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FRANÇOIS VILLON



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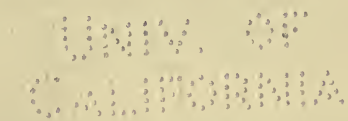
HIS LIFE AND TIMES

1431—1463

BY

H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

*Prince, let him forth be borne by Æolus  
To Glaucus in that forest far from us  
Where hope nor peace may ever on him glance.  
For he holds nought in him but worthlessness  
Who could wish ill unto the realm of France.*



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## PREFACE

### THE LAND OF THE GARGOYLE

TRAVELLING in France you may often get a glimpse of something that England cannot show you—a château with slated roofs and towers pointed each like a witch's cap.

The outline of a Chinese pagoda would not strike upon the retina more strangely than the outline of this veritable figure of stone, ambushed in valley or crouching on hill-top, and showing to the broad light of day the roofs that rose and the towers that took form when Amboise was building and before Bussy was a man. You pass on, the château fades from sight, but the picture of it will remain for ever in your mind. You have seen the Middle Ages.

My object is to present to you François Villon, one of the strangest figures in all literature, and one of the greatest of French poets. Were I to attempt to reach him immediately and entirely through the MSS. of the Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, or the Bibliothèque Nationale, or the Archives of the Côte d'Or, and were I to take

you with me, we would both be half asphyxiated by the stuffy smell of parchment, and we would part company, or arrive at our journey's end cross and tired and without finding Villon.

You cannot find a man through manuscripts, unless they are in the handwriting of the man. Archæologists and museum hunters may tell us all about a man's surroundings, his companions, his status in life, and his morals, as they appeared to his contemporaries, but to find the man one must find the man, and we can only find him through the expressions of his mind. And that is why so many dead men are so utterly dead. They have left nothing by which we can weigh them as men. Literary men fall under this freezing law no less than others, simply because the large majority of them leave on paper their ideas, fancies, inventions, and so forth, but of themselves little trace. Villon had the magical power of turning himself into literature, and that is why I propose to rob archæologists and students and all sorts of people on our road, so that we may find out in what sort of country Villon lived and something of the extent of his genius, but to discard or almost to discard these when we come to estimate Villon as a man—to discard everything but the literature which holds his mind and heart, and, almost one might say, his body.

Stand with me, then, on this French road in the year 1914 and, forgetting books and manuscripts for awhile, let that château with the pointed towers

touch you with its magic wand. All those modern houses crumble to dust, the railway-track vanishes, mule-bells strike the ear, pilgrims pass, their faces set towards Paris, and troops of soldiers, soon to be disbanded and to join the ranks of the unemployed, the labourers, the mendicants, and the robbers.

It is the year 1431. War is smouldering in the land; only a few short months ago Jean d'Arc was burned at Rouen. Henry VI of England, his archers and men-at-arms, are advancing away there to the west slowly towards Paris. Paris is starving. Charles VII, recently crowned, is King of France but as yet only in name, and over the whole broad land the spirit of the dead Maid is welding together the Armagnacs, the Poitevins, the Bretons, and the Burgundians to form the French nation.

Side by side with this creation of a people is going forward—or soon to go forward—the creation of a national language.—

Up to this France has spoken almost entirely in stone; up to this the architect has been the man of letters; up to this all those scattered tribes, Angevins, Poitevins, Burgundians, Armagnacs, and Bretons, have found expression for the genius that lives in man, not in verse or prose or painting, but in the pointed arch and shrill spire, the cathedral, fortress, and château.

We are in the land of the gargoyle. That château before us is the mind of the Middle Ages epitomised in stone, severe, narrow-windowed,

armed, and above all fantastic. When we reach Paris along that road on which the pilgrims are straying, you will see that château broken up and repeated in a thousand different forms, you will see its pointed roofs in La Tournelles, its weathercocks on the Hôtel de Sens, its towers on the Bastille, its portcullis as you cross the Petit Pont, and its fantasy everywhere.

And what you see here and what you will see in Paris is not a collection of stones cemented by mortar, but the carapace of the mind of the people. You are, in effect, looking at the literature of France in the year 1431.

As I have hinted before, France has not learned to express herself fully in poetry or prose. She has not yet learned properly to write, the mind of the people is pregnant with artistic speech, but as yet it can only murmur in verse and in tapestry or cry out in stone, yet even in these tapestries you may see the prefiguration of French literature, and even in these stones.

Over there at Bourges you will find the first verse of Villon's *Ballade of Jean Cotart*, not yet to be written for thirty years, on the main porch where Noah lies drunk and naked, and you will find his ballade of the *Contredits de Franc Gontier* hinted at in the sculptures of the Salle des Cheminées of the Palais de Justice in Paris. You will find Rabelais everywhere, from the Abbey de Bocher-ville to the Church of St. Jacques de la Boucherie, though Rabelais is not yet to be born for many

and many a year. Grim humour, gross humour, fantasy and a vague gloom, arising from the skull which is the basis of Gothic art, are found everywhere; we find façades that sneer, porches that criticise, bas-reliefs filled with pointed stories, a whole literature petrified and inhuman. The attempt, in fact, of the human mind to express itself in stone.

To Villon, who was born last month, will fall the high mission of helping to give the human mind expression in speech. The mocking verses of his *Testaments* will give voice to the spirit of mockery whose expression can now only be found chiselled in the lavatory of the Abbey de Bocheville,<sup>1</sup> or in the sculptures of Guillaume de Paris; his tenderness, his humanity, his tears can be found as yet nowhere, for stone cannot give expression to these.

Leaving aside the genius and directness of vision of this man who has just been born into the world—or rather perhaps because of them—Villon's highest mission will be to tell future ages that the inhabitants of the land of the gargoyle were living and human beings, not mediæval figures. That will be the highest mission of one who, with Aristophanes and Homer, holds the position, far above all royal positions, of a world-link—the man whose destiny it is to be ever living in a world ever dying.

So, standing here on this French road in the

<sup>1</sup> See Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*.

year 1431 before that isolated château and under its spell we may gather some hint of the rigid world into which our poet has just been born, some idea of that huge edifice of stone which Art has constructed as a mode of expression for the dreams and the humours of man, and which has turned into a sarcophagus for the corpse of thought—a sarcophagus to be shattered by the voice of that infant over there in Paris and by the voices of others still unborn.

# CONTENTS

## PREFACE

	PAGE
THE LAND OF THE GARGOYLE . . . . .	V

## CHAPTER I

THE DIM PEOPLE OF THE ROADS . . . . .	1
---------------------------------------	---

## CHAPTER II

THE CITY OF THE PRIEST AND THE NOBLE . . . . .	6
--	---

## CHAPTER III

THE CHILDHOOD OF VILLON . . . . .	23
-----------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER IV

HIS UNIVERSITY CAREER . . . . .	29
---------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V		
HIS FIRST EXILE . . . . .		PAGE 55
CHAPTER VI		
THE ROBBERY AT THE COLLEGE OF NAVARRE	60	
CHAPTER VII		
WHAT TOOK PLACE IN PARIS AFTER VILLON'S FLIGHT . . . . .		68
CHAPTER VIII		
VILLON BEGINS HIS WANDERINGS . . . . .		78
CHAPTER IX		
HE LEAVES ANGERS . . . . .		83
CHAPTER X		
HIS VISITS TO MOULINS . . . . .		87
CHAPTER XI		
HE VISITS THE DUKE OF ORLÉANS . . . . .		91



*Contents*

xiii

CHAPTER XII

	PAGE
HE REACHES THE CASTLE OF THE OGRE (1461)	101

CHAPTER XIII

HE RETURNS TO PARIS, 1461 . . . . .	106
-------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIV

FATE . . . . .	116
----------------	-----

CHAPTER XV

WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM? . . . . .	130
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVI

SUMMARY . . . . .	135
-------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVII

THE "PETIT TESTAMENT" . . . . .	136
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVIII

THE "GRAND TESTAMENT" . . . . .	146
---------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XIX

	PAGE
THE BALLADES NOT CONTAINED IN THE "TESTAMENTS" . . . . .	218

## CHAPTER XX

SOME NAMES AND PEOPLE . . . . .	234
---------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XXI

MODERN COMMENTATORS, WRITERS, AND TRANSLATORS . . . . .	240
--	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON THE VARIOUS EDITIONS OF VILLON'S WORKS UP TO 1916 . . . . .	247
--	-----

INDEX . . . . .	255
-----------------	-----

## FRANÇOIS VILLON

## His Life and Times

1431—1463

## CHAPTER I

## THE DIM PEOPLE OF THE ROADS

As we step back from the Past and stand here to-day before the old French château, glance for a moment at the country around us. To-day the word "country" calls up pleasant visions to the human mind. To-day poets sing of the beauty of the fields, and trees, and rivers, and mountains; even to-day we find some murmurings about verdure and flowers in the tapestries and songs of the folk who lived protected in the châteaux of 1431, but the country beyond the château garden was a grim place, where men, women, and children lived the lives of beasts, half starved, overworked, and ever followed by three phantoms—the soldier, the wolf, and the robber.

A peasant existed by virtue of his poverty—he was not worth killing or robbing; a wolf by virtue of his heels or his teeth; a soldier by the length of his sword; a noble by the strength of his castle;

and a robber by the sharpness of his dagger and his wits.

The country, in fact, in the year of our Lord 1431 and for many years after, was a desolation between two cities, a place where corn was grown and men were robbed, where the lamb came into the world and the wolf came out of the wood. The wolves were perhaps the first among the visible terrors of the country, and one may gauge their ferocity from the fact that they attacked the towns. They fought the dogs in the streets of Paris itself, and slew women and children within the walls. After the wolf came the soldier. War was always looming up in the form of armed bands: now the English; now the Burgundians, more savage than the English; now the Armagnacs, more savage than the Burgundians. And war to the poor man in the country did not come as war; he knew nothing of the name of the thing or the glory of the thing; he only knew it as an evil that added to the misery of life,—armed men breaking from among the trees, raiding the flocks, emptying the larder, firing the thatch; women ravished, children slain.

x In England the countryman was in comparative peace and safety, free from invasion and the sword. But here the soldier was one of the worst problems of a bitter life, and after the soldier the robber.

In England the robber was of the soil, he was a home-grown product, he was far better held in check, and he was less ferocious. When I say

home-grown I mean that here in France terrific aliens, men from the Barbary coast, Turks, and Easterns, men from Russia and Poland and the continent in general, joined the army of crime. They brought ideas cruel as the kriss, tricks as treacherous as the split dagger, weapons as keen as their wits and vices as terrible as their faces. There were no police. The archers and the horse and foot sergeants who kept order in Paris were not found on the country roads. Justice was dealt out in a rough-and-ready manner by the lords who lived in the châteaux and their men-at-arms, and even by the country-people themselves when they could get hold of a single robber and string him to a tree. But the utter absence of organised law left the evil practically untouched, and all over France in the year 1431, and for many years to come, crime organised itself, little trammelled, and the robbers, tricksters, petty thieves, and beggars were forming themselves into companies and societies with rules, laws, and even languages of their own. The gypsies had their king, their captains, their signs, and their argot; but the Coquillards or companions of the cockle-shell easily stood first among these robber bands of France. They stood first, not because of their numbers, but because of their methods and their genius. They were not robbers pure and simple, though always ready for robbery. They were dice throwers, with loaded dice; gamblers, with marked cards; coiners; sellers of smuggled indul-

gences ; drunkards, followers of girls, and brawlers in general.

All sorts of people joined them—priests, students, soldiers, and wastrels from the ranks of the nobility. The Coquillards numbered in their list the names of many well-known characters : that of Regnier Montigny, for instance, a sinister figure, allied to several of the noblest families—the Saint-Armands, the Brebans, the Chartrains. Montigny who, after numerous thefts and misdeeds, was sentenced, despite his nobility, to be hanged and strangled (*pendu et étranglé*), which sentence was carried out at Montfaucon. We also find in their list the names of Dambourg, Jacquet le Grand, Nicholas de Launay, Colin Cayeux ; possibly of Jacques Raguyer, destined to die Bishop of Troyes ; possibly of François Villon, destined to live for all time ; certainly of Guy Tabary, and a swarming host of other men destined in name, but not perhaps in soul, to die for all eternity.

The language of this extraordinary band of malefactors who in dim procession are to enter the literature of future ages, the language—or rather the argot under which they hid their evil thoughts and designs—is destined to live, though masked and almost unintelligible, in two pieces of writing. One is the information which Perrenet le Fournier handed to the magistrates at Dijon in 1455, a document containing many details and some slight clue to the argot ; the other consists of six weird ballades, which, under the title of *Jargon et Jobelin*,

Pierre Levet published in an edition of Villon's poems in the year 1489.

This argot is full of mystery and night. The few known words are full of vigour. Prison figures as "La Jarte," a cut-purse as "le vendangeur."

The argot of these shadows was a language born of cities, but as the winter drives wolves from the wood, so did the winter of Justice drive the Coquillards and other bands of robbers from the cities and the towns. They were the terror of the roads, just as the wolves were the terror of the woods and the soldiers of the fields.

Under the influence of these terrors, to say nothing of the terrors of hunger, frost, and snow, one can form some estimate of the mind of the ordinary countryman and of its attitude towards travellers with lean purses.

One can understand almost completely why a Paris poet with nothing in his pocket might prefer to sing of other things than the joys of the country.

It has been said of Villon that nature made no appeal to him.

Can you wonder?

## CHAPTER II

### THE CITY OF THE PRIEST AND THE NOBLE

IF one could recapture a few billion miles of the great coloured picture that is ever rushing off from the world to be lost in space, and re-read from it the history of the world, or that part of it which would show the growth of Paris, we would see, were we to start at the very beginning of things, the Seine flowing quietly between green banks and around a small island covered with trees. We could never imagine the destiny of this sylvan spot of earth with its bending willows, flowing river, and quiet little island around which the river flows. Who could fancy that the gods had selected these few acres of rest and peace on which to build a city which above all others must stand as the city of fever and unrest ?

As our imaginary picture moved forward it would show trees being felled on this island surrounded by the Seine and huts being erected. Then scenes of war would come, with men taking refuge on the island and discovering the fact, that a piece of land surrounded by water is a natural fortification and the next best thing to a castle.



Then you would see houses rising on the island, and on the island's banks rude earthworks to protect the houses. By this time the men who have seized the island have discovered the fact which England has discovered by this—the fact that water can be the best friend of man. Just as the Channel gives England peace, the strip of swiftly flowing Seine on either side of the island gives the inhabitants comparative security.

The houses increase and multiply, and now the moving picture shows two bridges building to join the island to the bank on either side—one on the right, one on the left; and where the bridges join the river-banks two fortresses rising to protect the end of each bridge.

The fortress which protects the bridge on the right bank is called the Grand Châtelet, that on the left the Petit Châtelet.

When the bridges and fortifications are finished, we have the first city of Paris—an island town where huts are giving place to houses and houses to churches, and where the masons are soon to be at work on Notre Dame, whose corner-stone was laid by Charlemagne.

Years pass and Paris still remains a tiny place, self-contained, protected by the Seine and seemingly always to remain a little town.

But this little town has in it the germ of growth. It can no more remain a little town than a genius can remain in the ranks of mediocrity. Just as our poet Villon was the stock from which the

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bouillon of French literature is made, so was this little town the pot which held the fiery stew of Parisian character. It boiled over. Houses began to appear on either bank, and round the houses to protect them a wall.

But Paris was still growing, and beyond this wall more houses appeared, and so rapidly did they appear, and so numerous did they become, that to protect them Philip Augustus was compelled to build a circular line of towers that stood like armed men warning enemies off, and warning Paris to contain itself and grow no larger. But Paris was still growing, and, impelled by this mysterious spirit of growth, it passed the towers of Philip Augustus and spread beyond them, strewing the plain with houses, till Charles V in the year 1367 was compelled to protect these new houses with yet another wall. In the time of Villon—that is to say, towards the year 1450—Paris had long passed the wall of Charles V, and was already an enormous city and not far short in size of the Paris of the Second Empire. It had already gathered to itself not only men and arms, but ideas and learning and the fine arts. Its life was varied, multi-coloured, and vivid. It held the mother of all French cathedrals in Notre Dame, the first of all French palaces in the Hôtel de St. Pol; its university numbered forty-two colleges and occupied the whole left bank of the river; it had four thousand taverns where the men who were learning to laugh in flesh, not in stone, might

forgather and sharpen their wits with wine and conversation; its women could out-chatter all women; and, despite the frosts of winter and the hardness of the times, it showed a warmth of social life to be found nowhere else in Europe. Let us never forget that the sun shone in the Middle Ages just as it shines to-day. Never let Montfaucon and Henri Cousin the sworn tormentor govern entirely your ideas of the Paris of 1450; nor Claude Frolo your ideas of its monastic life; nor Montigny and Colin de Cayeux your ideas of its tavern life. Men were men in those days, and not mediæval figures, and women were women and life was life, and to show you Paris with the sun shining and the bells ringing and the breezes blowing, you must rise with me as the bird rises into the blue, and forget the present in reviewing what we are pleased to call the Past.

Beneath us lie ten thousand roofs and half a thousand spires, and who can number the weather-cocks twisting and turning to the winds of spring?

Immediately beneath us lies the island of the Cité crusted with houses and churches. Twenty-one spires beside the towers of Notre Dame rise from this small quarter alone. A sharp eye can pick out the Rue de la Juiverie, where is situated one of the most notable taverns in Paris—the Pomme de Pin. That square space across which people are straying in front of Notre Dame is the Parvis de Notre Dame, and that heavy roof

nodding at Notre Dame across the Parvis is the roof of the father of all hospitals, the Hôtel Dieu.

Heavens ! what a crush of house roofs, weather-cocks, church roofs, church spires and gables does this tiny island of the Cité show to us ! It is like a porcupine for points, and were you to fall you would almost certainly be spitted on a spire. Only to eastward is there a little clear space of ground, beside the clear space of the Parvis de Notre Dame, and to westward where lie the gardens of the king.

From this height the streets of the Cité look like narrow trenches cut in this world of roofs and spires. They are many, and the Rue de la Juiverie is the broadest. From this height the roofs of the cité pick themselves out and proclaim what they shelter to the knowing eye. Here we have the leaden roof of the Sainte Chapelle, and to the westward of the Sainte Chapelle those towers, strident and arrogant, proclaim "beneath us lies the Palais de Justice." To southward of Notre Dame that roof recalling the hands of the Roman masons proclaims itself as covering the palace of the Bishop ; close by, the hôtel of Juvenal des Ursines frets the sky ; and there, grim and dark, lie the roofs of the Marché Palus. Then the spires and the towers of the churches—the towers of Notre Dame, the spires of the Sainte Chapelle, St. Denis du Pas, St. Pierre aux Bœufs, St. Landry, and the seventeen other spires of the seventeen other churches congregated in this narrow space—

each one is distinguishable by its form and size and age, and on a feast-day, to the ear, by the voices of its bells. Poised above the Cité we notice all these things and something more. We are looking down at an island, yet we seem to be looking down not at an island, but on a part of the great city that spreads itself upon the right and the left banks of the river. The five bridges connecting the Cité and the banks help to form the illusion. They are so close together and so crusted with houses that they almost hide the water.

Oh! these houses clinging like marten-boxes to the Petit Pont, the Pont au Change, the Pont aux Meuniers, the Pont Notre Dame, and the Pont St. Michel, green with lichen from the river-mists and damp, decayed, old, mysterious, and half sinister in their decrepitude, what pen can paint them as they hang there between river and sky, the back windows convenient from which to drop a corpse into the black water moving like a snake below, the front doors opening on the mediæval life always pouring across the river from the University to the Cité, from the Cité to the Ville? It was to one of these houses that Catharine de' Medici came to consult René on the eve of St. Bartholomew; and it might have been in one of these houses on the Petit Pont that Villon brought the chattering fish-women into his Ballade of the Women of Paris. They are houses belonging neither to the Cité, the University, nor the Ville, only to the thoroughfare connecting those three quarters

of the city of Paris ; but they remain for me always the most fascinating buildings in this City of Fascination, for the reason that they are the most obscure, hiding in the mists of the river as well as in the mist of the Middle Ages.

