wound I dare not show?

And again in another poem:

The pangs of love, which still return,  
Within me now more fiercely burn;

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Desire and pain my bosom fill,  
And though my heart is smitten through,  
The doctor who can heal my ill  
Will lengthen out the treatment still,  
Just as the other doctors do.

Thus love leads to contradictions and foolishness. "Little loves he who grows not foolish," is the opinion of Bernart de Ventadorn. Sometimes the poet, bereft of his senses, can neither hear nor see. Sometimes all nature appears to him reversed; he takes the snow for verdure, and fills his song with such absurdities as: "I am sick, yet no one was ever more healthy. . . . I give though I have nothing. . . . I am a fool yet wiser than Cato. . . . I sing that which I know not how to sing."

In the presence of his lady the lover trembles, grows pale, and loses control of himself. He

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

dares not speak. Often he adores her with a curious and (to the modern mind) blasphemous intermingling of gallantry and religion. He approaches her on his knees with clasped hands, he worships the very country in which she dwells. Her smile seems like the smile of God, and if God shall have any part in him, He must hold it as a fief from her. Had he been so faithful to God as to her, he would surely enter Paradise alive. Less offensive than such expressions is the pretty opening of a poem by Bernart de Ventadorn:

From my lady's country blowing,  
When the breezes sweetly rise,  
To me, it seems, is flowing  
Fragrance from Paradise.

The poet exalts his lady's fame. She is



## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

the most beautiful and the noblest in the world, unequalled in virtue. All who approach her are benefited, the sick grow well, the rough courteous, the ignorant wise. Even a thought of his lady is sufficient for Peire Vidal:

When one thinks of her, that day  
He cannot live as one forlorn,  
For in her sweet joy is born,  
And whatsoever one might say  
In her praise, he could not lie;  
For no man can e'er deny  
She's the best in all the world.

The poet professes unchangeable devotion and absolute submission to his lady's will. Nothing is hard that pleases her. He would not complain even if she should kill him. A small token from her is of the highest value. He would be rich if she should give

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

him a thread from her glove or one hair that fell upon her cloak. He believes that he was made for no other purpose than to honor her. In comparison with her love, everything else in the world is worthless, and he had rather despair for her than possess another. He would, indeed, receive as his lord a shepherd or even an enemy coming from her. To one poet she is dearer than his eyes or his teeth. More tastefully, Peire Raimon sings:

Myself I have devoted, as was right,  
To love and to the lady whom I prize;  
Justly I chose, taught by my judging eyes,  
The beauty who is flower, and glass and light,  
And source and guide of what is true and meet;  
And since so sweet  
My heart she wounded with a glance of love,  
I think of nothing else, no pleasure prove  
From other joys, remember nought but her.

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Love ennobles the lover. It makes him courteous, generous and brave. He is purified by this flame as gold in the fire. So Pons de Capdueil:

Whom love holds joyous has a happy fate,  
For love's the source of every benefit ;  
Through love men grow accomplished, graced with wit,  
Gentle and frank, humble and yet elate ;  
Better a thousand times, where love is found,  
Are courts and wars, whence worthy deeds abound ;  
My whole heart, therefore, for the promised gain,  
I give to love, nor for the grievous pain  
And anguish that I bear do I complain.

Thus love maintains prowess and courtesy. Without lady-service there would be no worth or honor, measure or good breeding. It is, above all, the source of song, as is declared by Aimeric de Peguilhan, among others:

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Good lady, I from you and Love receive  
Sense, knowledge, vigor, heart, good words and song;  
To you and Love the thanks and praise belong  
If anything of worth I may achieve,  
For you have given me this mastery.

A curious survival of the early song of illicit passion is the universal fear of detection. Love must be concealed, and, ostensibly for this purpose, the lady is always addressed under an assumed name; a disguise, it may be added, which was usually perfectly transparent. Tale-bearers, moreover, were overwhelmed with opprobrious epithets. They were hard, cruel, tormenting, envious, evil-speaking and low-bred.

Such is a general outline of this system of courtly love. The songs in which these ideas are expressed are naturally artificial, appealing chiefly to the intellect and abounding in

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

fanciful conceits. In addition to the metaphor of the physician, already mentioned, we have the frequent comparison of the troubadour in love to a fish in the water. Again and again the eyes and the heart are personified, and sometimes referred to as enemies, on account of the injury they work. Lafranc Cigala has a *tenso*, in a dream, between his heart, himself and his understanding, as to whether the sufferings of lovers are due to themselves, to Love, or to the lady loved. Sometimes the ingenuity is very striking, as when Folquet de Marseille tells his lady that, since he holds her in his heart, she should be very careful not to inflame him too much, for, in the burning she herself might be injured. "The fire that burns me," writes Guilhem de Cabestaing, "is such that the Nile will not extinguish it,

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

any more than a delicate thread will sustain a tower."

Foremost among the love-poets, by common consent, stands Bernart de Ventadorn. One of his best known lyrics will therefore be given entire as a specimen of the type we have just been discussing:

It is no wonder if I sing  
Better than all who know that art,  
For love most strongly rules my heart ;  
Him I obey in every thing.  
Body and heart and mind and thought  
And strength to him I consecrate ;  
He draws me with a force so great,  
I look on all but love as naught.

Life without love—what is it worth ?  
The man whose heart is never fed  
With love's sweet food, indeed is dead ;  
He's but a cumbrance on the earth.

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Lord, may thy hatred never move  
So fierce against me that I may  
Survive a month, a single day,  
And have no heart to long for love.

She whom I love with faithful mind  
Is best and fairest, yet my eyes  
Are filled with tears, my heart with sighs ;  
Too much I love—my hurt I find.  
Helpless, Love takes me prisoner,  
And in his prison I must sit ;  
No key but pity opens it,  
And pity is not found in her.

It is indeed my firm belief  
That, when I see my lady near,  
I tremble visibly with fear,  
As in the wind a quivering leaf ;  
My weakness before Love is such,  
A child would have more sense than I.  
And one who thus must conquered lie  
A lady ought to pity much.

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Good lady, this alone I ask,  
As vassal take me ; service due,  
As to a lord, I'll pay to you,  
Though no reward should crown my task.  
Behold me here at your command,  
Frank, humble, courteous, bold and gay;  
Would you, like bear or lion, slay  
One who thus yields him to your hand ?

Sweet is the wound that Love doth give ;  
He smites my heart, and smites again ;  
I die a hundred times with pain,  
A hundred times with joy re-live.  
So sweet these ills, they have surpassed  
All other benefits combined ;  
And since the ills so good I find,  
How good the recompense at last !

O God ! might every lover now  
As false or true distinguished be ;  
Might tricksters, full of calumny,  
Bear each a horn upon his brow !



## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

I'd freely give, if it were mine,  
Silver and gold, all earth can show,  
If my sweet lady could but know  
How faithful is my love and fine.

To *Courteous*, to my lady, go  
My song, and may she feel no woe,  
Nor my long absence e'er repine.

Such was the lyric of love. Sung before a court, or, in other words, before society as constituted in the Middle Ages, it formed a large part of polite public entertainment. But from many a radiant assemblage, she who had been its animating spirit was removed by the inexorable hand of death. The poet who had celebrated love and joy and beauty must now attune his music to the voice of grief. The plaint, a form which, even to-day, after so many centuries, can touch our hearts, was the

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

vehicle of his emotion. Let us listen to the sorrow of Pons de Capdueil at the death of Lady Adelaide:

Of all the wretched I am he who bears  
Most grievous pain and anguish of the mind.  
I long to die, and I would deem him kind  
Who slew me, for my spirit so despairs;  
My life is naught but misery and dread  
Since Lady Adelaide, alas! is dead:  
I suffer from the injury and dole.  
O, traitorous Death! you can most truly say,  
A better in the world you could not slay.

Ah, it had been to me a blessed thing  
If God had willed that I should first have died.  
Wretched, alas! I would not long abide,  
Now she is gone. Pardon her, Jesus, King,  
Almighty God of justice and of truth;  
Save her, O Christ, by thy exceeding ruth!  
St. Peter and St. John, receive her soul!  
For in it dwell all virtues men can see,  
And from all trace of evil it is free.

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

It is but right that every man should wail,  
For never did God make such charms on earth :  
Who any more can show such winsome worth !  
What now do beauty and good sense avail !  
What now avail honor and social meetings,  
Delight and courtesy and tender greetings !  
What now avail frank speech and actions strong !  
Sad age, your meanness in my heart I hate,  
Of you nor more can man the best relate.

We may be sure the happy angels raise  
A song of joy on knowing she is dead,  
For I have heard, and in the books 'tis read :  
“ God praises one whom all the people praise.”  
Whence I am sure she's in the palace fair,  
Amongst the lilies and the roses, where  
The angels praise her joyously in song.  
So should, indeed, the one who never lies,  
Seat her above the rest in Paradise.

Joy is destroyed, and lost is youth's bright mien,  
And all the world lies under heavy blight ;  
For counts and dukes and many a noble knight  
She made more worthy—now no longer seen

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

By any one—and she imparted grace  
To a thousand ladies. God has turned his face  
    Away in wrath, who raised her worth so high;  
For with her he has taken happiness  
And song, and left us sorrow and distress.