Let us pass beyond them to the left bank and poise for a moment high above the University. When all this left bank of the river was green fields and windmills and willows, when Paris was a tiny city contained in the island of the Cité, when the masons' trowels were sounding on the stones of Notre Dame, the University of Paris was in germination, for the school placed under ward of the chapter of Notre Dame was the seed from which the University sprang.

Then, when Paris burst the bonds of the Cité and spread over the right and left banks of the river, by some process of selection impossible to discover, the growing University chose to spread itself over the left bank, the growing opulence of the realm of France, as expressed by the king and the nobles, over the right bank.

So, as in a glass darkly, we can see at the very beginning of things the Church leading its dim procession of scholars across the Petit Pont and through the gateway of the Petit Châtelet to found its colleges on the Montagne Ste. Geneviève, and the State leading its king, nobles, heralds, pursuivants, trumpeters, and men-at-arms across the Pont Notre Dame to found on the right bank

the Louvre and the Hôtel de St. Pol and the Bastille, whose towers were yet unsketched against the sky.

Poised here high above the University we can see with a glance of the eye the power of Thought.

Dim, grotesque, almost barbaric, with the grammar of Ælius Donatus in one hand, with the works of Aristotle clasped to its breast in the other, sandalled and tonsured, half-monk, half-pedagogue; fierce, gigantic, childlike, it crossed the bridge, cast down its books, and began to build.

And that sea of roofs was the result, covering those acres of houses.

They stretch along the Seine bank from the Tournelles to the Hôtel de Nesle, and from the Seine bank they sweep upwards over the Montagne Ste. Geneviève and beyond to the wall of Philip Augustus.

Roofs, roofs, roofs, angular and dark; flashing in the sun after rain, twirling their weather-cocks to the winds of spring, white under the snow of winter, built together so that the effect is that of one enormous house of ten thousand gables. Nothing could be more striking than this roof view of the huge old University of Paris, angular and hard as the mediæval writing in her charters and bleak as the teachings of her theologians. The roofs of the forty-two colleges dominate all the others and spread themselves here and there over the whole University quarter, but more especially over the swelling rise of the Montagne Ste. Gene-

viève ; and, breaking up from amidst them, the shrill spires of the churches and the houses of the religious orders proclaim the dominion of the Church over learning. Here we have the triple spires of the Bernardines, here the spire of St. Benoist le Bien Tourné, there Ste. Geneviève (the church of the patron saint of this sacred hill) ; but the airy spires of the churches, the grace of the Hôtel de Cluny and the Logis de Rheims, the humour of the weather-cocks and the elegance of the abbeys, detract scarcely at all from the grim effect of that huge conglomerate of roofs, angular, massive, the very shell of mediæval logic, arts, and theology.

Looking down from this height, two streets cutting like trenches through this mass of slating strike the eye more especially. The first is the Rue St. Jacques, which cuts through the whole city, passing over the Petit Pont and through the Cité under the name of the Rue de la Juiverie, over the Pont Notre Dame, and through the Ville under the name of the Rue St. Martin. The other street is the Rue du Fouarre, where the schools are situated. It is closed at both ends by barriers. It derives its name from the straw with which the examination-rooms are strewn—straw in winter, herbs in summer—and even at this height we can hear the row of the disputations from its classrooms. Compared with the other streets of the University quarter it vibrates more shrilly, like the over-stretched string of some solemn instrument, a string often threatening to snap in revolt.



So, stretched beneath our imagination, lies the great University of Paris—the Mother of Universities, grave and grey and grim, of which Abelard was the first professor and of which the last French scholar will be the last student; the University that gave Roger Bacon hospitality and Villon his degree in arts; the University whose spirit still lives in the minds of its children's children, but whose form has passed away as utterly as a mist blown by the wind.

Turning from it, and crossing the Seine and the Cité by the road of the birds, we find beneath us the third great quarter of mediæval Paris—the Ville. Semi-circular in form, like the University but enormously larger, the Ville lies beneath us, appealing to the eye from a hundred points and mostly from the roofs of palaces, the gardens of palaces, the towers of the Bastille, and the rooftops of the business houses and the houses of the Bourgeoisie situated in the centre of the Ville and surrounding the Croix de Trahoir. Yet another point, and a broad one at that, fascinates the eye—the Place de Grève right on the quay edge, surrounded on its three sides by great old houses, marking its junction with the Seine edge by the Tour Roland, and its true function and office by the gibbet erected in its centre.

But despite the Place de Grève, the Bastille, the Croix de Trahoir, Montfaucon and its gibbets, the Place aux Chats, and the other gloomy points whose very names spell punishment and death, the Ville

continues to hold our eye by the splendour of its palaces and the beauty of its gardens. Along that same Seine edge from which opens the Place de Grève, great houses of the nobility mirror themselves on the water of the Seine as the towers of Chaumont mirror themselves on the Loire.

Behind them, like a city within a city, lies the Hôtel de St. Pol, owned by the Kings of France, a vast structure composed of four great mansions all joined together, the gardens, lakes, trees, and out-buildings all fused into one common preserve.

In size and certainly in magnificence the Hôtel de St. Pol stands first among palaces in this little city of palaces and gardens—the Ville. After the Hôtel de St. Pol comes the Louvre with its twenty-three towers; and after the Louvre, perhaps, comes the Palais de Tournelles fretting the sky with a hundred spires and turrets; and next to the Tournelles the Logis d'Angoulême with its gilded roof. All that great green space beyond the Tournelles is the garden of the King. Trees, flower-beds, lawns, lakes, and swans, it lies, like the gardens of the Hôtel de St. Pol, like the gardens of the Logis d'Angoulême, like the courtyards of the Louvre, like the pleasure-grounds of the Logis de la Reine, like the parterres of the Hôtel de Jouy, like the tennis-courts of the Hôtel de Sens, an evidence of the pleasure of the King and the ease of the nobility.

But the King's pleasure speaks loudly and in a

grimmer fashion through the mouthpieces of those great black tubular towers bunched together like eight monstrous malefactors standing on the right of the Tournelles and guarding as it were the Porte St. Antoine. They are the Bastille.

There have been three Bastilles in Paris—the Bastille du Temple, the Bastille de St. Denis, and this, the Bastille of the Porte St. Antoine, of which the first stone was laid by Hugues d'Aubriot, Provost des Marchands in the reign of Charles V, and on the twenty-second day of April, 1369. This first stone was laid by the hand of a bourgeois, but by the order of the King. To-day in the year 1431 the Bastille is only sixty-one years of age; it is in its youth. When it was born sixty-one years ago it consisted of two round towers set on either side the Porte St. Antoine; afterwards two additional towers parallel to the first two were built, and the whole connected by walls; later on, in the year 1383 in the reign of Charles VI, four more towers were added, and the whole eight towers were joined together by walls of enormous thickness. The old Porte St. Antoine was closed and the way of entrance to the city carried round the building.

Looking down, we can see the tops of the eight guarding towers, the arbalétriers doing sentry-go on the roofs, the mediæval cannon like black dogs nosing Paris, and in the centre of this great mass of masonry two dark wells. One is the great court, the other is the court of the well.

Villon refers to the Bastille simply as the House in the Rue St. Antoine !

Now, beyond the Bastille and the Tournelles, follow with your eye that chain of roofs, the roofs of the numberless religious houses, breasted in by the wall of Charles V, follow the semicircular trend of it till you come to that great break like a pit cut by a rodent ulcer in the architecture of the city. It is the Cour des Miracles. The appalling leprosy of evil seems to have attacked the very stones and tiles of the houses that surround that market square, the true Goblin Market of mediæval France. High above it as we are, we can notice its most salient features. It has corroded and eaten away the old wall of Paris. The high and heavy-eaved houses that surround it seem worn out by debauchery ; ragged, half tiled, and ruinous, they sit like those old prostitutes of Villon's ballad,

Assises bas, à croppetons,  
Tout en ung tas comme pelottes,

the very weariness of age and vice. Amidst them stands one of the old towers of the wall like a man-at-arms gone to decay, dismissed the service, and driven by vice to this low company.

The smell of the place comes up to us even here, the smell of garlic, and rags, and offal, and ordure ; decay and death. It is unapproachable. The very sergents of the Châtelet who beard even the University, the very Provost of Paris and his

lieutenants, pause before the Cour des Miracles as men pause before a pestilence. It is the home of the Coquillards, of the gipsies, of the beggars and the thieves. It is known all through Europe and is recruited from every country. It has its argots, its kings, its people who permeate everywhere, and its dreadful ambassadors who come from nowhere; it is the capital of nightmare-land. The Coquillards use it for a head centre, so do the gipsies, so do the robbers and beggars who infest Paris.

Here you will find the Turk and the Spaniard, the Slav and the Greek, and here you will find, worse even than these, the Parisian; you will find them all in rags, for rags are the uniform of this company of crime, and all to a man without mercy or religion, and all living here in the Cour des Miracles, within sound of the bells of the forty-four churches of the Ville and the murmurings of the Filles Dieu!

Now, scarcely altering our position, but rising higher in the sky, let us view the whole of this amazing city with one glance of the eye. The University, the Cité, and the Ville all lie beneath us, revealing their secrets, their incongruities, their strength and their weaknesses, their beauty and their terror.

Here, truly you may see the mind of the Middle Ages made visible. Not a roof in all that city but tells its tale, not a street.

The angelus will soon be sounding from the

Sorbonne, and the same wind that will blow us the sound on this fine April evening is stirring the almond blossom in the gardens of the King and the corpses swinging on the gibbets of Montfaucon.

The shadows are falling on the Place de Grève, on the Croix de Trahoir, on the Pont Champeaux, and on the twenty other places where men are hanged every day or broken on the wheel; on the Cemetery of the Innocents, where prostitutes and thieves forgather at dusk; on the Rue de la Juiverie, where the Pomme de Pin is filling with students. Beneath us the whole life of the greatest mediæval city is just on the point of being held up by dusk. The cries of the hawkers in the Rue de la Juiverie are ceasing, and the voices of the fishwives on the Petit Pont, and the songs of the washerwomen beating their clothes between the bridges. The sounds of the day are changing to the sounds of the night, and the lamps are springing alive and the windows lighting up all along the Seine bank, all across the Ville, the Cité, and the University. They twinkle for awhile in the gathering darkness, and then the lamps of the Cité fade and go out. Notre Dame is sounding the curfew of the Cité. For an hour the lights of the Ville and the University answer each other across the water, and then the right bank is swallowed by a tide of darkness, for St. Jacques de la Boucherie is ringing the curfew of the Ville. The city beneath us seems slowly closing its eyes; only the lights of the University remain spreading over the

Montagne Ste. Geneviève, and in the passing of an hour they too fade, for the Sorbonne is sounding the curfew of the University. Silence follows on the darkness; the crying of the hawkers, the chatter of women, the bustle of traffic—all have ceased; but through the silence can be heard the ferment of the night-life of the town, where the students are creeping from the University to beat the streets and the sergeants are issuing from the Châtelet, armed with staves and lighted lanterns, to watch for incendiaries and brawlers; where the beggars and the homeless are crawling to sleep under the butchers' stalls of the markets, and the light girls, like painted shadows, are hiding in porch and corner, or plying their trade by the Paris moat or in the cemeteries and gardens.

From all those lampless streets, those coigns of darkness and spaces of shadow, now rise points of sound—the call of the watchman, the far-off shouting of students, the scream of a woman, and the vague murmur telling of the life that is fed by the four thousand taverns, viewless under the curfew, but plying their trade none the less. The muffled voices of a furious debauchery rise from a city of darkness where no light shines, except over there that glimmer from the window of Made-moiselle le Bruyères, who is telling her beads, and over there that square ember which is the Cour des Miracles, burning its bonfires in the face of the angelus and curfew, and showing against the blackness like the mouth of Hades.

As the moon rises and the night passes, the noises of the night resolve themselves into the crowing of cocks and the bells that tell the hours.

Ten thousand roofs, five hundred spires, weather-cocks, domes, and spindled towers cover the dreams of a people fantastic as their city and a city fantastic as a dream. A city where animals are solemnly tried for witchcraft, and where sorcery is a trade and alchemy a fine art. (A city where the King rules over the court at the Louvre, where Mathias Hungadi Spicali rules over the court of Miracles, and Aristotle over the schools of the Rue du Fouarre;) where Henri Cousin breaks men on the wheel and boils them alive in the cauldron of the swine-market and where Mademoiselle (le Bruyères) prays for souls; where the Abbess (de Pourras) pays for drinks, and the priest is a libertine and the saint a priest; where the fool is once a year elected Pope, and the Pope degraded into the position of the fool.

Surely of all mad and contradictory people these dreamers beneath their spires, their gargoyles, and spindle towers are the most contradictory and the most mad. Inhuman and beyond the pale of our sympathy, one might say, if one had never heard them speak through the one mouth which God gave them to speak with to posterity—the mouth of François Villon.



## CHAPTER III

### THE CHILDHOOD OF VILLON

FRANÇOIS de Montcorbier, alias François des Loges, afterwards to be known as François Villon, was born in the year 1431, and we know nothing about his birth, little about his mother, and less about his father. We can only say positively that he was born of poor parents and within the boundaries of Paris. The fact of being born within the sacred boundary made him a "child of Paris," and so entitled to sundry quaint old privileges to be mentioned later on.

Nothing could be darker than the history of the birth and childhood of Villon, and yet nothing in literature is more distinct and lovable than the glimpse he gives us of the mother who bore him, who looked after him in childhood, and to whom he brought sorrow. Of all those wonderful etchings, those pictures with the stroke of a pen with which the Ballades and the Testaments fill our mind, that of the Mother of Villon is the most poignant, the most real, and the most living.

Poor, ignorant, superstitious, old, and withered, we see her kneeling for ever before the stained-

glass window of the Church of the Celestines in the Ballade which he wrote for her, and we hear him presenting her with this immortal picture of herself as a sort of solace for all the grief he had given her.

Item, donne à ma bonne mère,  
 Pour saluer nostre Maistresse,  
 Qui pour moy eut douleur amère,  
 Dieu le sçait, et mainte tristesse. . . .

Dieu le sçait !

The fact that she was illiterate and unable to read did not prevent her from presenting to the world one of its greatest poets, and the fact that his wildness was a part of his genius, inseparable as the thorn from the rose tree, she could never know ; she lived in utter darkness as to the cause of things. Why God had made her son a trouble to her she could not tell. With no cause for faith she believed in God—and her belief was justified.

The works of Genius are full of incalculable surprises. This ballade of Villon to his mother casts its light in a hundred ways. It reveals to us a woman, and it makes a woman reveal the beauty of her soul, and the Church some part of the mystery of its power ; it tells us that Ignorance cannot touch with its dull hands the knowledge of the heart, and it shows us Faith as no other picture in the world has ever shown us Faith. It lights the evil of the man that wrote it, the weary life of the woman about whom it was written,

and it is the touchstone of the genius of the writer.

Written by the greatest realist that the world has ever known, it teaches us that true realism is not the reproduction of the dirt of life but the soul of things. Villon might have drawn us a picture of his mother at the wash-tub—had he been a Zola that would doubtless have been the extent of his realism. He presents her to us on her knees, and that is his greatest triumph, for that is what she *was*.

When Villon was born the English were masters of Paris, and through all the years of his early childhood Paris was the storm-centre of France. Weather and war seemed to vie with one another as to which should bring the greatest load of misery to the people. Forty days of snow are registered in the archives of 1435, "the trees died and the birds," and the English left in 1436 and Charles VII arrived in 1437; but the leaving of the English and the arrival of the King left the poor as miserable as ever, as hungry, and as cold. There was no bread; people ate the filth of the rubbish heaps and died crying out to Jesus that they died of hunger and cold.

Outside in the country the distress was worse. Even the wolves felt it. The war had stripped the country of food and paralysed labour. Villon, in one of his verses, speaks of poverty driving men to crime as winter drives the wolves from the wood. Our realist was not drawing upon his im-

agination ; all through the years of his childhood the wolf had been at the door of Paris. When the starving country-folk sought refuge in the starving city, the wolves came behind them, fighting their way in and attacking and devouring the dogs in the streets ; they killed women and children ; and the smallpox followed on the wolves as the wolves followed on the war. Yet war, wolves, smallpox, cold, and starvation could not kill the quenchless spirit of these Parisians. They hung absurd effigies of the English in the streets, and they lit bonfires to greet the entrance of Charles, and presented plays and mysteries ; they laughed and chattered at sight of the smallest bit of blue sky ; and when the clouds of disaster had passed, the city recovered itself, after the fashion of Paris, which since its birth has always been recovering itself.

We may fancy, then, this Montcorbier household making its fight for life with the rest of the city, and nothing could be much darker than the history of that obscure family were we driven to seek for it in archives and records. Yet already from Villon we know the character and almost the face of the woman on whom no doubt the main stress of the battle fell, and already we see, from the evidence of Villon himself, a grand old figure beginning to sketch itself in that darkness, the figure of the man who adopted him, Guillaume Villon, Canon of St. Benoist. In those days, as now, the Church rested its hand not only on the

shoulders of the people but on the heads of the children. Most of what we would call the primary schools were connected with some cathedral or church, and we may very well believe that François de Montcorbier first came under the notice of Guillaume Villon as François sat, a miserable enough spectre of childhood, learning his letters in some cold class-room.

Everything we know about this old Canon Guillaume Villon points to his goodness of heart. He was well-to-do and possessed houses, and did not press the tenants for their rent ; he adopted little François de Montcorbier and, what is more, treated him well. Villon loved him, left him his library in derision, and then, with a catch in his throat, left him this patent to immortality and all men's friendship in seven words.

*Qui m'a esté plus doux que mère !*

Everything we know about the authorities who ruled over the University and the youth of Paris throws the good character of Guillaume into higher relief. Contrast with him that ruffian Jennat de Hainnonville, who beat his pupils and broke their limbs, made their lives a misery, and charged them for board and lodging ; contrast with him all the University crowd, from the Rector to Jean Hue, stiff and starched, severe, mouthing dog-Latin, and ever on the side of the ruffian students as against the town. Peaceable old Guillaume Villon has nothing to do with these. He is the one warm spot that we can appreciate

in all that chill University. Sipping his Beaune and friendly towards man, filled with the quaintest fancies about immortality and death, he stands with the mother of the child he adopted at the door of its life.

## CHAPTER IV

### HIS UNIVERSITY CAREER

GUILLAUME lived in a house named the Porte Rouge situated in the cloister of St. Benoist le Bien Tourné, which, in turn, was situated near the Sorbonne. Here he took François de Montcorbier to live with him, paid his college expenses, and started him in life. At twelve years of age one was entitled to present oneself at the University to study in the faculty of Arts, and one must suppose that there was some sort of examination for matriculation, inasmuch as the newcomer was expected to be able to read and write.

We have seen the roofs of the University from above, let us examine it now inside as well as out.

Here in the University's streets the sense of chilliness and formality which we gathered from our view of the roofs vanishes like snow in fire. The narrow streets are violently alive, crowded with students, some in long robes, others—the bloods—in short vests and wearing shoes of soft tanned leather, everyone tonsured, down to the twelve-year-old child just joined, and two out of three with a convenient dagger hidden on the

person. The students of Arts are the gentlemen with the short vests ; we can pick out by different signs all the students belonging to the different faculties, of which there are four—Theology, Medicine, Décret, and Arts—and you may mistake a student of Theology for a student of Medicine, but you never can mistake an Arts student. He is the devil in all this strange mixture, the centre and cause of all University disturbance ; if he is not wearing a short vest, and rings on his fingers, and shoes *à la poulaine*,<sup>1</sup> he is carrying a stick to beat people with, and if there is no other sign to tell him by, you can make sure of your man by his swagger.