Ah, since my Lady Adelaide has died,  
What ills I bear! For I must lay aside  
    All joy, and say to song my last good-bye.  
Sighing and weeping henceforth is my part,  
And sad complaint and anguish of the heart.

Friend Andrew, changed desires within me reign;  
Never shall I delight in love again.

Such words may seem heart-felt; yet, even in this form of song, conventionality soon prevailed. Every poet uttered the same exaggerated laments and praises. He would contrast his past joy with his present grief, and resolve to abandon song forever—a resolution, it may be said, that was rarely kept.

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Nothing could alleviate such pain, nor could words express it: joy is hateful, the mere thought of his loss is enough to slay the mourner; it were better to have died first, for the world seems miserable and worthless; all people are called upon to join in weeping, and curses are heaped upon false, traitorous, injurious Death. At the same time, the lady is represented as the best, noblest, completest, that could exist; she is the summit and the source of worth and virtue; with her everything splendid has sunk into the grave: may the Lord save her soul and place her among the saints in heaven.

Again and again we find the same ideas expressed in the same language. In the Provençal lyric formalism crushed and annihilated all freshness and life. And yet, as we

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

look back upon the past, Provence is the very land of romance, and no historic figures seem to embody the freedom, love and adventure—in fact, all the romantic elements of the age of chivalry—so completely as the troubadours. For, even if their poetry abounds in commonplace, their lives do not. No field has offered better opportunities to our modern poets than the biographies of these wandering singers.

They are biographies that, in this critical age, we cannot accept as truth; but what we reluctantly yield in the domain of fact, we cling to, with greater persistence, in the domain of poetry. Real events, the treasures of folk-lore, and the play of imaginative genius, have combined to mould these stories into shapes that cannot die.

The jongleur, before he chanted a song,

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

narrated the life-history upon which it was founded. Sometimes, perhaps, he told that which he knew; more frequently, however, he relied upon tradition, or even upon his own fancy. Thus were accumulated the materials for those tales of passion which have inspired succeeding poets from Dante to Swinburne and Browning, the *Biographies of the Troubadours*. In them are to be found tragedy and comedy, faithfulness and deception, affection, jealousy and hate. No one who reads them, with any belief in their accuracy, can help feeling that, when their heroes occupied the stage, the chief business of life was love.

We read of Rudel, who was enamoured of the Countess of Tripoli, without ever having seen her, solely upon the reports of her beauty and virtue which he heard from pilgrims

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

returning from the Holy Land. In her honor he made all his songs, and at last, in order that he might see her, he joined the Crusaders and began his voyage across the sea. But a great sickness fell upon him, and when he reached the haven he was dying. Yet he could thank God that, before his death, he had seen his lady. Within her arms he breathed his last, and she, in her grief, entered a convent that very day.

Less tragic, but hardly less romantic, is a story of Peire Vidal, who at one time believed himself Emperor of Constantinople. In love with Madame Loba—a name that signifies wolf—he attired himself in a wolf-skin, allowed himself to be pursued in the mountains by huntsmen and hounds, and was almost killed for his pains.



## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Guilhem de Balaruc, learning from a friend that a lover, reconciled to his sweetheart after a quarrel, has a happiness equal to that caused by the first interchange of affection, departs from his lady, insults her messengers, and refuses all offers of reconciliation. When he thinks it time to renew his courtship, it is she who is obdurate, and only after long efforts and the intervention of many friends, is he pardoned. The penance imposed upon him by the lady is severe. He must draw out the nail of his little finger, and send it to her with a song in which he declares his folly and expresses his sorrow for his fault. Both conditions he, of course, joyfully fulfils.

Most famous of all, perhaps, is the story of Guilhem de Cabestaing. This knight fell under the suspicions of his lord, but, by pre-

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

tending that his passion was for his lady's sister, and by enlisting her services in the imposture, he for some time escaped detection. At length, however, one of his own songs betrayed his secret. He was slain, and his heart was served to his lady at her repast. When informed what it was she had eaten unaware, she said: "My lord, you have given me so good a food to eat, that I will never again taste of any other." And casting herself from a lofty balcony, she died.

In such wise has romantic fiction embellished the lives of the troubadours and reflected its splendor upon their songs. Other bards have celebrated an Achilles, a Roland, or a Siegfried, but these bards are themselves heroes of poetry.

Among them all, there is none, perhaps, who

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

is, at the same time, so distinguished for his own poems and for his legendary reputation, as Bertran de Born. Living during the eventful period of the wars between Henry II. of England and his rebellious sons, and himself taking a prominent part in these contests, this singer represents, in the fullest degree, the warlike element in the Provençal lyric. Love, indeed, he sang, but his chief inspiration was the trumpet of battle. He was, in turn, in friendly and in hostile relations with all three of the young princes—with Henry, known as “the Young King,” with Geoffrey, and with Richard of the Lion-heart.

He has been called the Tyrtæus of the Middle Ages, a misnomer, perhaps, but, under all circumstances, it seems his voice was still for war. In his view,

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Young men who warfare do not seek  
Grow flabby, cowardly and weak.

It is "courts and wars and the joy of love" that fill him "with happiness and song." In times of unworthy peace, he seeks to stir up strife, singing:

War is my joy, since war, so long,  
Love and my lady wage with me ;  
Through war exalted high I see  
Love-service, courts, delight and song.

In war the vulgar clown grows bold  
And courteous, therefore war well fought  
Delights me, not the quiet bought  
And kept alive by love of gold.

When assailed in his castle of Autafort, apparently because he had forced his brother out and usurped his rights, he is still defiant :

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Though peace throughout the land I see,  
I must continue still to fight ;  
Plague on him who would take from me  
My castle,—though not mine by right !  
May peace still be far !  
I welcome the war !  
For no other law  
I hold worth a straw.

Nor year, nor month, nor week, nor day,  
Do I regard, in this affair ;  
There is no season I would stay  
My hand from injury, and spare  
Those doing me wrong ;  
Nor are they so strong  
That three of the best  
A strap's worth could wrest.

Let him who will his forests fell,  
I strive to still far other needs ;  
For swords and arrows suit me well,  
And helms and haubercs, swords and steeds ;  
I find my delight  
In tourney and fight,

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

Assaults on the walls,  
Gifts and love in the halls.

He curses the peasants and delights in their ills. The merchants, too, are despised and hated. Aristocrat from top to toe, he can see no good in the commons. None of his songs shows his spirit more completely than that vigorous *sirventesc* written, probably, when Richard of England and Alfonso of Castile were about to unite their forces against the King of France. It is as follows:

For the two kings in song I make appeal,  
That many cavaliers may soon appear :  
Alfonso, valiant monarch of Castile,  
Intends, they say, to hire soldiers here ;  
And Richard's gold and silver will not fail  
In bushels upon bushels, for he makes  
A joy of giving : now no pledge he takes,  
But longs for war more than a hawk for quail.

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

If honor and if courage do not melt  
From the two kings, we soon shall see the fields  
With fragments strewn of swords and helms and shields  
And men cut through the body to the belt;  
In fury we shall see steeds charging past,  
And many a lance through bosom and through thigh,  
And joy and tears, moan and exultant cry;  
Vast is the loss, the gain surpassing vast.

Pennant and flag, trumpet and beating drum,  
Insignia and chargers of the best,  
We soon shall see, for the good times will come ;  
The wealth from usurers we then will wrest ;  
No beasts of burden safely can proceed  
Upon our roads, nor townsman free from fear,  
Nor merchants come from France to traffic here—  
Rich will those be who seize the goods they need.

I trust in God that, if the kings arrive,  
I shall be hewn in pieces, or alive :  
And if I live, great joy shall be my share,  
And if I die, I shall be free from care.

Bertran has been considered, perhaps un-

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

justly, the chief instigator of the rebellions of Henry, the Young King, against his father. At any rate, he took part, both with sword and lyre, in these wars, and he grieved bitterly over the Young King's death. This personage, according to the poet's account, was generous, well-spoken, a good horseman, and very handsome. He maintained the pleasures of youth, of arms and of love. His welcome was lavish and his giving prodigal. His entertainments combined banqueting with viol and song. The boldest since Roland, he is wept by all, and may God receive his soul. The famous lament opens with these words:

I end my singing doleful and forlorn,  
Never again its music to employ :  
For I have lost my reason and my joy,  
And the best king that ever yet was born.



## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

It was shortly after this brilliant figure had ended his career in sackcloth and ashes, and with a prayer for forgiveness on his lips, that his father, Henry II., laid siege to Autafort with the purpose of wreaking vengeance upon the evil genius of his beloved son. The castle fell, and Bertran was captured and led before the stern old warrior. "Bertran, Bertran!" exclaimed the King, "you have boasted that never at any time have you needed even the half of your wit, but know that in this peril you will indeed require all you can command." "What I boasted," answered Bertran, "was quite true." "But now," said the King, "be assured your talent will fail you." "Indeed, my lord, it has failed," replied Bertran; "for the day the valiant Young King, your son, died, I lost all my sense and knowledge and

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

wit." And the King wept, and pardoned Bertran, and restored to him his lands and honors.