But, scamp though he is as a rule, he does not absorb all the ruffianism of the University ; the students who study the science of Medicine—and Heavens ! what a science it is !—the Theologians and the others give him a full backing. This University, to put it in plain and straight English, is a hell, and the pet amusements of a large percentage of these tonsured individuals are fighting—often leading to murder or homicide—drink, gambling, rape, and robbery.

These amusements are conducted for the most part out of the precincts of the University, in the city beyond, where four thousand taverns and

<sup>1</sup> “ Oromedon begat Gemmagog,” says Rabelais, “ who was the first inventor of shoes *à la poulaine*, which are open on the foot, and tied over the instep with a latchet.”—*Pantagruel*, Book II, chapter i.



three thousand prostitutes are always beckoning across the water to Learning.

Nearly every one of these men who pass us is attached to a master of the University, lives with him, and boards with him, and you cannot watch them for a moment without being impressed by the fact of their difference in worldly status ; some are the most miserable objects ; if they have shoes they are worn out, if they have souls they are debased by the extremest poverty, by hunger, by cold, ill-use, and the performance of eternal drudgery. Those of these wretched ones who are attached to a master have to serve at table, to clean the rooms, and perform the meanest work that ever fell to mortal ; others beg their bread from door to door ; others keep company with the vilest characters in the Cité and Ville and pick up what they can by robbery.

Above these you have men better placed who pay a small sum a week for their board and eke out their existence by doing light jobs, copying books, etc. Above these come the aristocracy of the University with the blood flowing strong in its veins, well dressed but nearly always without a penny, sucked dry of money by the tavern, the brothel, and the gambling-shop, which is, in fact, always a tavern as well.

Here and there in the passing crowd you may see austere faces, sober faces, and faces lit by the light of ideality ; priests in embryo, bishops in posse, and a saint or two who has never been

canonised. Ten *sous parisis* is about the sum that the wealthy pay for their board; and at the age of fourteen the cleric is eligible for the Baccalaureate, the examination taking place in the Rue du Fouarre where the schools are situated. The examination for the Mastership of Arts takes place in the same Rue du Fouarre, and the candidate must be twenty-one years of age.

Villon took his Baccalaureate degree in the March of 1449. We can almost see him both now and at his examination for the Mastership of Arts, before the black-robed examiner, his tongue in his cheek and answering questions, mostly about rubbish. For the Baccalaureate he would be examined upon the *Organon* of Aristotle, *Les Topiques de Boèce*, *Le Grecisme*, and *Le Doctrinal*.

I have said that he would be answering questions mostly about rubbish without in the least intending to sneer at the curriculum of the Mother of Universities. She required astronomy and metaphysics, Greek and Latin, and a knowledge of the works of Aristotle—so much for the curriculum. Her professors, however, required much more; jargon to make clear things opaque, logic after the fashion of the old schoolmen with exquisite arguments on no foundation, Averroës to expound Aristotle, Jean de Salisbury to confuse Cicero; everywhere Fancy leading Ignorance, Cleverness constructing the most wonderfully logical yet absurd structures on air, Nonsense masquerading as Sense, and everywhere again, Jargon.

Villon hints that the jargon of the schools nearly drove him crazy.

But they talked sense in the taverns, and as Villon was a genius, and as the whole foundation of genius is commonsense, he, without any doubt, went to the taverns to find it.

They were in a manner the clubs and the coffee-shops of the day, just as the barbers' shops were the coffee-shops and clubs of Athens, and one can fancy the relief of escaping from those frigid and angular class-rooms, from Averroës and Aristotle and *Les Topiques de Boèce*, from the logic that led nowhere and the metaphysics and the black-robed metaphysicians, to the warm shelter of a tavern, a glass of good wine, and the company of human beings. There were, as I have said, four thousand public-houses to choose from, from the Pomme de Pin in the Cité, to the Grand Godet de Grève in the Ville, and to the Mule tavern in the University itself, and they exhibited all the virtues and all the vices that always exhibit themselves naked under the shelter of the vine.

It is very difficult to estimate the influence of wine on mediæval man, for at times he did most exceedingly drunken things when he was sober. We know him, from Villon's testimony, to have been a human being extraordinarily like ourselves, yet there are clouds in the mentality of this brother-man, and mists, that no explaining can well account for. Take the Feast of the Fools and see a whole city stirred to madness—by what? Take the

festivals of the Church and see sober churchmen crowning themselves with red roses—why? Take the whole of the University running like a hare-brained crew to capture the stone in front of the house of Mademoiselle le Bruyères, and set it up on the Montagne Ste. Geneviève—take their worship of it, as will be shown later on, and give me the reason of it.

All these things were the outcome of sobriety. We can trace no such lunatic action to the door of drink. Men fought with one another and killed one another through drink—that was perfectly logical. Men drank so much that they actually exchanged their clothes for drink and walked into the streets mother-naked—that, too, was logical and understandable. Men did all the wicked things that are the logical outcome of human imperfection inflamed by alcohol; but in their sobriety they often did stupid and wicked things for a reason that is absolutely beyond our comprehension and absolutely unconnected with the ordinary promptings of humanity.

The heart was human and like ours, but the brain was tainted by some trace of mist, from who knows where?—perhaps from the land of Paganism. And this mist, more or less attenuated, we find in all places where serious men forgathered, where they tried animals for witchcraft and put poor wretches to the question by water, where they administered the law, where they administered the sacrament of the Church; among the players

who performed mysteries and the audiences that watched, among the masters of the University and the scholars. We see it consolidated in the leaden figures round the filthy old cap of Louis XI, and it still clings about the gargoyles of Notre Dame, this weird, vague, lunatic Gothic—something beside which the antics of old drunken Jean Cotart are lovable, burglary a relief to the eye, and coining a human, if wicked, art.

This mist may have touched but it never clung to the mind of Villon, his works are free from it, they are all fresh air as compared with the atmosphere which surrounded him. He was perhaps the first entirely sane man who lived in Paris, the first who saw everything around him in absolutely clear air.

And it is a strange thing that the first work of this master realist had to do with the capture of that same stone I spoke about a moment ago, the *Pet au Diable*, and took the form of an epic poem, humorous you may be sure, and recounting the antics of the clerics who captured it from before the house of Mademoiselle le Bruyères and their battle with the sergents of the Provost who tried to take it back.

One day in the year 1451 the students of the University, with Villon among them, you may well be sure, marched *en masse* across the bridges of the Seine to the Place de la Grève, where, before the hôtel of Mademoiselle le Bruyères stood an immense stone named for some obscure reason the *Pet au Diable*. They tore it up and carried it off

in triumph to the University quarter, where they set it up in state, and if they did not worship it, their actions and their antics around it formed a passably fair imitation of worship.

The outcries of Mademoiselle le Bruyères and the news of the business caused a great commotion in Paris, so much so that the Parliament took a hand in the affair and ordered the Lieutenant-Criminel of the Châtelet to recapture the stone and prosecute the ravishers. Accordingly Maître Jean Bergon, attired in all the grandeur of his office and followed by his sergents, swept up the Rue du Mont St. Hilaire, seized the *Pet* and conducted it to the courtyard of the Palais-Royal, where it was placed in safe keeping to be used as a witness in the following inquiry and prosecution. Meanwhile, Mademoiselle le Bruyères, mourning her *Pet* as an old lady mourns her lap-dog, put up another stone, either as a tribute to its memory or as a temporary stop-gap, whilst the University, burning at its loss, gave itself furiously to think.

In a trice it gave itself furiously to act. Like a bee-hive burst open it discharged its swarms one evening across the Seine. Clercs and scholars, baccalaureates and graduates, Theology, Medicine, Décret, and Arts, armed with sticks, stones, mud, and daggers, they stormed the Palais, threatened to kill the porter, and recovered their treasure; but the rioting, once let loose, did not stop at the Palais. They swept up to the Halles, filling the Ville with sounds of battle. It was now Gown

against Town with a vengeance, and was in fact only an episode in the eternal Town and Gown warfare going on in Paris. They tried to unhook a public-house sign, and, doing so, one of the precious company broke his back; then, remembering suddenly the fact that Mademoiselle le Bruyères had set up a rival to their darling, back they tore to the Place de Grève, captured the unfortunate old lady's new *Pet*, and made off with it to the University.

Here both stones were set up and crowned with flowers, bonfires were lit, and a mad night of rejoicing followed.

So far so good.

It was now, however, the turn of the Cité and Ville to give themselves furiously to thought.

The good City of Paris had long suffered from its University.

The University was, in fact, a little kingdom of its own. Just as in the University of Oxford the undergraduates hold themselves aloof as a body from the townspeople, so did the scholars of Paris stand apart as a body from the civic life of the Ville and the Cité. Had they contented themselves with standing apart, the townsfolk would have been very well satisfied, but Messieurs les étudiants did not content themselves with standing apart, as a body. Individually they mixed with the life of the city, drank in its taverns, and frequented the public places.

They considered themselves a good deal above

ordinary individuals, and as the ordinary individual of that day was a pretty direct person, fights and brawls were frequent.

People grew grapes in that day right round the walls of Paris, and the students, who liked grapes and had no money or morals, robbed the vines; ducks paddled on the moat of Paris, and they stole the ducks; in a hundred small ways friction was always arising between the University and the town and the sparks were always liable to set the thatch alight.

Worse than this, among the rowdy scholars there was a large sprinkling of criminals, wolf-men who were always ready for murder and rape, terrific characters beside whom the thieves and the burglars of the town made small figures; and the thing that gave all these University men an extra potency for evil was the fact that each one of them, from the full-grown wolf to the cub of twelve, was set apart from the power of the common law and sealed by the mark of the tonsure. Just as a Japanese Daimyō went about with his crest on his back, so did the scholars of the University of Paris go about with the mark of the Church on their heads. The Provost, the Parliament, and even the King had no judicial power over the tonsured head; a University man caught stealing or ravishing or murdering had to be handed over to the University, and as the University—that is to say, the Church—had a horror of shedding blood, you may guess the result.



One cannot but feel a sincere sympathy for the bourgeois of Paris. To be assaulted by a ruffian is bad enough, goodness knows, without the knowledge that the ruffian who assaults you is safe from the law.

The City of Paris, then, when it gave itself to thought over the *Pet au Diable* affair, found quite a lot to think about : a long succession of riots and brawls dating from before the thirteenth century rose before its mind and suddenly moved it to action.

On the 6th of December, 1452, the City rose in the form of its Provost, Robert d'Estouteville, who, followed by his lieutenants and sergents, horse and foot, poured across the city towards the University and went right to the heart of the matter. That is to say, they stormed the steep Rue St. Hilaire, found the *Pet*, which stood impudently crowned with rosemary, tore it up, put it 'on a cart, and wheeled it away. Now, the 6th of December was a feast-day with the University, the militant section of which must have received hard blows from the men of the Provost, for they took refuge in a house, the Hôtel de Ste. Étienne.

The lieutenant of the Provost stormed the Hôtel de Ste. Étienne, broke down the doors, and gave orders to his men to kill all resisters.

It was a *débâcle* for the students. They had collected in the hôtel all their trophies. Just as the young bloods of 1840 and 1860 used to collect trophies of their midnight escapades in the West

End—a gentleman of that period told me some years ago that his included forty-four door-knockers—so used the students of Paris to collect tavern signs, butchers' hooks, and knives. These were all seized by the valorous lieutenant, together with the persons of a number of the students.

Flushed with victory and wine—for they broke open the cellars of the hôtel—the city swept on to the house of one of the masters where more of the militants were concealed, broke in, and arrested right and left.

The victory became an orgy. One can fancy the mediæval professors, masters, and deans congregated in safety and listening to the fight, but it would be difficult to imagine their outraged feelings when the news was spread that one of the sergeants of the Châtelet was strutting about the streets *in the robe of a scholar!*

However, the University took its defeat for the moment in silence. In the following May, however, it met in solemn council to consider the whole business, and the result of that meeting was a solemn deputation, headed by the Rector, which left the University and wended its way to the house of the Provost. Eight hundred students followed the deputation to give it effect.

The Provost listened to the deputation most affably, and, instead of lecturing it soundly on the maladministration of the University and sending it away with a caution, he promised that all the innocent scholars who had been arrested would

be set at liberty. He spoke it fair, in fact, and the Rector, followed by the deputation, left him, and regained the street where the eight hundred students, when they heard the news, cheered him to the echo.

Now came the worst of the whole business. The students had come unarmed. Trooping down the Rue de Jouy, they came in clash with Commissary Henry le Fèvre, a fiery-tempered gentleman at the head of a company of sergeants.

The students jostled the sergeants and the sergeants jostled the students, and the affair might have passed at that but for the fact that the University, which for years had been sowing the wind, was now fated to reap the whirlwind. Fèvre called to his men to draw their swords, and in an instant a bloody fight was in progress. The unarmed University men took flight—that is to say, the bullies and the wolves and the cowards. Others remained to protect the Rector. One of these, an innocent and harmless individual, but a hero without any doubt, was killed.

You may be sure that the University did not fail to take advantage of this affair. The City, for once, was completely in the wrong, and the University not only appealed to Parliament to give it reparation, but it also struck work to give extra force to its appeal.

This, perhaps the first strike in history, lasted for a year. Reparation was granted, and the University won.

I have described the affair in detail. It lights up the University with its conflagration, it lights up the city, and the mediæval mind. Men killed, men wounded, Paris in convulsions, the Parliament in confabulation, all the work of the University suspended for a year—on account of a stone.

It tells us that the Romance of the *Pet au Diable*, copied out by Guy Tabary, was not, as Stevenson imagined from its name, an improper romance, but an epic poem describing the whole affair.<sup>1</sup>

Villon says that it was lying in loose sheets under a table; he says that it was roughly done, but that

La matière est si très notable  
Qu'elle amende tout le mesfait.

If the poem existed, if its existence was not a figure of Villon's imagination, and if it was written by Villon, its loss is to be counted among the world's great losses. The sane mind and the subtle humour of Maître François Villon would have shown us, without any manner of doubt, these gentlemen of the University and city, not as they appear in the dim gloom of the archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale, but as they were, living and in action. It might also have thrown more light on his own life in the University.

<sup>1</sup> "The same remark applies to a subsequent legacy of the poet's library, with specification of one work which was plainly neither decent nor devout."

Again—"Tabarie was a man—who had copied out a whole improper romance with his own right hand."—R. L. Stevenson, *François Villon (Familiar Studies of Men and Books)*.

However, unaided by that powerful lamp, we may see his university life, darkly enough in places, too vividly in other places.

Though he lived with Guillaume Villon in the house called the Porte Rouge in the Cloister of St. Benoist, he studied and boarded with a master, Jean Conflans, Bursar of the College de Navarre, and in Jean Conflans' extraordinary writing, this entry may still be read in MS. No. 1 of the Bibliothèque de l'Université on a page of the register of the Nation de France :

Dominus François de Montcorbier de Par. cujus bursa ii s.p.

Now, two *sous paris* was the least one could pay for board ; it was the price of starvation, one may say ; yet if Guillaume Villon had been a rich man, which undoubtedly he was, and a good man, of which I am sure, how came it that he allowed his adoptive child so little for food ?

It is quite possible that, the Porte Rouge being close to the College of Navarre, François got most of his meals at home, and that the two sous were paid for partial board, that old William Villon made some arrangement with Maître Jean Conflans to this effect.

However that may be, I don't believe in the least that he was starved, though he says in the *Great Testament* that he was always too hungry to have much pleasure in love. He was not the person to starve without complaining, and the old Canon was not the man to close his ears to

the complaints of a hungry adoptive son. Yet I believe that he often suffered hunger through his own fault.

Running wild about Paris, he must often have missed his meals, at home or under the roof of Jean Conflans, and as he always seems to have been hard up, he could not have the wherewithal to purchase food as well as pleasure.

To arrive at some estimate of his University environment, imagine an Oxford lifted with some giant's spade and set down on the Surrey side of the Thames opposite London Bridge. Imagine London infinitely worse in morals and manners than the London of the Regency, and Oxford let loose by day and night on London, and assured in its own mind that, however it might conduct itself, it was pretty safe from the laws of London.

I do not wish to develop an *ex parte* argument against the University, and one must at least remember that the City of Paris sometimes—though rarely—said “A fig for the Church!” and hanged some tonsured malefactor; still, there is no denying the fact that few modern men have ever found themselves free to do evil as the students of Paris found themselves in the years that stretch between the years 1431 and 1464, and very few modern men have ever found evil so handy and waiting to be dealt with.

We have seen the students pouring through the streets of the University on their way to the schools or to the celebration of some festival. The

obverse of that picture is to be found in the streets of the Cité and the Ville when night is falling on Paris.

Then, in the old streets of the town, in the Rue de la Juiverie, in the Place de Grève, round about the Abreuvoir Popin, in the Cemetery of the Innocents, you will find these same students prowling like single wolves, or in bands.

I have said that there were four thousand taverns in Paris (according to Guillebert de Metz), but that does not give us a true estimate of the drinking capacity of the city. According to Pierre Champion, nearly everyone in Paris sold wine, from the highest to the lowest. Some sold it wholesale, some retail, but they sold it, and nearly every house added to the flood of Vin d'Aulnis, Burgundy, and Beaune that deluged the City of Paris.

Nightfall in this city of hard drinkers gave the University element its chance. The streets were unlit after curfew except by a glimmer here and there before a shrine; the police, if we may call sergeants of the Châtelet police, were as hard drinkers as the rest of the inhabitants and as venal as police have ever been; and, though the curfew snuffed out the lights of the city, we may be sure it left lamps burning in the drink-shops.

Under the ordonnances of St. Louis light women were condemned to inhabit certain quarters of the town, and not leave the streets of these quarters after dark, under pain of a fine of 20 sous.

But ordonnances were made to be broken, as

these were ; we find these women, in fact, living in some of the best streets of the town, and they undoubtedly mix with those shadows which we see flitting about the dark old streets of Paris after nightfall and contributing, as nothing but the female element could contribute, to the rows, the fights, and the general *diablerie* of the night.

Added to these, and to drink, we have the last pitfall dug by the Devil for mediæval students to tumble into—the gambling-house ; and to make the trap more sure the Devil had fixed the gambling-houses in the taverns.

The ordonnances forbade gambling ; more, they forbade games, even the *jeu de paume*—a great-great-grandfather, apparently, of our rackets. But the ordonnances did not stop gambling.

Cards and dice were the chief games.

The ordonnances that forbade gambling must have produced a most baleful result, in this way : gambling could not be carried on in the more respectable taverns frequented by honest bourgeoisie, or even in the second-class taverns where hosts were law-abiding and timid men, but only in those houses owned by men who did not fear the law—men with the courage of the criminal classes, or the callousness, if the term pleases you better.

The student who wanted to gamble—and I am very sure that Maître François Villon was of this number—would be drawn to the gambling-taverns and to worse. For in these places you would meet what he undoubtedly met with.



You would meet the crook—the man who played with loaded dice and marked cards, the smuggler of indulgences, the thief, and the burglar.

As surely as gravity holds the earth to the sun, so surely these disreputable taverns held the worst characters of Paris, and attracted to the company of those characters men who, without this fatal attraction, might have been fairly honest if not good.

I do not mean to say that these laws created evil, but they concentrated it.

If you will take any modern city you will find the laws producing just the same result. The low public-house is the house where gambling and betting are to be found, and where they are found you will find also the thief, the house-breaker, and the ruffian.

Given the gambling instinct, a student of the University would be attracted to more than the gambling-table; he would be drawn into a concentrated atmosphere of vice.