Such is the old story, rendered familiar to modern readers by Uhland's ballad. Yet, in that relentless poem, the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, we find Bertran, not pardoned, but in one of the lowest depths of Hell. Passing from horror almost beyond thought to that still more horrible, the great voyager through the realms of death comes to the ninth division of that circle beyond which lies only the region of eternal ice. In this *bolgia* are punished those who have sown civil or religious discord among the members of the human race. Each is mutilated to a degree corresponding with his crime. Mahomet is hardly to be described, and there are many

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

others whose wounds we should be glad to forget. Among them, one figure appears, holding up his own head by the hair, as a lantern; and when he nears the bridge upon which Vergil and Dante stand, the head opens its mouth and cries: "Has any a penalty so great as this? . . . I am Bertran de Born, he who gave evil counsel to the Young King. Because I made the son a rebel against his father, I bear forever my own head divided from my body."

The Young King, whom Bertran is thus supposed to have separated from his father, was a favorite of the troubadours. They praised his recklessness, both in the generous prodigality of his gifts and in the impetuosity of his undertakings. In contrast with their admiration for this hero of the age just dying,

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

these poets had nothing but contempt and scorn for Philip Augustus of France, the calculating statesman who, adapting means to ends, built up a nation which took its place among the greatest of the world. Wherever the serious affairs of politics deprived the wandering singers of their accustomed gifts and honors, we hear more and more of bitterness in their songs; manners have decayed, love is dead, the knightly spirit has departed. As years go by, the *sirventesc* gradually supersedes the *canso* of love, until the old order has changed, giving place to new.

The *sirventesc* had, indeed, always been important. It had called men to battle, as we have seen in the songs of Bertran de Born; it had distributed praise and censure among the nobles; it had spoken the national ideals;

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

it had exhorted Christians to the Crusades. In this last form, we find eternal welfare set in opposition to temporal prosperity. To serve the Saviour who suffered death for us, the pardoning King of righteousness and mercy, one should abandon all that he loves most. Thus Peire Vidal sings:

Lord Jesus, who was crucified  
To save all Christians, sends command  
To conquer back the Holy Land,  
Where for the love of us he died,  
To all the people far and near ;  
If we refuse obedience here,  
When at the last is judged each plea,  
Many a harsh sentence we shall see.

Such songs—and there are many of them—seem to breathe a real religious fervor, but, for the most part, religion occupied but a small place in troubadour poetry. Even in

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

the exhortations to the Crusades, love is often more prominent than duty toward God and the Church. Usually it was only at the close of life that the other world cast its shadow upon their thoughts. Many of them, atoning for lighter days by fasting and penance, ended their careers in the cloister. Even the earliest of the troubadours, Guillem de Poitiers, felt, in his old age, the emptiness of life, and no song of repentance seems more sincere than his:

My life I gave to joy and might,  
But now to both I say good-night.  
To Him I go, for my release,  
Who gives to every sinner peace.

Charming and gay the mien I bore,  
The Lord now wills it so no more ;  
The weight I can no longer bear,  
I have approached the end so near.

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

I leave all things most dear to me,  
All worldly pride and chivalry;  
Whate'er God wills, that I embrace,  
And pray that He will show me grace.

As so many of the brilliant poets thus ended their lives in the practice of religious devotion, so the whole fabric melted away. When Simon de Montfort destroyed the chivalry of Southern France, the troubadours perished from the earth. Some few, indeed, might keep alive a spark of the old spirit in foreign lands, but the flame was spent, and it could not be rekindled. In 1324 the townsmen of Toulouse tried to revivify the ancient lyric, but the Floral Games which they instituted, with prizes and degrees distributed before a great concourse of citizens, could not invigorate this child of chivalry. The old forms

## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

were maintained—indeed they were reduced to a science—and the lyric which had celebrated earthly passion now celebrated the love of the Virgin Mary and the love of God. Yet all real life had fled. The Provençal lyric was the offspring and the expression of chivalric society, and when that society died, this lyric died with it.

It was no problem poetry, as so much of our recent verse pretends to be. Limited in range, and appealing to the fancy rather than to the heart, it produced no surpassing singer, no Burns, no Heine. But its influence still survives. Like a butterfly among the flowers, it flourished for its brief season, and then perished utterly. And yet, in the artistic impulse which it gave to poetic endeavor, in the civilizing and, with all its faults, elevating



## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

influence which it exerted upon European ideals, and in the passionate, tender and brave romance with which it has gifted succeeding generations, the Provençal lyric remains, and must remain, a precious—in truth, an invaluable—contribution to universal literature.