Here he would find ready spread for him the net which Villon found—the net of the Coquillard. These same Coquillards, as I have hinted before, formed a vast secret society spreading all over France with Paris for its head centre. Its sign was the cockle-shell, which was the sign of the Pilgrim. Its complexity and the extent of its ramifications may be judged by the fact that I am bound to consider it as one of the elements in Villon's university career. The society numbered

among its members all sorts and conditions of men, from the aristocrat to the merchant, from the merchant to the tavern-keeper, from the tavern-keeper to the cleric. It was a large business with as many departments as a New York store, and to extend the simile, its chief aim and object was to make money. Coining, burglary, highway robbery, selling indulgences and false jewellery, card sharpening and dice-playing with loaded dice, were chief among its industries.

But if you were to fancy that the Coquillards were pure and simple robbers whose aim in life was pure and simple robbery you would fall slightly short of the truth. Their aim was pleasure. They spent their money freely. They were *bons viveurs* who had the courage to live well by coining in an age when the coiner was boiled alive, when caught, and then hanged; by theft in an age when thieves, when caught, were "hanged and strangled."

Personally, I have much more sympathy with a burglar than with a man who adulterates milk; with a coiner than a man who sweats women; with a brigand than a promoter of bogus companies; and, though the Coquillards were without any manner of doubt a right-down bad lot as a whole, do not let us forget that they risked much more than life in the pursuit of pleasure.

The soul of crime is cruelty, the heart of crime is cruelty, the standard—the only logical standard by which we can measure crime—is cruelty. When a pickpocket robs a poor woman of her shabby

purse with a few shillings in it, he is committing an act infinitely more criminal than the act of the burglar who robs a rich man of his plate—the act is infinitely more cruel. I have no doubt that petty robberies of the poor were committed by members of the Coquillard band, but from the evidence before us their operations were mostly conducted against the well-to-do.

That is not very much to say for them, but still it is something. You will say that it applies to the criminals of to-day who conduct their operations mainly against the rich. It does. But it does not apply to the criminals of to-day who conduct their operations mainly against the poor. You will find Coquillards in heaven without any doubt, but the worst of the Coquillards will be admitted, I am very sure, on the day that St. Peter turns his key for the best of our sweaters and “cadets.”

Villon was undoubtedly connected with the company of the cockle-shell. How deeply was he involved? Let us get at some interesting facts.

In the year 1455 the Coquillards were very busy about Dijon, and Jean Rabustel, Procureur-Syndic of Dijon, a man evidently as vigorous as the sound of his name, left lesser work in the town and suddenly turned his attention upon them. He routed them out of Dijon, but he did much more than that. He induced some of them to give evidence. He disclosed to the Judges of Dijon not only the names of over sixty men of all classes

who were companions of the cockle-shell, but a whole literature, or at least a vivid glimpse of it.

Rabustel had managed to get hold of one Perrenet le Fournier, a barber of Dijon. Perrenet had many of the Coquillards among his customers. Perrenet, who must have been a pretty adventurous individual, not only cut the hair of the Coquillards and trimmed their beards, he drank and gambled with them, felt his way among them, felt their heads, so to speak, till, finding a head soft enough for his purpose, he extracted its contents. Perrenet always gives me that little shiver which the spider produces on one—the spider that lays its net, catches a fly, and sucks its brains.

Perrenet discovered from his dupes the argot of the Coquillards, he gave Rabustel a list of words from the argot with their equivalents in French, and this list Rabustel laid before the Judges of Dijon. It is still extant in the Archives Départementales of the Côte d'Or.

You will remember that in the first pages of this book I mentioned the fact that Pierre Levet the publisher produced in the year 1489 an edition of Villon's poems which included six strange ballades written for the most part in a jargon that was quite beyond the power of any man to understand.

They were Greek to Marot, who lived close to Villon's time; they were equally dark to Auguste Longnon, one of the greatest scholars of recent times; and they would still be dark to us were it not for Marcel Schwob.

Marcel Schwob was more than a man, he was a romance. This old white-bearded scholar of the Jewish type, of whom Pierre Champion is the worthy successor and who is shown to us so vividly by Pierre Champion in the preface of his great work *François Villon, sa Vie et son Temps*—this Marcel Schwob, who had devoted his life to the study of Villon amongst other studies, found himself, like Marot, like Gaston Paris, like Longnon, and like a dozen more, quite at fault before these six weird old ballades which Pierre Levet had included among the poems of Villon.

Marcel Schwob lived in Paris, and away at Dijon lay the archives of the Côte d'Or, dusty, unread, silent yet full of speech. What instinct, what calculation of genius made the old Jewish scholar reach out his hand, so to speak, and open these parchment volumes? Who can tell? But he did, and there he found the key to the mystery of the six ballades that spoke in an unknown tongue.

That old angular, mediæval writing of Rabustel gave a list of some of the unknown words with which the Ballades were bristling and a translation of them.

The Ballades were written in the argot of the Coquillards, and Villon, the writer of the Ballades, was automatically and at once condemned to wear the cockle-shell in his cap.

One might be tempted to ask whether these six ballades which Pierre Levet published under the title of *Jargon et Jobelin* were really written by

Villon or some one else. We know that a good deal of matter has been printed under Villon's name without warrant.

The balance of testimony, however, weighs towards the fact that Villon wrote them. He acknowledges in a ballade that is undoubtedly his that he knew the jargon and could talk it. Other ballades undoubtedly written by him and lately discovered shew the stain of the jargon.

And yet these same archives of the Côte d'Or, whilst they link Villon to the Coquillards, do his name a service.

It does not appear on the list of the malefactors drawn up by Rabustel, and yet that list is a long one.

Villon undoubtedly was connected with this society of scoundrels. We ask again, What was the extent of that connection ?

Putting aside all the antiquarians and speaking from my knowledge of the man's mind as revealed by his works, I can answer at once. It was a connection that involved part of his time and part of his intelligence. In other words, he was not a continuous and consistent criminal.

When you have read all I have to say about him, you will perhaps agree with me in this.

We can scarcely escape from the supposition that Villon formed a connection with this criminal society during his university career, presumably towards the latter end of it, but it would be wrong to imagine that the society he frequented was

entirely that of idle students, and questionable companions, and Coquillards.

One of the most curious things about this extraordinary man was the fact that he mixed with the highest and the lowest. He was in "good society." We find him dedicating a ballade to Robert d'Estouteville, and who was Robert d'Estouteville but the Provost of Paris! He numbered among his friends many notable people, from Guillaume Charriau to Martin Bellafaye, lord of Ferrières en Boise.

He is making rhymes to-day at the Pomme de Pin or the Mule, and to-morrow, shot out of Paris, he is down south making rhymes at the court of Charles of Orleans.

In Paris he is drinking, to-day, with the Abbess de Pourras, and to-morrow he is making love to Katherine de Vaucelles.

His position at the University casts a light on all these discrepancies.

Living with old Guillaume Villon, bearing his name, and in the position of his adoptive son, he must have held a very good position both in the eyes of the University and of Paris.

Knowing this, when summing up his university career, one might be tempted to say, Here is a young man with a splendid future before him, what a wastrel to chose the society of thieves, evildoers, and idlers!

Before passing judgment, however, let us consider for a moment what the prospect was that

lay before Villon on the day in 1452 when he took his degree of Master of Arts.

The Church, Law, and Medicine lay open before him.

There is no doubt at all that he could have made a good living in the Church. But the Church of that day was scarcely the field for a mind like the mind of Villon. He who saw the soul of things so clearly and the body of things so forcibly must have seen the Church of his time pretty much as we see it. He preferred to rob it rather than belong to it. Of two bad courses he chose the worse for his prosperity's sake, but for his soul's sake who shall say ?

He could have joined the profession of Medicine in a day when boiled toads and excrement, snake's heads and gibberish, were part and parcel of that wonderful science which, born with all the disgusting manners and language of an idiot, has at least learned sense and extreme cleanliness.

He did not become a medical man.

And the Law, which boiled a man and then hanged him, tried men and animals for witchcraft and condemned men to the horrors of the Châtelet and the mercy of the wheel, seems to have attracted him no more than Medicine or the Church.

So it came about that the degree of Master of Arts was the highest university honour he rose to. He took it in the year 1452, and so severed, at least so far as we are concerned, his connection with the University.



## CHAPTER V

### HIS FIRST EXILE

THREE years of darkness follow that same summer day when Jean Conflans, standing before the register of the Nation of France, gave Villon his certificate of Master of Arts and entered the fact in the register.

Then, of a sudden, the darkness clears away and we see him next in the full light of a summer's evening, on the 5th of June, 1455, seated on a stone under the clock of St. Benoist le Bien Tourné.

It had been a feast-day, and Villon, who had been assisting at a procession of the Church, had taken his seat to rest himself and talk with two friends—a priest named Gilles and a girl named Isabeau.

Whilst they were talking up came another priest, Philippe Sermoise by name, accompanied by a friend, Maître Jean le Mardi.

Philippe had a grudge against Villon, and began to pick a quarrel with him. Villon—according to his own account—tried to soothe the other, and even rose to offer him his seat. But Philippe refused

all advances, used some insulting language, and then Villon, in his turn, took fire.

Sermoise drew a dagger from his robe, and Villon not only drew a dagger but picked up a heavy stone.

Then, taking fright, Gilles and Isabeau ran away.

One can see the whole scene—the flying figures of the priest and the woman, and the two men left face to face.

Le Mardi tried to patch up the quarrel, but Sermoise advanced to the attack and Villon retreated, whilst Sermoise, striking at him, wounded him in the lip. Villon, striking back, wounded Sermoise so that he fell, and then, to keep him quiet, struck him on the head with the stone which he was still carrying in his right hand.

That last seems a blackguard action, and yet there is no outcry against it from Maître le Mardi, the friend of the wounded man, and Sermoise would scarcely have forgiven Villon had the latter used foul play. How came the stone into Villon's hands?

The picking of it up shows, I think, that he was on the defensive, not on the offensive side of the quarrel. You ask me how I would establish this fact, and I reply that as a man of action who has engaged in quarrels, instinct tells me that the man who attacks another man is not likely to add a stone to his armoury at the last moment, whereas the man who is attacked is certain to grasp at any extra weapon.

Besides, since the earliest times the stone is the weapon used by man to repel attack—chiefly the attack of wolves and dogs. This fact still lingers in the mentality of men and dogs, and if you wish to prove it, bend down and pretend to pick up a stone the next time you have any trouble with a dog. The most vicious dog must run away before this action of yours, not, primarily, because he fears you, but because he must. His mental clockwork has been constructed so to act through long generations of ancestors with a knowledge of men and the power of stones, and it acts automatically.

It is the same with men, and a man alarmed and on the defensive would, most undoubtedly, have acted automatically just as Villon acted.

He was repelling attack.

Leaving Sermoise lying on the ground, he rushed off streaming with blood to the nearest barber to have his wounds dressed.

The barbers of that day were also surgeons, and they must have had their hands full dealing with wounds given and received by desperadoes, for they were bound by law to inquire the names of their patients and of the men with whom their patients had been quarrelling.

Villon gave the name of Michel Mouton, and did not wait to have the name verified. He left Paris almost immediately.

As for Sermoise, they carried him—with the dagger still in the wound—to the Cloister of St.

Benoist and then to the Hôtel Dieu, where he died some days later.

His deposition is entirely in favour of Villon having been the defendant in the quarrel. Sermoise, without declaring himself in the wrong, asked that the affair might be let drop, and said that he pardoned the man who killed him.

Sermoise, despite the fact that he drew the quarrel, certainly comes out of the affair better than Villon, or at least in a more heroic manner. But, weighing everything, we can only bring in a verdict of manslaughter against the latter.

The fact that he gave a false name and ran away from Justice is against him. And yet Justice in the year 1455 was a monster so frightful that to run when it was after you must have been an extremely natural act.

Villon left Paris—left the house in the Porte Rouge, its shelter and protection, and vanished into the darkness outside Paris. Where he went to no man knows.

It has been suggested that he took shelter at Bourg la Reine, a town near Paris on the Orleans road. He may have done so, but I suspect he went farther.

He remained in exile seven months, and then he obtained a pardon from the King and returned to Paris.

Stevenson in his essay on Villon turns this pardon about and sniffs at it.

Villon, to make sure, got in reality two pardons—

one under the style and title of François des Loges, otherwise known as François Villon, the other under the name of François de Montcorbier. There was nothing at all dark or sinister in that. He was always known by those names, and it was only prudent for him to obtain a pardon covering all those names, so that the Law of the time, which had as many teeth as it had letters, should not seize him by one of the tricks inseparable from Law and drag him into the Châtelet.

To represent this perfectly frank declaration of his aliases as a transaction pointing to shadiness of character is to muddy the clear water of evidence, and heaven knows, as regards the life of Villon, the evidence requires clarifying, not thickening.

One thing is certain. He was pardoned, and he returned to Paris and the shelter of the Porte Rouge in January 1456.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ROBBERY AT THE COLLEGE OF NAVARRE

ONE can fancy Guillaume Villon receiving him that cold January day, and one can fancy something of the life which he took up again in Paris during the next few months—months that formed the turning-point of his career.

One might fancy that the Sermoise affair would have acted as a check on his exuberant nature, did not we know that a check to a nature like this acts often as a dam to a river—the water must go somewhere, and it goes over the fields.

He was always a great person to run after the women, and it seems certain that he ran after one woman in particular this summer, Katherine de Vaucelles, no less, a girl evidently of good birth and, from what we can gather of her, a cold and unlovable character in a beautiful body.

Had he come across just now one of those creative women, one of those women who by the alchemy that lives alone in love can bend a man's character, even though the bending had been ever so little, she might have saved him from the

catastrophe towards which he was moving and which took place in the following December.

But Katherine de Vaucelles, incapable of inspiring the love that saves, was capable of inspiring the lust that ruins.

She raised his desires and rejected his advances, and Villon, in his anger, insulted her in some way. Unable to resist the insult herself, she deputed the business to a very capable person, Noël le Joly, who, Villon admits with charming frankness, beat him as a washerwoman beats the clothes she is scouring.

This beating, though undoubtedly deserved, did not soften his nature or help to turn him to the better things of life, and in the next vivid picture of him that comes to us out of the darkness of the past he is seated in his room at the Porte Rouge writing by the aid of a single candle.

It is near Christmas of the same year 1456,

En ce temps que j'ay dit devant,  
Sur le Noël, Morte saison.

The wolves are howling at the gates of Paris, the curfew of the Ville and the Cité has sounded, but the bell of the Sorbonne has not yet rung the curfew of the University.

The candle, which still shines, and will shine for ever, gives an uncertain light, the ink is nearly frozen in the ink-pot, his fingers are stiff with cold, and he is putting the last touches to the *Petit Testament*. The *Little Testament*, which, in

the course of its forty verses, tells us that, being hard stricken by love and Katherine de Vaucelles, he is leaving Paris immediately, gives a list of people to whom he bequeathes parting legacies, and winds up with a grimace at the professors of the University and their jargon.

But the man who is writing the *Petit Testament* is not quite the same man who killed Philippe Sermoise a few months ago, nor the same man who was beaten by Noël le Joly a few weeks ago. In the course of the last few days he has become in deed, if not in soul, a criminal. That was the catastrophe at which I hinted just now, and it came about like this.

Villon, among all the rest of his acquaintances, bad and good, had a friend named Guy Tabary.

Tabary was a sort of criminal Boswell, and he has this distinction, that he stands perhaps the most clearly defined of all the figures that inhabit the Paris of the Middle Ages.

One can laugh at Tabary still, and he still possesses the power to irritate one. He was a hanger-on of Villon's; he had copied out with his own hand Villon's first poem, he obeyed Villon's orders, ran on his messages, took bad treatment without a grumble, and was never happier than when he was talking.

A few days ago Villon and three other friends, finding themselves very hard up, and knowing where plenty of money was to be had for the taking, decided to take it.



Villon sent for Tabary, invited him to supper at the Mule Tavern in the Rue St. Jacques quite close to St. Benoist's, and gave him the money to buy the food with.

The supper party took place at about five o'clock, and there sat down to table Villon, Colin de Cayeux (picklock—afterwards hanged), Guy Tabary, Petit Jehan (most likely hanged as well) and Dom Nicholas (a Picardy monk).

After supper they came down the Rue St. Jacques in the direction of the Collège de Navarre till they reached an unoccupied house belonging to Maître Robert de Saint-Simon and adjoining the college. They got into the house without any difficulty, and here Villon, Dom Nicholas, Petit Jehan, and Colin de Cayeux stripped themselves of their upper garments, left Tabary to guard the clothes, and, going into the courtyard, climbed over the wall that divided the courtyard from the college precincts, by means of a ladder.

They entered the vestry of the college chapel, and there they found what they sought.

In the gloom, but sufficiently lit up by the thieves' candle, stood a huge iron-bound box with four locks. We can see them standing round whilst Colin de Cayeux, on his knees and with the dexterity of a surgeon probing a wound, examined the mechanism of the locks with his crochet.

He managed to pick one, and presumably failed with the others, for they were driven to use an iron bar with which they levered up the lid.

Inside they found a small coffer of walnut wood which they easily opened, and there, before their eyes, lay the treasure they had been seeking—five hundred crowns in gold.

The aumries lay still to their hand waiting to be opened, but their nerves had been shaken, presumably by the lock-picking difficulties they had encountered, so, dividing up the spoil, they put things in order as far as they could, slipped out of the vestry, and regained the empty house where Tabary was waiting for them and guarding their clothes.

They gave Tabary ten crowns and promised him a dinner, and Tabary took his ten crowns without an inquiry or grumble. He was very much of a child, Tabary, as will be seen more especially later on.

Villon was not long in spending his share of the money.

He is sitting to-night finishing his Testament without a sou in his pocket, or at least “with only a little false coin, and *even that will soon be gone!*” and the tragic thing is that old Guillaume Villon is sipping his wine or saying his prayers in one of the rooms below, ignorant of the fact that the man in the attic—his adoptive son—is a burglar who has also committed sacrilege.

The *Petit Testament* at which he is writing to-night is his first poem, or at least the first that has managed to survive.

It shows in its forty verses scarcely anything of

the greatness of the poet, though much of the humour and cynicism of the man.

Twenty-five years of life—fifteen years of which have been fairly comfortable life under the protection of Guillaume Villon—have produced what? A complaint about the cruelty of his mistress, a string of jesting legacies, and a sneer at the University.

The five years to follow now, five years of exile and hardship interspersed with prison, are to produce the *Great Testament*, a work different when taken all together from the *Little Testament* as the sky is from the earth.

As regards the *Testaments*, I do not know any critic who has properly pointed out the worthlessness of the *Little Testament* as compared with the *Great*; whilst many critics lump the two together and so let the stain of the Less contaminate the worth of the Great—and have left their readers in ignorance of the fact that the difference between the two works is the measure of the growth of a soul.

Let us say a word on this matter.

In all literature there is nothing more interesting, nothing more illuminating, than the difference of the work on which Villon is engaged on this evening towards the Christmas of 1456 and the work he is to produce five years later.

To-night he is writing just as a clever and cynical blackguard might write, and except in the first few verses his tongue is never out of his cheek.

What he is engaged on is well named the *Little Testament*.

What he is to write five years hence will be well named the *Great Testament*. Having said that much, we will leave the full consideration of his work till we have done with his life.

As he is finishing his writing he hears the clock of the Sorbonne striking nine. It is the curfew of the University, and, putting what he has written away, he blows out the candle and, slipping from the house, makes off through the dark streets to some place where he has appointed a meeting with some of his robber friends.

He is leaving for Angers to-morrow, driven from Paris by a nervous dread of the consequences of the robbery at the Collège de Navarre and by irritation over his spoilt love-affair, drawn to Angers by the fact that he has a rich uncle there who is a fine mark for robbery. He is going to-night to make the last arrangements with Colin de Cayeux and the other Parisian experts in burglary, who are to follow him to Angers when he has located the treasure.

This is the story as told by Guy Tabary, that eternal cackler, when he was cackling some months later on the leather mattress of the Châtelet, and under the gentle persuasion of Henri Cousin, the sworn tormentor of Paris.

I am quite willing to believe it, and yet there are dubious points not entirely cleared up.

Who was the uncle, of whom we hear no more ?

## *The Robbery at the College of Navarre* 67

and why, if he were going to Angers to commit a felony, did he leave his new address in writing? Then we know that the burglary never took place.

Yet we must believe Guy Tabary, simply because he was such an ass that he would never have invented the story. He was of the genus of fools who always speak the truth.

It may have been that Villon, anxious to escape from Paris and get free from the entanglement of his fellow-criminals without showing the white feather, made up the story of the rich uncle at Angers.

The band he belonged to were making all sorts of new plots and plans, and his prescient mind may have warned him of what was to take place almost immediately in Paris.

However that may be, two facts alone remain—he left Paris, and the uncle at Angers, if he ever lived, was never robbed.

## CHAPTER VII

### WHAT TOOK PLACE IN PARIS AFTER VILLON'S FLIGHT

SCARCELY had Villon made his escape from Paris than the redoubtable band to which he belonged set to business.

They had hidden up their work and their traces so well that the robbery at the College of Navarre had not yet been discovered, and was not discovered, in fact, till two months after the night of the robbery.

Emboldened by this success, they made an attempt on the Church of St. Mathurin, but dogs gave the alarm and the affair came to nothing.

Shortly after a very daring act was committed. There lived at the Monastery of the Augustines a very wealthy cleric named Guillaume Coiffier. In that age every man was his own banker, and Coiffier, though he may have had a lot of money in house property or out at interest, kept a large sum by him in hard cash. He had, besides, some valuable silver plate.

The thieves, by the agency of one of their clerical members, beguiled Coiffier away from his rooms for a few hours, and during the absence stole his

money and his silver plate. It was this theft, not the robbery at the College of Navarre, that brought destruction to Tabary and the band, as will immediately be seen.

Meanwhile the robbery at the College of Navarre was discovered, and on the 9th of March an inquiry into the business was instituted by Jean Mautaint and Jean du Four at the request of the Faculty of Theology.

The inquiry disclosed nothing, and the whole affair and Villon's connection with it might have remained for ever in darkness but for the intervention of a stranger.

This stranger was an old gentleman named Pierre Marchand, the Prior of Paray in the diocese of Chartres, who arrived in Paris on business the 23rd of April, which was—to be exact—the Saturday before Quasimodo Sunday.

He put up at the Three Chandeliers, and he seems to have amused himself with business not altogether ecclesiastical, for we find him next morning breakfasting at a tavern, the Chaise, situated on the Petit Pont, with—of all people in the world—Guy Tabary!

Of course the venerable Pierre Marchand may have been the most straight-living man in the world; the fact remains, however, that we find him, a few hours after his arrival in Paris, breakfasting in very strange company. But, let his morals have been what they may, his mentality and almost his person come to us with an astonish-

ing vividness and freshness. He, like Guy Tabary, was a character. They might both of them have stepped into our minds out of the pages of Dumas.

Tabary, flushed with wine and conversation with the jolly, bright-eyed, and rosy-cheeked churchman, asked the latter to tell of his adventures on the way to Paris, and, when Pierre Marchand had done, Tabary, the eternal babbler, fired with the desire to tell of *his* adventures, and having none but discreditable ones to tell—told of them.

Now, Marchand had heard all about Guillaume Coiffier's loss—he was his friend—and he instantly set to work with the wisdom and the wile of a Sherlock Holmes to pump Tabary.

Tabary confessed that he had been imprisoned in the prison of the Archbishop of Paris under suspicion of being a picklock.

On a laugh and wink from Marchand, he waxed bolder, and another glass of wine brought out the fact that he knew all about how these “crochets” were made, these skeleton keys with which a coffer might be opened in a twinkling.

“*Mordieu!*” cries Marchand, “what a man you are! It's only in Paris one could come across your sort. With a companion like you a man like myself might get along very well, for between you and me, *compère*, those crochets you spoke of, what are they but the keys of Paradise?—the Paradise of good wine and pretty girls? You open a box full of gold and then you are in Paradise. I am not a young man, and I would like to



see Paradise before I die—ha ha! before I die. Help yourself—the bottle is at your elbow—and pass it along. Um—this is a good Beaune, but I know where there is better, just as I know where there is gold enough to buy it. Did I tell you the tale of the bottle of Beaune and the girl from Avignon?”

“*Pardie!*” says Tabary, exploding over the unprintable tale, “give me a churchman for a good story and a nose for a pretty girl. But this gold you spoke of?”

“Safely locked up,” says Marchand, “but we might—with those crochets of yours you spoke of, and which I would give my eyes to see—we might do something. Produce your keys, Peter, and let’s see those ugly and wonderful things that can yet find us so much beauty and pleasure.”

“Alas!” says Tabary, who, by the way, had never confessed to possessing such things, but had forgotten that fact, “I cannot; I threw mine away.”

“Threw them away!”

“For prudence’ sake. A little time ago there was an alarm, and—into the Seine they went.”

“*Confiteor!*” says Marchand, “that was a pity.”

“As you say, it was a pity, but what would you have? The Seine tells no tales. But though my crochets are gone, there are others to be found in Paris; and if all the crochets in Paris were to be sent to Seine mud, why, little Thibaud would make crochets as good again in a trice, just as quick as he could melt a chalice.”

“ This Thibaud is a goldsmith then ? ”

“ Goldsmith and locksmith both. The bottle is empty—I’ll pay.”

“ Put your money away. Respect the orders of the Church, my son. Landlord, ho ! there—another bottle. Well, all this you have been saying is very interesting—and I wish I were a younger man.”

“ Young ! why, age is nothing, and you, I dare swear, you are as hearty as the best of us.”

Marchand shakes his head.

“ Not on the legs, my son ; but in the head, well, in the head I have some strength in me left, and if ever we become companions——”

“ But we *are* companions,” cries the wine-flushed Tabary, “ and never have I met a bottle companion to beat you—and you must know the others. *Pardieu !* you must know the others.”

And so it comes about that Marchand makes an appointment to meet Guy Tabary at the Pomme de Pin tavern in the Rue de la Juiverie in the Cité on the morrow.

Accordingly, on the morrow they meet at the Pomme de Pin and have sundry drinks together. Properly warmed, they start off to meet the others who are in the precincts of Notre Dame, not for piety’s sake, but for the sake of sanctuary.

They have escaped from prison, in fact, and have bolted like rabbits to the shelter of the great cathedral, under whose shadow they are safe from the Law.

How the old ecclesiastic turned detective must have licked his chops when Guy pointed out to him the knot of young blackguards, five in number, conversing together, their thumbs in their girdles, beneath the solemn stone effigies of Chilperic and King Pharamond.

“Look,” says Guy, “that little fellow with the long hair, he is the strongest of the lot, and there is not his equal in Paris at cracking a coffer open. That’s Thibaud.”

He introduces Marchand, and Thibaud and his companions bow and are very civil; but, clever as the Prior of Paray may be, he can get nothing definite out of them.

You see, they are not fresh from a tavern like Tabary, and have not experienced the pleasure of the Prior of Paray’s seductive conversation and smutty tales; they do not know, as Tabary knows, what a really good sort he is, and so they are rather reserved.

Tabary feels that his friend has fallen rather flat; he takes him off, and into another tavern they go.

It is not in the chronicles that they went into a tavern after leaving Notre Dame, but they most certainly did, and here Tabary made amends for the silence of his confederates. He told everything he knew about himself and his companions, of burglaries completed and burglaries, so to speak, in the egg.

He told of a scheme in hand to rob another rich Augustine monk, a bibliophile named Robert de la

Porte, and, the Prior of Paray promising to help, shook hands on the bargain.

The robbery, for some reason or the other, did not come off.

Something alarmed the gang. Someone—Thibaud for choice—took fright at this churchman from the provinces who was so anxious to add to his income by burglary, and the gang, like a flock of evil birds, prepared for flight.

Marchand, no less alarmed lest they should escape from the net which he had constructed and which was just about to close, went straight to the Châtelet and made his deposition.

But he was too late. When the Law started to seize the robbers, they were not to be found. They had left Paris.

But Tabary had done his work. His foolishness had betrayed every member of the gang, François Villon included.

Tabary did not remain long at large. He was caught on the 25th of June, 1458, and thrown into prison. He admitted a number of things and denied others, but finished by making a clean breast of the whole business.

They did not hang Tabary. The College of Navarre was too anxious to get even part of its money back, and Tabary's poor old mother came to his rescue.

She arranged with the College to pay them back fifty écus in gold, the said sum to be payable in two lots.

She finished the payment in the next year, and Tabary was set at liberty. Then, as now, it was the woman that paid, and as for Tabary, we hear nothing more of him.

Let us finish with Villon's other companions now and at once. We know the fate of at least two—Montigny and Colin de Cayeux. Whilst all these things had been happening in Paris, Jean Rabustel, as we know already, had been busy rooting out the Coquillards of Dijon, and in the list of malefactors which he drew up appeared the name of Regnier de Montigny, Villon's friend, to whom in the *Petit Testament* he leaves a jesting legacy of dogs.

Just as Tabary remains the most human of the band with which Villon is associated, so is Montigny the most sinister. He undoubtedly had a profound effect on Villon and deserves a word as to his life and death.

Montigny was the son of Jean de Montigny, Elu de Paris, and of Colette de Canlers, daughter of Jacques de Canlers, secretary to the King. He was allied to half a dozen of the best families and seems to have gone wrong from the very first. He had committed numerous robberies and thefts; he had against him grim evidence pointing to the fact that he had murdered a man named Thévenin Pensete who lived in the Hôtel du Mouton near the Cemetery of St. John, and he was seized on this charge by the Provost of Paris in the summer of 1457.

He was condemned to death.

His relations, disgusted, shamed, and perhaps glad to be rid of him, did nothing; his sister Jeanne, the wife of Robert Chartrain, alone made an appeal for him.

She was enceinte, and she implored the King, Charles VII, to grant Regnier a pardon for the sake of her child yet unborn. That appeal, which has not been unused in our days, coming to us from the darkness of the Middle Ages, links the present with the past as no work or creation of man can link them. It gives us some faint hint, also, of the stir the affair must have made, of the consultations between the relatives, the wagging of heads in sombre, tapestried rooms over this *mauvais ordure* Regnier, pale women listening behind the arras, and children quieted by the sense of disaster.

Charles VII listened to Jeanne's appeal, granted letters of mercy, and commuted the penalty to a year's imprisonment and a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Jacques de Compostelle.

But the Law was very much in earnest over Regnier.

It pointed out that the letters of mercy made no mention of the most serious of the charges against the condemned. Parliament pushed the King's pardon aside, and Regnier de Montigny was hanged at Montfaucon on a gibbet which ever after bore his name.

We hear nothing more of Jeanne and her unborn

son ; the waters of time close over the affair, leaving nothing visible but a bit of wreckage.

As to Colin de Cayeux, who escaped with the rest of the band when the Prior of Paray had sprung the alarm, he wandered about the Provinces for a good while associating with the Coquillards. We find him now at Montpippeau, now at Reule—see Villon's *Belle Leçon de Villon aux Enfants Perdus*—and now we find him at Senlis, seized by the Provost of Senlis in the Church of St. Leu d'Esserent.

Colin had always clung to his tonsure, and when they carried him off to Paris and imprisoned him in the Conciergerie, the Church, in the form of the Bishop of Senlis and the Bishop of Beauvais, tried to reclaim the tonsured one and wrest him from the clutches of the civil law.

But the Law was firm, refused to recognise a churchman in a thief, and Colin was hanged and strangled—*pendu et étranglé*—on the 26th of September, 1460.

And what became of the Prior of Paray, who so cleverly had betrayed the confidence of Guy Tabary, broken up the band, and condemned so many to exile and death ?

Who knows ? But, wherever he went, he remains the most curious and one of the most interesting figures of all those associated with the life of François Villon.

## CHAPTER VIII

### VILLON BEGINS HIS WANDERINGS

WHEN Villon dried the ink of the *Petit Testament*, bade goodbye to his bad companions, and started on foot for Angers, he little knew how much walking there was before him, and that his short visit to the country was to last for five very long years.

Without any manner of doubt the robbery at the College of Navarre was his travelling companion, and for miles and miles along the Anjou road, after he had left the gates of Paris behind him, horse-hoofs following, or a sudden hail, would make him turn with a very special liveliness.

The act he had committed possessed a vileness all its own. The College of Navarre was his own college, he knew the ins and outs of the place, and it was this knowledge that had enabled him to bring the affair to a successful issue.

It was, besides, his first step in crime, and the echo of it must have sounded portentously loud in the silence of the country. He little knew that the point from which retribution was to strike him was not Paris, but Paray away in the diocese of



Chartres, where, just now, a venerable ecclesiastic named Marchand was, no doubt, talking to his housekeeper of his forthcoming visit to the capital.

He little knew that what he had to fear was not the robbery he had helped to commit at the College of Navarre, but the robbery by his companions of Coiffier's gold pieces and silver plate—a robbery which, though as yet uncommitted, was to bring down on him all the consequences following the College of Navarre business.

One is tempted to put the book on one's knee and fall into a reverie for a moment over this lesson that comes to us from the remote past—a lesson which teaches us, among other things, the zig-zag method in which destiny works.

One afternoon, having outwalked his fears, and feeling himself a thousand miles from the College of Navarre and its menace, Villon saw, sketched before him on the horizon, spindle-shaped towers, spires, and roof-tops sending their trace of smoke to the winter sky. It was Angers. As he drew closer he could have picked out the roofs of the University—for Angers was a university town—above the machicolated guarding wall, and the towers of King René's Palace near the University; for Angers was also a royal residence, and at this moment it held among its residents one of the most interesting royal figures in History—René of Anjou, or to give him his other title, Renatus I.

King René at this moment was a man getting on

in life. He was born in 1409, and succeeded his brother Louis III as Duke of Anjou and Count of Provence. In the late wars he had lost the territories of Anjou and Maine to the English, but his daughter having married Henry VI of England, they were now returned to him.

On the restoration of peace René, a huge man, bluff and powerful, a great fighter, a lover of jousts and tourneys, hawking and hunting, disclosed his real nature, or at least a strange part of it.

This enormous barbarian with the face of a gladiator had already, down in Provence, shown himself keenly interested in very practical matters. He had interested himself in encouraging the glass-factories and woollen industry, and it was he who first introduced the Muscatel grape into Provence. He was a keen agriculturist, and had a passion for tree-planting.

But on the cessation of the English wars, René, as I have said, disclosed a new side of his mind. The warrior René vanished, and there appeared in his stead a charming and curious character: a man of culture, a collector and lover of old books, china, glass, tapestry, and all the delightful things that make life worth living; a poet, or at least a writer of elegant verse; and a philosopher who discovered in his time what we are beginning to discover—the charm of the simple life.

This delightful King, whom one grieves never to have known, would forsake his palace for the

fields, and there in the pleasant country of Anjou, by the banks of the river, under the blue sky of spring he would lead the simple life dressed as a shepherd, now fishing in the river, now holding sylvan fêtes, and now scribbling his verses that even still hold some faint echo and perfume of those April days.

René had, however, the defects of his qualities, and despite his love for the simple life he seems to have spent a great lot of money on his collections, his feasts, his jousts and his tournaments, and he seems to have squeezed his subjects to obtain the money. However, at this distance of time the complaints of these folk reach our ears as little as the groaning of the builders of the Pyramids. René remains, and we doubt whether his subjects could have spent their money better than in helping to construct for us that delightful figure.

At first sight it seems surprising that Villon, the greatest poet of his time, should not have struck up a friendship with the King, who seems to have collected poets just as he collected books. The mystery disappears, however, if we examine the matter more fully.

The man who arrived in Angers in the January of 1457 was not Villon the poet, still to show himself, but Villon the author of the *Petit Testament*, the cynical, scoundrelly ex-student of the Paris University, to whom wine and women were everything, to whom the verses of the poets of his time were of no more interest than the babbling of a

brook, and collections of tapestry and glass of little more significance than algebra to a footpad : an entirely human and material person who could never rise to the contemplation of lilies, but who was yet to sing of the sorrows, the humours, and the frailty of man.

This person was little likely to shine at the court of King René the dilettante.

So far as we can make out, he never even entered it.

## CHAPTER IX

### HE LEAVES ANGERS

WE know absolutely nothing of Villon's stay in Angers. We can guess, however, that some whisper of what happened in Paris that April reached him through his friends the Coquillards and drove him still farther from the capital. We only know that he left Angers and started on a wandering journey that lasted for five years, and that the sufferings to which he afterwards referred in the verses of the *Great Testament* were almost certainly endured during this part of his life.

In the *Little Testament*, which he left behind him before starting on this momentous pilgrimage, we find him full-blooded, jocular, cynical, and full of the impudence of youth. In the *Great Testament* we find him old, broken-down, with a voice like a rook, "spitting white," physically done for, yet immense in mind and spirit.

What were the incidents of this strange journey that had such a wonderful effect on his soul and body, and what was the country like through which he travelled ?

It is twenty-six years since that year 1431 in which in the first pages of this book we stood on the road looking at the old French château. The wars have died away, the wolves have retreated into the woods, and armed bands no longer destroy the flocks. The tide of life has begun to flow again between village and town, and town and city, but danger has not vanished nor has mistrust disappeared. There are robbers everywhere, and the Coquillards, despite Rabustel and his kind, are flourishing.

Mendicants with painted sores, such as the one we meet with in the *Cloister and the Hearth*, gipsies, stealers of children, and cheats, are everywhere. Among these we have real pilgrims, monks, honest merchants, lords travelling in state, and bands of players of mysteries—wandering actors at whom Villon hints in his ballade of *Good Advice*—and, far pleasanter than these, and also sketched for us by the hand of Villon, jugglers and wandering singers, the great-great-grandfathers of Murger's Bohemians, people who live from hand to mouth, without thought of the morrow :

Dancers, and jugglers that turn the wheel  
Needle-sharp, quick as a dart, each one  
Voiced like the bells 'midst the hills that peal.

Singers who sing without law their lay,  
Laughing and jovial in words and ways,  
Feather-brained folk, yet always gay,  
Who run without coin good or bad their race.

We see them sketched by the master-hand, just as we see the mystery-players sketched by the self-same hand :

Song, jest, cymbals, lutes,  
Don these signs of minstrelsy,  
Farce, imbroglio, play of flutes  
Make in hamlet or city,  
Act in play or mystery.  
Gain at cards or ninepin-hurls  
All your profits, where go they ?  
All on taverns and on girls.

Among this crowd, now dropping a word of argot to a Coquillard, now chumming with the light folk, the feather-brained, harmless ephemera of life, pushed aside by the pages and horsemen of some passing lord, begging, feasting, starving, and laughing, we see the figure of Villon, now in the gutter, now in prison, now at court.

We catch echoes of this extraordinary wandering in the verses of the *Great Testament*. He found time and means to have love-affairs. He lifts the veil with the tip of his finger and two charming girls peep at us from the ninety-fourth verse of the *Great Testament*. Girls very fair and kindly, living at St. Genou near St. Julian des Voventes—or in the Marches of Brittany or Poitu.

He drops the veil and they vanish. He has not even given us their right address.

At nights he would sometimes put up at one of those places of rest, half farms, half inns, which Charles Reade has so ably pictured ; and if he had

not the money to pay for a lodging, there were always the fields.

The wanderings of Villon fill the imagination with all sorts of pictures, but of the facts we have very little knowledge, and it is now time to marshal the few facts that are indisputable.



## CHAPTER X

### HIS VISITS TO MOULINS

THE Duke of Bourbon, a good fellow and a patron of the arts, lived at that time and kept his court at Moulins.

We can see Moulins still. If you go to Paris and call at the Bibliothèque Nationale, you can see its representation in an old drawing (Bibl. Nat. fr. 22297, fol. 369), a tiny walled city with spindle towers fretting the sky, a gate, a drawbridge, and a moat.

With its ducal castle, drawbridge, spindle towers, and its weather-cocks all twirling in the winds of spring, Moulins shows itself again. The artist has not even forgotten the ducks on the moat, and one can almost hear the cocks crowing across these crenellated walls that contain the houses like a great pie-crust.

It was here that Villon presented himself. He passed over that drawbridge, visited the kindly duke in the castle, and did his business.

He came for money.

To beg? O dear me, no—just to borrow.

The duke gave him six écus, and off he started again on his wanderings.

He soon spent the money, and later on, remembering the liberality of Monsieur de Bourbon, he returned to Moulins on the quest of another loan.

Taking his seat in some tavern of the town, he called for pen, ink, and paper, and wrote a letter to the Duke—a letter in the form of a ballade. Here it is.

[*Original French*]

LA REQUESTE QUE VILLON BAILLA À  
MONSEIGNEUR DE BOURBON<sup>1</sup>

Le mien seigneur et prince redoubté,  
Fleuron de Lys, royale geniture,  
Françoys Villon, que travail a dompté  
A coups orbes, par force de batture,  
Vous supplie, par cette humble escripture,  
Que luy faciez quelque gracieux prest.  
De s'obliger en toutes cours est prest ;  
Si ne doutez que bien ne vous contente,  
Sans y avoir dommage n'interest,  
Vous n'y perdrez seulement que l'attente.

A prince n'a ung denier emprunté,  
Fors à vous seul, vostre humble créature.  
Des six escus que lui avez presté  
Cela piéça, il mist en nourriture ;  
Tout se payera ensemble, c'est droicture,  
Mais ce sera légèrement et prest :  
Car, se du gland rencontre en la forest  
D'entour Patay, et chastaignes ont vente,  
Payé serez sans delay ny arrest :  
Vous n'y perdrez seulement que l'attente.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean II, died in 1487.

Si je pensois vendre de ma santé  
A ung Lombard, usurier par nature,  
Faulte d'argent m'a si fort enchanté,  
Que j'en prendrois, ce croy-je, l'adventure.  
Argent ne pend à gippon ne ceinture ;  
Beau sire Dieux ! je m'esbahyz que c'est,  
Que devant moy croix ne se comparoist,  
Sinon de bois ou pierre, que ne mente ;  
Mais s'une fois la vraye m'apparoist,  
Vous n'y perdrez seulement que l'attente.

## ENVOI

Prince du Lys, qui à tout bien complaist,  
Que cuydez-vous comment il me desplaist,  
Quand je ne puis venir à mon entente !  
Bien m'entendez, aydez-moi, s'il vous plaist  
Vous n'y perdrez seulement que l'attente.

[*Translation*]

## THE REQUEST TO MONSIEUR DE BOURBON

Seigneur and prince redoubtable, give ear,  
Flower of the lily, child of royalty,  
For François Villon, who has learned to bear  
The bruises born of beating, speaks to thee ;  
This humble writing tells his poverty,  
And in it for a loan request is laid ;  
His thanks before all courts shall then be said  
To thee—and shouldst thou not his plaint refuse,  
The sum in full, with interest, shall be paid ;  
Nought but the time in waiting wilt thou lose.

Of other prince no denier, that I swear,  
Have I thine humble creature had in fee ;  
The six écus you handed to me were  
All spent in food, not in frivolity,  
All shall be paid together presently,  
If in the woods of Patay, in some glade,  
Acorns be found for sale, or chestnuts made  
Into a profit where folk buy and choose.  
All shall be paid in full, be not afraid ;  
Nought but the time in waiting wilt thou lose.

If I could sell the health I hold so dear  
 Unto a Lombard born in usury,  
 To that extreme adventure I would near  
 Be brought by want of food and penury ;  
 In belt or purse no denier clings to me,  
 Dear God ! the wonder makes me half-dismayed,  
 No cross I see in sunshine or in shade,  
 Save those of wood or stone—I do not gloze ;  
 Yet, if to me the true cross be displayed,<sup>1</sup>  
 Nought but the time in waiting wilt thou lose.

## ENVOI

Prince of the Lily, all whose deeds are weighed  
 By mercy, guess my grief at having strayed  
 So far from that intent these lines disclose ;  
 I wait me thy decision, having prayed ;  
 Nought but the time in waiting wilt thou lose.

What the result was no man knows—most probably another loan, to be repaid when Villon sold the chestnuts he gathered in the woods of Patay.

However that may be, we love the ballade, the only promissory note that Time has honoured.

<sup>1</sup> The cross on the silver coins of the day.

## CHAPTER XI

### HE VISITS THE DUKE OF ORLÉANS

VILLON paid two visits to the court of Charles of Orléans at Blois. At the time of Villon's visits to him Charles would have been a man well advanced in years. The son of Louis de Valois, Duke of Orléans, he had been brought up in a court where prose was used for the direction of servants, conversation about ordinary affairs, and the settlement of household accounts, whilst verse seems to have been the real medium for the exchange of thought.

Nothing is more astonishing than this fever for rhyme which filled the minds of the men and women of this age, where court ladies exchanged thoughts in rondels and soldiers flung ballads at each other's heads, where men took one another's reputations away in chansonettes and fought duels with adjectives, where everywhere you find twisted phrases and hardly anywhere honest thought. It was no wonder, then, that Charles, who was born with a teeming fancy but no imagination, fell a victim to the malady of his time and expended a vast amount of energy on rhyming.

Yet the life of this man without imagination had the food in it for many volumes of Romance.

At fifteen years of age he was unhappily married to a girl of seventeen, Isabella, the widow of King Richard II of England.

There was something of comedy as well as tragedy in this marriage which made it a fit prelude to the tragi-comedy of Charles's life.

A little more than a year after his marriage his father, Louis of Orléans, was assassinated by his old enemy John, Duke of Burgundy. A more hateful and brutal murder it would be hard to conceive, or a more disastrous. It threw France into civil war.

We see Charles at the head of his ill-guided troops always trying to get at John, Duke of Burgundy, and John—otherwise called the Fearless—always getting the better of Charles, without crushing him.

When the parents of Villon were young, children of humble parents and therefore exposed to all the ruinous consequences of civil war, France, with a mad king on the throne, was being decimated by the wars between these dukes, one a ruffian and a murderer, the other the son of the murderer's victim.

Town fought town, and the cry of "The Burgundians are at the gates" would clear the streets more effectively than the cry of "wolves." Babies without mothers, children without food, families homeless, homes roofless, corpses festering

in the ditches, all proclaimed for five long years to the patient skies that civil war was in the land.

And when we contemplate John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, and consider the devastation that can follow on the act of one ruffian man, we are driven to formulate a new code of morality as regards the attitude of the people as against the body and person of the man who, holding power, presents his will in opposition to the commonwealth.

It is from the individual man that most universal miseries arise.

Charles, feeling himself unable to cope with the Burgundians, calls in the Armagnacs to his aid and makes an alliance with Bernard d'Armagnac, who takes supreme command, and so the war goes on with redoubled fury, the war of madmen against madmen with an end signifying nothing.

For Charles is not touched, and John of Burgundy is not touched, peace is concluded, but no man may count the number of the slain.

But Charles, though unsuccessful, comes out of the business like a gentleman and a warrior; despite his passion for making rhymes and all his weaknesses, he can fight, and we next find him fighting the English and leading his troops in the thick of the battle at Agincourt some fifteen years before the birth of Villon.

Taken prisoner at Agincourt, he was conveyed to England, and there he remained a prisoner for five-and-twenty years. Five-and-twenty years is a terribly long time when measured against human

life. He was taken prisoner fifteen years before the birth of Villon, and when Villon was ten years of age Charles of Orléans was being released from captivity.

He had been well treated by the English, but prison had not enlarged his mind, and when Villon met him for the first time Charles was a gentleman of over sixty, grey-haired and hard of hearing, and saddened by the knowledge that he had passed the best days of his life in captivity.

It is a strange coincidence that whilst René of Anjou was an exponent of the modern idea, the simple life, Charles of Orléans in his later years would have been a fit president of a peace conference at The Hague. He had seen war and weighed it and found it wanting. And he said so.

This kindly and rather deaf old gentleman, rather narrow, too, and very much of a prince, was scarcely the person to draw out the robust genius of Villon, or to appreciate it were it drawn out.

We have little evidence of the effect that the one produced on the other, but we have material for forming a vivid mind-picture of that strange court at Blois where Villon found himself during the course of his wanderings.

Sitting on the little hill of Bon Bec, to-day, with all Touraine spread before one under the pleasant spring weather, one can see the past as only the setting of Nature can show it to us.

The apple blossoms are blowing in the closes just



as they blew on that day when the Vidame de Chartres captured their beauty in his verse, and the Loire is flowing just as then from its home in the heart of the Cevennes; the Castle of Blois on its hill, away over there, still dominates the land, which, save for that puff of smoke on the railway from Tours, is just the same, when seen from a distance, as the land which Charles of Orléans knew and loved.

The charm of spring lies in its antiquity, all this freshness carries in its heart the call of immemorial ages, and, to-day, up here, across that distance and the silence and azure of April, come the songs and sounds that were fresh as now at the building of Orléans and the birth of Pharamond.

Beneath us lies the Ballade country. The far-billowing foliage, the fields, the flowing river, Orléans a trace in the distance, Chambord mirroring its towers in the waters of the Loire, and all the châteaux of Châteaux-land, and all the poetry of Ballade-land half seen, half guessed, half heard.

It was here that Villon came, dusty and sore-footed along that road lying by that clump of woods. We can fancy him turning that corner from which you get so good a view of the town of Blois and the castle above it.

He came along that road, and, for myself, I believe he came in company; semi-attached to one of those strolling bands of actors and mystery-players at which he hints in his ballades.

One can scarcely imagine him attacking that

castle alone. It is hard enough to imagine him there, in whatever way he reached it.

Not that poverty or poor clothes would have daunted him, for the hero of the Repues Franches would have found means to cover himself decently, or that socially he would have found himself out of place, for we have splendid evidence to show us that in Paris he had mixed in good society. It is the intellectual Villon that we find difficulty in fitting into the court society of Charles of Orléans.

Villon was many things, but one thing he was not—a rhymers. Yet he managed to hold his own amid the rhymers of Blois. On his first visit the coloured and perfumed people of the court of Blois were deeply engaged in constructing a ballade on the line—

I die of thirst beside the fountain's edge,

and Villon who had all his life been dying of thirst beside the fountain's edge, managed to do so again in verse. This is it :

[*Original French*]

BALLADE VILLON<sup>1</sup>

JE meurs de soif auprès de la fontaine,  
Chault comme feu, et tremble dent à dent,  
En mon païs suis en terre loingtaine ;  
Lez un brazier friçonne tout ardent ;  
Nu comme ung ver, vestu en president ;

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<sup>1</sup> *Ballade composée sur un sujet et avec un refrain donnés par le duc d'Orléans. Le manuscrit des poésies de ce prince contient onze autres ballades faites à la même occasion par onze poètes de sa cour.*

Je ris en pleurs et attens sans espoir ;  
Confort reprens en triste desespoir ;  
Je m'esjouys et n'ay plaisir aucun ;  
Puissant je suis sans force et sans pouvoir ;  
Bien recueilly, débouté de chascun.

Rien ne m'est seur que la chose incertaine ;  
Obscur, fors ce qui est tout évident ;  
Doubte ne fais, fors en chose certaine ;  
Science tiens à soudain accident ;  
Je gaigne tout, et demeure perdant ;  
Au point du jour, diz : " Dieu vous doint bon soir ! " <sup>1</sup>  
Gisant envers, j'ay grant paour de cheoir ;  
J'ay bien de quoy, et si n'en ay pas un <sup>2</sup> ;  
Eschoicte attens, <sup>3</sup> et d'homme ne suis hoir ;  
Bien recueilly, débouté de chascun.

De riens n'ay soing, si metz toute ma paine  
D'acquérir biens, et n'y suis prétendant ;  
Qui mieulx me dit, c'est cil qui plus m'attaine, <sup>3</sup>  
Et qui plus vray, lors plus me va bourdant ;  
Mon ami est qui me fait entendant  
D'ung cygne blanc que c'est ung corbeau noir ;  
Et qui me nuyst croy qu'il m'aide à povoir.  
Vérité, bourde, aujourd'huy m'est tout un.  
Je retiens tout, riens ne sçay concepvoir ;  
Bien recueilly, débouté de chascun.

## L'ENVOI

Prince clement, or vous plaise savoir  
Que j'entens moult, et n'ay sens ne sçavoir ;  
Parcial suis, à toutes lois commun.  
Que fais je plus ? Quoy ? Les gaiges ravoir,  
Bien recueilly, débouté de chascun.

---

<sup>1</sup> Not a sou.

<sup>2</sup> I wait succession.

<sup>3</sup> Wounds me.

[*Translation*]

## BALLADE VILLON

*(Composed at the Court of Charles of Orléans at some time between  
the years 1456 and 1461)*

Beside the fountain's edge of thirst I die,  
I burn like flame with teeth a-chattering,  
In my own country far from home I lie,  
Beside the brazier I am shivering.  
Worm-naked I am clothed like any king,  
I laugh in tears, wait though no hope is here,  
Take comfort in the midst of blank despair,  
Enjoy myself, though pleasures have I none ;  
Wield power, though no sign of strength I wear ;  
Am well received, and kicked by every one.

Of nought I'm sure except uncertainty,  
The thing obscures my only clear-seen thing,  
I only doubt the truth in clarity,  
My learning is what accident may bring.  
I win all, yet remain without winning,  
Give you good night at point of morning fair,  
Stretched on my back I dread to fall down stair,  
Have goods in plenty, yet no sou I own,  
Await succession though I'm no man's heir ;  
Am well received, and kicked by every one.

I have no need of anything, yet I  
Seek wealth, though unto wealth no claim I bring.  
Who praise me ? they who do me injury ;  
Who speak me truth ? ev'n they whose jeers most sting.  
My friend is he who makes me see on wing  
White swans like blackest crows that fly in air.  
Who works me ill I hold for me hath care,  
Truth and a lie seem equal 'neath the sun.  
I'm memory-full, yet of conception bare ;  
Am well received, and kicked by every one.

## ENVOI

Prince, I would ask you in your mind to bear  
That much I know, yet have of sense no share ;  
I stand apart, though of the common run,  
I ask my wage nor other wish declare ;  
Am well received, and kicked by every one.

It is where intellect touches everyday life that we fail to join him with the people of Blois. Those long days that held nothing but pageantry and play, peacocks strutting on the grassed terraces, ladies and lords as akin to real and strenuous life as the lords and ladies in tapestry, playing chess, flirting, ballade-making, scandal-mongering, a court convulsed by the arrival of a dwarf or a juggler, thought as false as the rhymes conveying it were perfect—all this was an exceeding strange surrounding for the man who had killed Sermoise, who had robbed the College of Navarre, who had slept under hedges, and to whose genius the real stuff of life was as food and drink. It is a true thing to say that the greatest poet of France was more in his poetical element when giving a leg-up to a burglar than when giving a rhyme to a lady at a court where verse was the speech of the courtiers.

The burglary was a bit of life, and life alone x  
could inspire Villon, who drew into his verse the soul of the crust he ate, the mother who bore him, the rope that swung for him, the bottle he sucked from ; who lived by the vitality of common things—the only earthly immortals.

Sitting here to-day, throned above the Ballade country, we can realise to the full how close to the real life of man Villon stood, for in all that country around us we can see nothing of him. The butterflies and birds and bees say nothing of him, and the wind over the tree-tops nothing.

They are the pretty occasional dialogue in an intense play, absolutely unessential to the action. If you doubt my word, read Villon.

Yet, to-day, they seem the whole play and the whole business of the play. The lark unlocks doors of an impossible heaven, the blue, blue sky reveals nothing of the black, black sky beyond. Orléans, speaking with the voices of the thrush and the cuckoo, says, "I am a fairy city"; Tours, across leagues of beauty, "There is no sorrow here." Blois unlocks the gates of her castle and the pages troop down to receive Baudet Harenc, to note whose coming the ladies are peeping from the terrace walls.

Imagination can do anything here, and paint anything—but Villon.

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## CHAPTER XII

### HE REACHES THE CASTLE OF THE OGRE (1461)

ABOUT twelve miles over there from Blois the town of Meung lies on the right bank of the Loire. It is hidden from here by that rise in the ground where the trees a month later will have completed their summer dress and will show a dome of verdure curved like a woman's breast.

That little town which we cannot see was destined to be the last stage in Villon's wanderings before he returned to Paris.

He had met many people on his journey, jugglers, thieves, priests, honest folk—all the mixed and moving population of the roads. He had visited the Duke of Bourbon at Moulins, the Duke of Orléans at Blois; he had been driven, for some reason or other, as far as Roussillon; he had slept under the sky and under a palace roof, in the prison of Orléans, and no doubt in other prisons as well; but he was now, in the last summer of his pilgrimage, to meet such a man as he had never met before.

Thibault d'Aussigny was at that moment Bishop of Orléans. He was a man of tremendous force of character, hardness, and cruelty. x

Not the cruelty that tortures for pleasure, but the cruelty of the righteous man who has no heart. He was a strict disciplinarian, a man with as much bowels as a cathedral, with a will that broke down all the formidable obstacles that barred him from his bishopric, and a hand that bowed the necks of many men and all but broke the body of Villon.

You will find many Thibault d'Aussignys in the world still, diluted, and without the power for oppression enjoyed by this ogre of the Church of the Middle Ages, and I hate the type so intensely that I would willingly bring forward any evidence I could find against Thibault's character. But to be strictly just, his character seems to have been good. He clutched hard at money and power, but he did well by the Church, according to his lights; he introduced order into the monasteries of his diocese, and we cannot find any trace of wine and women in his private history.

If we could, we might perhaps feel more kindly towards him, for there is nothing more repellent than righteousness turned to stone.

Thibault, leaning from his tower, seized Villon by the scruff and dropped him into a pit in the Tour de Manasses of the gaol of Meung, and we do not know in the least what Villon had done to deserve this treatment. The Abbé Patron, without any foundation, apparently, supposed that it was because of a robbery committed in the church of Baccon. Pierre Champion suggests that it might have been in consequence of a robbery com-



mited at Montpipeau by Colin de Cayeux. The whole thing is dark, dark as the pit into which Villon was dropped by the hand of Thibault.

It has been supposed that Villon was imprisoned in a lower chamber of the Tour de Manasses. But the testimony of Villon does not speak of a lower chamber but of a pit.

He asks, in his ballade crying for mercy, to be lifted out in a basket. A man in a lower chamber does not require to be lifted out in a basket.

He was imprisoned in a pit so dark that, to use his own words, he could not even see the lightning of a thunderstorm, so close that no breath of air ever stole to him; he had neither stool to sit nor bed to lie on, and nothing to eat but bits of dry bread flung down to him by his gaolers.

Close your eyes and think for a moment of the sanitation, of the vermin, of the darkness by day and night, of the damp, and cold, and heat, and fumes of this infernal place maintained by a churchman for the punishment of fellow-men.

Contrast the robber in the pit with the bishop in the palace. Villon later on in his *Testament* hopes that God will treat Thibault as Thibault treated Villon. With all his matchless gift of language he could not have cursed Thibault in a more terrible manner.

And the imprisonment lasted, not for a day or for a week, but for three long months.

Poor Villon! No man loved a good dinner better than he, and few men have been served so

badly by Fate in this respect. His chief grumble against Thibault was on the score of food, or, rather, of want of food. He was starved, and the strange thing is, that as he lay starving in the pit of Meung, the man whose death was to bring him deliverance was starving at Mehun-sur-Yevre, and that man was Charles VII of France. It is also curious and interesting to note that, when Thibault had been elected to the Bishopric of Orléans in 1447, Charles had opposed his election, having a candidate of his own, Pierre Bureau, and that Thibault of the iron will, nothing daunted, had stuck to his position in face of King and Pope. Charles unconsciously was to bend the will of Thibault. I have said he was dying of starvation; the monomania had seized him that his children had conspired to poison him; he refused food, and died of exhaustion on July 22nd, 1461.

His death released Villon.

A few weeks after the death of the King, Villon in his pit heard the tramping of horse-hoofs, the trumpets of heralds, and the confusion and stir of the townspeople swarming to greet some new and important arrival.

It was the new King, Louis XI, who with the Duke of Orléans was passing to Tours, and as it was the law of the day that when a king entered a town for the first time there should be a general gaol delivery, for once in its evil course the Law, illogical even in its mercy, did a kindly act.

One can fancy how Thibault must have grumbled,

but it is an over-stretch of fancy to picture the prisoner being "most joyfully hauled up."

Villon went into the pit of Thibault a living human being, he came out the remains of one. The cold, the dark, the hunger and misery of those three months had broken everything but his spirit.

He was an old man.

Remember that only five years ago he had left Paris a young man, a man of twenty-five, full of blood and life, as the *Petit Testament* well shows. His four years and nine months of wandering, followed by three months of the mercy of Thibault d'Aussigny, had left him bald, broken, diseased, used up and done for.

Contrast the jesting and mocking spirit of the *Petit Testament* with the roundel with which he celebrates his return.

On return from that hard prison  
Where life near was reft from me,  
If fate still shows cruelty,  
Judge if she shows not misprision,  
For it seems to me with reason  
She hath found satiety.  
On return.

For the fate is but unreason  
That still wills my misery,  
Grant, God! I find sanctuary,  
In thy house from her dark treason.  
On return.

Our prisoner was not yet entirely free. He had to receive letters of remission. These he obtained, and maybe some help in the form of money from Charles of Orléans to assist him in his journey to Paris.

## CHAPTER XIII

### HE RETURNS TO PARIS, 1461

VILLON returned to Paris that same autumn.

What gave him the courage to return? We can only surmise that he was tired of wandering, desperate, and so changed in appearance that he hoped to be able to hide in the capital undiscovered. His mother was still alive, and so was Guillaume Villon. These two, the best friends he ever had and the only real friends of his we know of, must have exercised a strong attraction upon him.

Besides, the death of Charles VII had altered things considerably; all his place-men were displaced and their offices filled with the creatures of Louis XI. The very Provost of Paris, Robert d'Estouteville, had been superseded by a man of Louis, Jacques de Villiers; and when the Provost goes you may be sure that the less important people, even down to the sergeants of the Châtelet and the gaolers, will go as well.

Everyone in a general supersession like this has friends to employ, and the newcomers in the

service of Justice were not likely to have old criminals in their minds.

So it came about that Villon took heart of grace and, drawing to himself as little observation as possible, you may be sure, passed the gates of Paris one evening in autumn and found himself once again in the city of a thousand spires. But it was not the city he had left five years ago, and even less was it the city in which he had been born. The Burgundians and the Armagnacs no longer warred one with the other, Agincourt seemed a very long distance away, and the wolves, made timid by peace, no longer howled so loudly in winter at the gates of Paris.

Charles VII was dead and had carried off a whole age with him; and in stating this I state but a fact. It is almost impossible for us to understand the relationship of the men of mediæval times to the past. With us the past has a yesterday and a day before yesterday, and a last year and a year before last. With us in this year 1916 King Edward VII is still an almost living figure, and the light eternal and steadfast that we call History has not yet come to absolute rest on the grand figure of Victoria, which still seems slightly to move and almost to smile before settling to immortality.

But in the Middle Ages a man dead yesterday was already a man belonging to the past, a man dead a year belonged to the region of chimeras and dreams. There were few distances, there was

little perspective. The Maid of Orléans, who died in the year of Villon's birth, was ranked by him with Flora of Rome, with Harembourges of Mayne, with Héloïse, with Thaïs; and the dead King Charles was already with Pharamond, and the age which men associated with his name was dead as the age of Childebert.

The past, for the men of the Middle Ages, was, as a Chinese picture is for us, a country almost without perspective. Gothic art and Gothic thought had so few and such stereotyped major ideas about death and everything connected with death that a man once dead was like a man who had put on the habit of the Benedictines or the Augustines—indistinguishable from his fellows; and men in general were so ignorant of History that "Nabugodonosor" and Jason walked in the same field with Absalom and Glaucus, the last good Duke d'Alençon with Calixtus the Third; and Simon Magus with the Lords of Dijon and the Lords of Dolles.

You will understand me that this statement must not be taken as absolutely rigid. I am referring mainly to the mind of the mass of the people, and if I draw my illustrations from Villon's verse I am not bound to the opinion that his view of the past presented a picture as flat as that presented to the gaze of the general folk in Paris city.

Charles VII, then, when Villon entered Paris, was already an historical figure in the minds of the people, the air was still vibrating with the joy-

bells rung for the accession of Louis XI, all sorts of new places were filled by all sorts of new men, and the life of the capital, for the moment at least, was, perhaps, more full and abundant than at any time during the past thirty years.

We can fancy Villon passing through the busy streets, dusty and footsore, on the look-out for a lodging for the night, some hole to hide himself in, some friend to shelter him.

The men he had known, the students he had drunk with, the robbers, even, with whom he had associated, where were they now? In the twenty-ninth and following verses of the *Great Testament* he asks the question:

Where are the gallants with whom I consorted of old, so fine in song and speech, so pleasant in acts and words? Some are dead, they rest in Paradise—and may God have the remainder in His keeping.

Some—Dieu Mercy!—have become great lords and masters. Some beg naked, and never see bread, unless in the windows of the bakers' shops. Others are in the cloisters of the Celestines and Chartreux.

They have all vanished in one way or another.

Montigny and Colin de Cayeux are dangling their bones at Montfaucon, Guy Tabary has gone who knows where, even the Provost of Paris has vanished, giving place to a newcomer.

It was a bad return, and we do not know where Villon went that night for a shelter, but we do know that he did not seek permanent shelter with Guillaume Villon. We know this from the

seventy-seventh verse of the *Great Testament*, where he implores Guillaume Villon, his more than father, who has saved him from many a danger, not to search for him. John Payne suggests, and reason supports the suggestion, that he took shelter with some one of his old companions still left—possibly, says Payne, with La Grosse Margot.

Now, everyone who knows anything about Villon knows about the *Ballade of La Grosse Margot*. It is one of the most fiercely unprintable things in literature. Monsieur Longnon has suggested that it was not written round a woman at all, but round a tavern; that it was not a piece of personal experience, but more in the nature of an allegory. We will notice it later on, and I need only say, here, that, from internal evidence, one is driven to believe that M. Longnon's kind suggestion must fall to the ground.

Wherever Villon went, either to the house of La Grosse Margot or elsewhere, he found shelter, a pen and ink, and time to formulate his thoughts.

Driven from post to pillar during his exile of five years, he may have had time to write a few ballades and rondels, and to lay in his imagination the seeds for more, but it seems absolutely clear that his genius had never gathered itself properly together till now, when, fresh from the pit of Meung, without material hope and with the energy of a stream long damned, it found its relief in that extraordinary outburst of laughter, tears, regrets, and sighs, the *Great Testament*.



In whatever house he hid himself he opened windows for us to look out upon the streets of that new Paris of 1461.

He is done with the University now, and, had we no other testimony at all, the *Great Testament*, by its brilliant and fugitive glimpses of life, would help us to construct a vivid picture of the city in which it was written.

We have seen the Cité and the Ville from above, we have seen the University both from the outside and the inside; we are to see the city now all alive and chattering—moving, coloured, in dazzling glimpses.

The washerwomen are beating their clothes on the river-bank just as they beat them to-day, and the fish-women are quarrelling on the Petit Pont; and what a crowd it is we see crossing the Petit Pont, swarming down the Rue de la Juiverie, across the Pont Notre Dame and up that broad street on the right bank that leads to the Croix de Trahoir.

Chartreux and Celestines, *dévotés* and mendicants, idlers stopping for a drink at the Pomme de Pin, servants running on errands, the showman and his marmots, the clown and juggler, the light girls with their breasts half naked, the staid widow; *folz* and *folles*, *sotz* and *sottes* laughing, jibing, whistling, elbowed here and there by blackguards and bullies, jesting at the sergents of police, stopping to speak of the new King Louis and the late King Charles; light-hearted, blasphemous,

and crossing themselves with their tongues in their cheeks.

There goes the captain of the archers, Jehan Rou, ferocious and redoubtable, and Maître Guillaume Charruau with his big paunch where one might fancy he stored all the learning which he never digested at the University before taking that degree of Master of Arts which he flung aside to turn merchant, and there goes Ythier Marchand, furtive and secretive-looking, whom you would never imagine in the rôle of a lover. Yet Ythier Marchand away in the past had a love-affair which inspired Villon the poet with a rondel, which is the only rondel that ever had a soul.<sup>1</sup>

Mixed in the crowd you see Jehan le Loup and Casin Chollet, those two seedy-looking gentlemen with whom you would not go down a side-street for worlds and worlds—duck-thieves, that is all they are; and after them, pretending to see nothing, stamped with the air of authority and dressed in the uniform of sergents of the Provostry, come Denis Richier and Jehan Vallette. From a window in that old house a girl is singing a song of the day, *Ma Douce Amour*. It is strange to think of that singing shadow, dust so long and love still sweet; and it is strange to think that drink still makes men merry when one looks at that old man passing under the window, Jehan Cotart, no less, with the lump on his forehead he got by falling against a butcher's stall last night.

<sup>1</sup> See Rondel, p. 179.

Jehan trembles before one's eyes for a moment and then vanishes either into a tavern or into the crowd. The latter most like, for we can hear the blackguard boys shouting after a drunken man, their thin piercing cry cutting through all the hubbub of the street,

“ *Aux Houls, saouls ! saouls ! saouls !* ”

That terrible-looking man is the Seigneur de Grigny; and here comes the fat grocer Thibult de la Garde of Reuil, who has come up to Paris for the day to let us have a look at him; the two Perdryers, François and Jean, foxy and prosperous-looking, with slanderous tongues and false hearts; the prosperous-looking André Courault, King René's representative in Paris; Marion l'Ydolle and Big Joan of Brittany, arm-in-arm, treading on the heels of André Courault with an eye for the police and a wink for everyone else. They all pass, dissolve, and vanish, and the sunlight fades and we see the lights springing alive on the bridges. Close to the Petit Pont lies the Abreuvour Popin, lit by the glow of a bonfire round which a few old hags are sitting with their chins on their knees and a hand stretched out to the warmth.

Women who have once been young.

The tavern by the Abreuvour Popin is roaring, and across the lighted space you can see the beggars and mumpers crawling with painted sores, false wounds, patches on their eyes, to sleep under the butchers' stalls of the markets.

And then all this fades away and the Cemetery

of the Innocents takes its place, pale in the light of the moon that has risen over Paris, and filled with the tombs where the dead lie, good and bad, young and old, rich and poor, Great lords and ladies who no longer curtsey one to another—

Now they are dead, God take their souls! Seigneurs and dames, soft and tenderly nourished on cream, frumenty and rice, all mouldering to dust. May Christ absolve them!

The Cemetery of the Innocents is empty to-night of all but the dead, for the late edicts have closed it to the light women who made it a resort, and all the loose characters that followed them; and from the Rue de la Féronnerie on the one side of the cemetery and the Rue au Fer on the other, and from all the streets beyond, the sounds of the night come loud. Somewhere a voice is singing a song of the day—or rather of the night—*Ouvrez votre huis Guillemette*. Voices are mumbling close to the wall; the mumblers curse and take to flight at the sound of the tramp of armed men who are approaching. It is De Tusca, Sergeant of Police, at the head of his squad. They are clearing the streets of suspicious characters, and if we leap over the wall and follow them they will lead us to many a queer place, even to the house of La Grosse Margot where there is revelling going on, though the curfews of the Ville, the Cité, and the University have rung and it is time that all decent citizens should be in bed.

Villon lived in this swarming and busy Paris of 1461 for a year without being detected, or at least

without stirring up any recollection of his part in the affair of the robbery at the College of Navarre in the minds of the Faculty of Theology.

Now see how fate fell upon him.

On November 2nd, 1462, he was arrested in connection with a robbery.'

## CHAPTER XIV

### FATE

HE does not seem to have had any hand in the business, for he was almost immediately acquitted. Living as he did from hand to mouth among questionable people, it is quite possible that he was not living an entirely innocent life, but the point is that we may presume he was innocent of the particular charge on which he was arrested, for the drastic justice of 1462 did not open the prison doors for a robber against whom the smallest scintilla of evidence could be adduced.

And the doors of the Châtelet were just about to open and let Villon out when Fate interposed.

The authorities of the College of Navarre got wind of the fact that François Villon had returned to Paris, and down came Maître Laurens Poutrel to interview the prisoner and to close the half-opened door.

Villon confessed to the whole business of the robbery at the College of Navarre, and surely one might say all was over with him now. But the love of money which is the root of all evil, and

which was the cause of the robbery, proved now to be the temporary salvation of the robber.

The College of Navarre was very, very angry at its loss, but it was even more anxious to get its money back, or even part of its money, and Poutrel having, no doubt, read the prisoner a homily, pointed out his position, and threatened him with pictures of what the consequences might be, came to the point in his mind.

Could Villon refund any of the sum, and if so how much ?

Villon could not.

We can fancy the interview between the quick-witted robber-poet and the rigid-witted Poutrel.

But Poutrel held the cards.

He guessed that Villon had friends who would help him, he no doubt imagined fondly that this draggled butterfly would, when driven to it, help his friends to help him by setting to some sort of work, and the upshot of the business was that Poutrel consented to Villon's release on the promise of "*ledict Villon*" to repay 120 écus in gold of the stolen money in the course of three years.

One does not love the Faculty of Theology of the University of Paris, but no one can deny that in this matter they behaved with common sense and generosity. There is no doubt at all in my mind that Poutrel in that interview recognised the fact that Villon had already been well punished for his behaviour in the past.

The poet was set at liberty and returned to his miserable lodgings, wherever they were, only to find that Fate was less kind than Poutrel.

He had picked up many acquaintances in this new Paris, but he had found little in the way of money, and one evening, having passed the day without food, he made bold to call on a friend of his, Robin Dogis, living in the Rue Parcheminerie, and to suggest that Dogis should stand him a supper.

The supper took place at the house of Dogis, and four sat down to table—Villon, Dogis, a man named Hutin du Moustier, and a cleric of the University, Rogier Pichart by name.

Pichart was one of the "bloods," a violent and quarrelsome ruffian, especially when in his cups, and when supper was finished and Pichart had drunk as much as he could conveniently carry, the four revellers left the house, proposing to go to Villon's lodgings and there finish the evening.

They came up the Rue St. Jacques, it was after curfew and the streets were in darkness, not a lamp was to be seen and only one light, a dim glow that came from the office window of Maître François Ferrebouc the notary.

Ferrebouc's office was situated next to the Mule tavern—the same tavern that Rabelais frequented in later years—and the sight of the lightless tavern and the luminous office window seems to have been too much for the soul of Rogier Pichart. He came to the lit window and looked in at the clerks



all busily engaged, sober, and working hard at their accounts.

He began to jibe at them, and then, not content with words, spat into the room where they were working.

Then the clerks came out.

The venerable and discreet François Ferrebouc, hearing the noise of the fight, picked up his skirts and came out also to assist against the enemy. He struck Robin Dogis, Dogis in a fury whipped out a dagger, and, next moment, Ferrebouc was on the ground stabbed, but not mortally.

Dogis and his companions made their escape. Villon seems to have had no hand in the matter, yet he had been recognised as a companion of the others, and next day he was arrested, thrown into the Châtelet, tried as an accomplice of the others, and condemned to death.

There is something about this episode that brings us to a halt. That something mediæval which clings still to gargoyles, that strange perversion which, in the Middle Ages, now made justice drivellingly lenient when leniency might be least expected, now fantastically cruel when leniency might be most expected, seems to have seized with both hands the life of Villon.

“Here is a man,” one might fancy it saying, “whom I might have hanged several times for crimes committed. He has now committed no crime—let us hang him.”

The irony of the business acted on Villon in a

strange manner at first. He sought in his mind for something to say about this villainous trick of Fate, and like the costermonger in the story he could not rise to the circumstances. The thing was beyond even his powers of language. He accepted it with this quatrain, which I translate :

[*Translation*]

THE QUATRAIN

*Made by Villon when he was sentenced to death*

For my sorrow, I am François,  
Born in Paris near to Pontoise.  
Soon the six-foot cord that sways  
Will teach my neck what my — weighs.

[*Original French*]

LE QUATRAIN

*Que feit Villon quand il fut jugé à mourir*

Je suis François, dont ce me poise,  
Né de Paris emprès Ponthoise.  
Or d'une corde d'une toise<sup>1</sup>  
Saura mon col que mon cul poise.

It was just a statement of the bare facts of the case—with two jokes thrown in; and at first sight one might be tempted to say, “What a callous scoundrel!”

But take the facts of the case and the Gallic spirit of the scoundrel.

It was the refusal to pay homage to disaster, a

<sup>1</sup> Toise = 6·39459 feet; roughly speaking, a fathom.

snub for death, an acceptance of the worst with a joke. It was the *Merde* of Cambronne before the overthrow of his world at Waterloo.

On second thoughts Villon took a different view of the situation and addressed an appeal to Parliament, pointing out the facts of the case, including the major fact that he had no hand or part in the assault on Ferrebouc.

Whilst waiting the result of the appeal, and almost certain in his own mind that he had no hope of a mitigation of the sentence, he wrote the *Ballade des Pendus*, called in the first edition of his works printed by Pierre Levet the epitaph of Villon.

I give the original ballade and translation :

[Original French]

L'EPITAPHE EN FORME DE BALLADE

*Que feit Villon pour luy et ses compagnons, s'attendant estre pendu avec eulx*

Frères humains, qui après nous vivez,  
 N'ayez les cueurs contre nous endureciz,  
 Car, si pitié de nous pouvres avez,  
 Dieu en aura plustost de vous merciz.  
 Vous nous voyez cy attachez cinq, six :  
 Quant de la chair, que trop avons nourrie,  
 Elle est piéça devorée et pourrie,  
 Et nous, les os, devenons cendre et pouldre.  
 De nostre mal personne ne s'en rie,  
 Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre !

Se vous clamons, frères, pas n'en devez  
 Avoir desdaing, quoyque fusmes occis  
 Par justice. Toutesfois, vous sçavez  
 Que tous les hommes n'ont pas bon sens assis ;

Intercedez doncques, de cueur rassis,  
 Envers le Filz de la Vierge Marie,  
 Que sa grace ne soit pour nous tarie,  
 Nous preservant de l'infernale fouldre.  
 Nous sommes mors, ame ne nous harie ;  
 Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre !

La pluye nous a debuez et lavez,  
 Et le soleil dessechez et noirciz ;  
 Pies, corbeaulx, nous ont les yeux cavez,  
 Et arrachez la barbe et les sourcilz.  
 Jamais, nul temps, nous ne sommes rassis ;  
 Puis çà, puis là, comme le vent varie,  
 A son plaisir sans cesser nous charie,  
 Plus becquetez d'oyseaulx que dez à couldre.  
 Ne soyez donc de nostre confrairie,  
 Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre !

## ENVOI

Prince JESUS, qui sur tous seigneurie,  
 Garde qu'Enfer n'ayt de nous la maistrie :  
 A luy n'ayons que faire ne que souldre.  
 Hommes, icy n'usez de mocquerie  
 Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre !

[*Translation*]

## EPITAPH IN FORM OF A BALLADE

## LA BALLADE DES PENDUS

O brother men who after us shall thrive,  
 Let not your hearts against us hardened be.  
 For all the pity unto us ye give  
 God will return in mercy unto ye ;  
 We five or six here swinging from the tree,  
 Behold, and all our flesh that once was fair,  
 Rotted, and eaten by the beaks that tear,  
 Whilst we the bones to dust and ash dissolve.  
 Let no man mock us or the fate we bear ;  
 But pray to God that He may us absolve.

O brothers, hear us and do not receive  
 Our lamentations in disdain, though we  
 Came here by Justice ; for all men that live  
 Are not born into good sense equally.  
 Make intercession for us, graciously,  
 With Him whose life the Virgin once did share,  
 That His grace comes to us as water clear,  
 Nor hell's destructions on our heads devolve ;  
 Dead are we, and as dead men leave us here.  
 But pray to God that He may us absolve.

The rain has washed us as we'd been alive,  
 The sun has dried and blackened us, ye see,  
 The pies and crows that all around us strive  
 Leave us of eyes and beard and eyebrows free.  
 Never from torment have we sanctuary,  
 Ever and always driven here and there,  
 At the wind's will, and every change of air.  
 More dented than the fruit that beaks revolve ;  
 Men ! gaze on us, be warned, and onward fare—  
 But pray to God that He may us absolve.

## ENVOI

Prince Jesus, Lord of all, have us in care,  
 And keep from us the fires of hell that flare,  
 Lest those dread fires our fate and future solve.  
 O brothers, make no mock of what we are,  
 But pray to God that He may us absolve.

We may be grateful to the men who sentenced Villon to death, for the death-sentence acted on Villon's mind, making it disclose itself as nothing else could have done.

Under that potent stimulus we see him writing the *Je suis François* quatrain, and with the same pen the greatest ballade in literature.

But the death-sentence was to give us more of his character.

His appeal was successful.

Filled with relief and the joy of assured life, he sits down and dashes off the following letter in the form of a ballade to his friend Garnier.

I append my translation of it and the original :

[*Translation*]

BALLADE OF VILLON'S APPEAL

Garnier, what of my appeal ?  
 Was it sense or not—you see  
 Every beast must from the steel  
 Guard its skin by subtlety,  
 Or by flight, and so with me.  
 Since, then, all this needless pain  
 Came about through treachery,  
 Was it time for silence then ?

Were I heir to Hue Cappel,  
 "Butchers were his ancestry,"  
 They would not have made me swell  
 In their damned escorcherie.  
 You know well that trickery,  
 Since for pleasure's sake these men  
 Chanted forth their homily,  
 Was it time for silence then ?

Think you 'neath my cap did dwell  
 Not enough philosophy  
 Just to answer "J'en appel"  
 And my speechless tongue to free ?  
 When the greffier, notary,  
 Read the verdict out, and when  
 "Pendü serez" finished he,  
 Was it time for silence then ?

## ENVOI

Prince, had I stood foolishly  
 Voiceless, as with pip the hen,  
 By Clotaire's<sup>1</sup> my corpse would be :  
 Was it time for silence then ?

[*Original French*]

## BALLADE

DE L'APPEL DE VILLON

Que dites-vous de mon appel,  
 Garnier ? Feis-je sens ou follie ?  
 Toute beste garde sa pel ;  
 Qui la contrainct, efforce ou lye,  
 S'elle peult, elle se deslie.  
 Quand à ceste peine arbitraire  
 On me jugea par tricherie,  
 Estoit-il lors temps de me taire ?

Se fusse des hoirs Hue Capel,<sup>2</sup>  
 Qui fut extraict de boucherie,  
 On ne m'eust, parmy ce drapel,  
 Faict boyre à celle escorcherie :  
 Vous entendez bien joncherie ?  
 Quand donc, par plaisir volontaire  
 Chanté me fut ceste homélie,<sup>3</sup>  
 Etoit-il lors temps de me taire ?

Cuydez-vous que soubz mon cappel  
 N'y eust tant de philosophie  
 Comme de dire : " J'en appel ? "  
 Si avoit, je vous certifie,  
 Combien que point trop ne m'y fie.  
 Quand on me dit, présent notaire :  
 " Pendu serez ! " je vous affie,  
 Estoit-il lors temps de me taire ?

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<sup>1</sup> The gibbet of Montfaucon was situated near the abbey of St. Denis, where Clotaire III was buried (Prompsault.)

<sup>2</sup> The heirs of Hugues Capet.      <sup>3</sup> The sentence of death.

## ENVOI

Prince, si j'eusse eu la pepie,  
 Piéça je fusse où est Clotaire,  
 Aux champs debout comme ung espie.  
 Estoit-il lors temps de me taire ?

That important work finished, and the ink scarcely dry on the paper, he writes a petition to the Parliament also in ballade form.

The translation which follows—with the original—will give you some idea of this request :

[*Translation*]

## THE REQUEST OF VILLON

*Presented to the Court of Parliament in the Form of a Ballade*

All my five senses, hearing, touch, and taste,  
 My nose, and you the eyes with which I see,  
 And every member of me held disgraced,  
 Each from its place doth speak assuredly.  
 Most sovereign court, by whose grace here we be,  
 Whose hand discomfiture from us doth fling,  
 The tongue hath no sufficient offering  
 So gratitude with speech doth us invest.  
 We speak ! O daughter of the sovereign king,  
 Mother of good, sister of angels blest.

Heart, split in twain, or pierced be and laid waste,  
 But be not harder through perversity  
 Than the hard rock the wandering Jews once faced  
 And Moses split at Horeb anciently.  
 Weep, and seek mercy, in humility,  
 Ev'n as a humble heart in suffering,  
 Bow to the court that doth our empire bring  
 Strength, and protection to each foreign guest ;  
 Born of the sky that doth the broad earth ring,  
 Mother of good, sister of angels blest.



And you my teeth, each in its socket placed,  
 Answer, and unto all men say "Mercy,"  
 Louder than trumpet let your voice be raised,  
 Louder than bell or organ's minstrelsy.  
 Think never more of eating, I pray ye,  
 Consider how I suffered, ye who sing,  
 Spleen, heart, and liver touched by terror's sting.  
 And, Body, lest you'd seem no more than beast,  
 Praise now the Court that wrought for you this thing,  
 Mother of good, sister of angels blest.

## ENVOI

Prince, to whose clemency my hope does cling,  
 Three days to see my friends ere I take wing,  
 Grant, for without them I have coin nor vest.  
 Great Court, lend ear to my petitioning,  
 Mother of good, sister of angels blest.

[*Original French*]

## LA REQUÊTE DE VILLON

*Présentée à la Cour de Parlement, en forme de ballade*

Tous mes cinq Sens, yeux, oreilles et bouche,  
 Le nez, et vous, le sensitif, aussi ;  
 Tous mes membres où il y a reproche,  
 En son endroit ung chacun die ainsi :  
 " Court souverain, par qui sommes icy,  
 Vous nous avez gardé de desconfire ;  
 Or, la langue ne peut assez suffire  
 A vous rendre suffisantes louenges :  
 Si prions tous, fille au souverain Sire,  
 Mère des bons, et sœur des benoistz anges ! "

Cueur, fendez-vous, ou percez d'une broche,  
 Et ne soyez, au moins, plus endurey  
 Qu'au desert fut la forte bise roche  
 Dont le peuple des Juifs fut adouley ;  
 Fondez larmes, et venez à mercy,

Comme humble cueur qui tendrement souspire  
 Louez la Court, conjointe au saint Empire,  
 L'heur des François, le confort des estranges,  
 Procrée là sus au ciel empire,  
 Mère des bons, et sœur des benoistz anges !

Et vous, mes dentz, chascune si s'esloche ;  
 Saillez avant, rendez toutes mercy,  
 Plus haultement qu'orgue, trompe, ne cloche,  
 Et de mascher n'ayez ores souley ;  
 Considerez que je fusse transy,  
 Foye, pommon, et rate qui respire ;  
 Et vous, mon corps, vil qui estes ou pire  
 Qu'ours ne pourceau, qui faict son nid ès fanges  
 Louez la Court, avant qu'il vous empire,  
 Mère des bons, et sœur des benoistz anges !

## ENVOI

Prince, trois jours ne vueillez m'escondire,  
 Pour moy pourvoir, et aux miens adieu dire ;  
 Sans eulx, argent je n'ay, icy n'aux changes  
 Court triumphant, *fiat*, sans me desdire,  
 Mère des bons, et sœur des benoistz anges !

The postscript is the humorous part of the thing and the pith of the whole matter.

One would like to have seen the faces of the grave Parliament men as they read it.

The mother of good and sister of the blessed angels succumbed to the flattery, and three days' grace were granted.

It is a pity that afterwards, when Villon was beyond their reach, some hand did not present to them the *Garnier Ballade*.

These four productions, the *Quatrain*, the *Balade des Pendus*, the *Garnier Ballade*, and the

*Petition*, all springing almost at the same time from one mind, give us a glimpse and a gauge of that same mind which nothing else can give us.

Such a glimpse of laughter and trickery, grandeur and opportunism, beauty of word and thought, effrontery and fawning, as is given to us in this group of verses it would be hard to find though we searched the whole of literature.

In any reasoned edition of Villon's works they should be printed in order, in one group, and with the label—"This is Villon."

Leaving prison, freed from the fear of death and with three days' grace before quitting Paris, we may fancy that Villon recovered somewhat from his attack of good spirits. The prospect before him was sufficiently dreary. Remember that though in this age an exile conducted himself into exile, the business of the going and remaining was as strict as the business of transportation in the nineteenth century.

Villon was forbidden to return to Paris for ten years, and the punishment for return was death, not death on the gallows after a trial, but instant death from the sword of the first officer of justice that met him.

He visited his friends, his mother possibly, and old Guillaume Villon amongst the rest, and on the 8th day of January, 1463, he left Paris, never to return.

## CHAPTER XV

### WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM ?

WHEN the gates of Paris closed behind him for this the last time, he walked off into the unknown, and we have not even an echo of his footsteps.

We know absolutely nothing of what happened to him or where he went, or where or in what manner he died.

He is mentioned four times by Rabelais, and I give two passages for what they are worth.

Master Francis Villon, in his old age, retired to St. Maixent, in Poitou, under the patronage of a good honest abbot of the place. There, to make sport for the mob, he undertook to get the *passion* acted after the way and in the dialect of the country. The parts being distributed, the play having been rehearsed, and the stage prepared, he told the mayor and aldermen that the mystery would be ready after Niort fair, and that there only wanted properties and necessaries, but chiefly cloaths fit for the parts: so the mayor and his brethren took care to get them.

Villon, to dress an old clownish father grey-beard, who was to represent G—d the father, begged of Friar Stephen Tickletohy, sacristan to the franciscan friars of the place, to lend him a cope and a stole. Tickletohy refused him, alledging, that by their provincial statutes, it was rigorously forbidden to give or lend anything to players. Villon replied, that the statute reached no farther than farces, drolls, antics, loose and dissolute games, and that he asked no more than what he had seen allowed at Brussels

and other places. Tickletohy, notwithstanding, peremptorily bid him provide himself elsewhere if he would, and not to hope for anything out of his monastical wardrobe. Villon gave an account of this to the players, as of a most abominable action; adding, that God would shortly revenge himself, and make an example of Tickletohy.

The Saturday following he had notice given him that Tickletohy, upon the filly of the convent (so they call a young mare that was never leaped yet) was gone a mumping to St. Ligarius, and would be back about two in the afternoon. Knowing this, he made a cavalcade of his devils of the passion through the town. They were all rigged with wolves, calves, and rams' skins, laced and trimmed with sheep's heads, bulls' feathers, and large kitchen tenter hooks, girt with broad leathern girdles; whereat hang'd dangling huge cow-bells and horse-bells, which made a horrid din. Some held in their claws black sticks full of squibs and crackers; others had long lighted pieces of wood, upon which, at the corner of every street, they flung whole handfuls of rosin-dust, that made a terrible fire and smoak. Having thus led them about, to the great diversion of the mob, and the dreadful fear of little children, he finally carried them to an entertainment at a summer-house, without the gate that leads to St. Ligarius.

As they came near the place, he spied Tickletohy afar off, coming home from mumping, and told them in macaronic verse,

Hic est mumpator natus de gente cucowli,  
Qui solet antiquo scrappas portare<sup>1</sup> bisacco.

"A plague on his friarship," said the devils then; "the lousy beggar would not lend a poor cope to the fatherly father; let us fright him." "Well said," cried Villon: "but let us hide ourselves till he comes by, and then charge him home briskly with your squibs and burning sticks." Tickletohy being come to the place, they all rushed on a sudden into the road to meet him, and in a frightful manner threw fire from all sides upon him and his filly foal, ringing and tingling their bells, and howling like so many real devils, "Hho, hho, hho, hho, brrou, rrou, rrourrs, rrourrs, hoo, hou, hou, hho, hho, hhoi. Friar Stephen, don't we play the devils rarely?" The filly was soon scared out of

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<sup>1</sup> A monk's double pouch.

her seven senses, and began to start, to funk it, to squirt it, to trot it, to bound it, to gallop it, to kick it, to spurn it, to calcitrate it, to wince it, to frisk it, to leap it, to curvet it, with double jirks; insomuch that she threw down Tickletoby, though he held fast by the tree of the pack-saddle with might and main. Now his straps and stirrups were of cord; and on the right side his sandal was so entangled and twisted, that he could not for the heart's blood of him get out his foot. Thus he was dragged about by the filly through the road, scratching his bare breech all the way; she still multiplying her kicks against him, and straying for fear over hedge and ditch; insomuch that she trepanned his thick skull so, that his cockle brains were dashed out near the osanna or high-cross. Then his arms fell to pieces, one this way and the other that way; and even so were his legs served at the same time. Then she made a bloody havock with his puddings; and being got to the convent, brought back only his right foot and twisted sandal, leaving them to guess what was become of the rest.

Villon seeing that things had succeeded as he intended, said to his devils, "You will act rarely, gentlemen devils, you will act rarely; I dare engage you will top your parts. I defy the devils of Saumur, Douay, Montmorillion, Langez, St. Espain, Angers; nay, by gad, even those of Poitiers, for all their bragging and vapouring, to match you."—*Pantagruel*, book iv. chap. xiii.

Exemple autre ou roy d'Angleterre, Edouart le quint. Maistre François Villon, *banny de France*, s'estoit vers luy retiré: *il l'avoit en si grande privaulté* repecu que rien ne luy celoyt des menues negoces de sa maison. Un jour le roy susdict, estant a ses affaires, monstra a Villon les armes de France en paincture, et luy dist: "Voyds tu quelle reverence je porte a tes roys Francoys? Ailleurs n'ay je leurs armoiryes que en ce retraict icy, pres ma scelle persée."—"Sacre Dieu (respondist Villon) tant vous estes saige, prudent, entendu, et curieux de vostre santé? Et tant bien estes servy de vostre docte medicin *Thomas Linacer*. Il, voyant que naturellement sus *vos vieulx jours* estiez constippé du ventre, et que journallement vous failloit au cul fourrer un apothecaire, je diz un clystere, aultrement ne povyez vous esmeutir, vous a faict icy aptement, non ailleurs, paindre les armes de France, par singuliere et vertueuse providence.

Car, seulement les voyant, vous avez telle vezarde, et paour si horricque, que soubdain vous fiantez comme dix huyct bonases de Pæonie. Si painctes estoient en aultre lieu de vostre maison, en vostre chambre, en vostre salle, en vostre chapelle, en vos gualleries, ou ailleurs, sacre Dieu, vous chiriez partout sus l'instant que vous les auriez veues. Et croy que, si d'abondant vous aviez icy en paincture la grande Oriflamme de France, a la veue d'icelle vous rendriez les boyaulx du ventre par le fonde-ment. Mais hen, hen, *at que iterum* hen,

Ne suys je Badault de Paris ?  
De Paris, diz je, aupres Pontoise :  
Et d'une chorde d'une toise  
Sçaura mon coul, que mon cul poise.

Badault, diz je, mal advisé, mal entendu, mal entendent quand, venent icy avecques vous, m'esbahissoys de ce qu'en vostre chambre vous estez faict vos chausses destacher. Veritablement je pensoys qu'en ycelle, darriere la tapisserie, ou en la venelle du lict, feust vostre scelle persée. Aultrement, me sembloit le cas grandement incongru, soy ainsi destacher en chambre, pour si loing aller au retraict lignagier. N'est ce ung vray pensement de Badault ? Le cas est faict pour bien d'autre mystere, de par Dieu. Ainsi faisant, vous faictes bien. Je diz si bien, que mieulx ne sçauriez. Faictes vous a bonne heure, bien loin, bien a point destacher. Car, a vous entrant icy, n'estant destaché, voyant cestes armoyries, notez bien tout, sacre Dieu, le fond de vos chausses feroit office de lasanon, pital, bassin fecal, et de scelle persée."—*Pantagruel*, book iv. chap. lxvii.

Villon in Rabelais' time was only a rumour, a shade, a legend, and, as Champion points out, the man who makes Thomas Linacre physician to Edward V cannot be trusted as an historian. It would have been better for Rabelais to have left Villon untouched, for never has his madness for dirt shown itself to less advantage than when he drags the clean Villon into a noxious little story.

We may presume that Villon died very shortly after his exit from Paris.

It was the best thing he could do. He had lived his life. Recklessness, disaster, starvation, punishment, and death, all these terrible things seized him in turn, and from them all, as they devoured him, he drew the food for his genius—but more especially from death.



## CHAPTER XVI

### SUMMARY

THIS is the summary of the life of Villon :

Born . . . . .	1431
Took his Baccalaureate degree . . . . .	March 1449
Took his Master of Arts . . . . .	1452
Killed Sermoise . . . . .	June 1455
Assisted in the robbery of the College of Navarre . . . . .	Dec. 1456
Started on his five years' pilgrim- mage . . . . .	Jan. 1457
Imprisoned at Meung . . . . .	Summer, 1461
Released . . . . .	Autumn, 1461
Returned to Paris . . . . .	Autumn, 1461
Imprisoned and released, Paris . . . . .	1462
Imprisoned on account of Ferre- bouc affair and condemned to death . . . . .	
Released and left Paris . . . . .	Jan. 1463
Never heard of again.	

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE " PETIT TESTAMENT "

WHEN one comes to estimate the worth of a man in morals or in mind, does it matter so much whether he was good or bad or dull or brilliant? Is it not a fact that the chief question that matters much may be put in three words—did he grow?

The world is full of brilliant men who have never grown, of good men gone decayed for want of growth. The natural human and faulty men who grow in goodness, and the brilliant men who grow in brilliancy, are not these the people who count?

What is growth? As regards the mind of man it is the result of a process of testing, selecting, and rejecting of all the various food offered to the mind by the universe in which it finds itself; the process of finding out for oneself what is poisonous, what is garbage, and what is really worth eating and assimilating. Directly, it implies the power of employing this process, and of digesting and using for constructive purposes the food selected.

It is sometimes a terribly slow business. A man

may seem bad, worthless, or stupid till he is twenty, till he is thirty, till he is forty, and yet all the time he may be doing the only thing worth doing in the world—growing or preparing to grow. God, and the man of forty who has outlived the wildness of his younger days, alone know the truth of this.

And this growth, this natural building of the soul by the soul, of the mind by the mind, this finding out for oneself of the bad and good in life and profiting by the discovery, is the chief thing that counts so far as man is concerned.

Did Villon grow in the world in which he found himself? did he discover the difference between garbage and good food and profit by the discovery? Most undoubtedly he did, and, as I have said before, the triumphant evidence of this lies in his work.

The difference between the style and manner and matter of the two Testaments is the measure of his growth in worth, both in mind and morals, and the soul of the evidence lies in the fact that the jeering, laughing, tricky Villon of the *Petit Testament* still peeps forth in the *Grand Testament*. Here we find no assumption of morality, of tenderness or pity. The natural man is still in evidence, but with what a difference! He still laughs, he still leaves jesting legacies, he still busies himself with the little things of life, he falls back into his mockery and trickery at moments—all that is nothing beside the fact that he has learned to weep

and that his tears are real, that he has freed himself, in part, from the hateful engrossment of the moment, and recognises colours to which he seemed blind before, and tones to which he seemed deaf.

And to demonstrate his moral growth I would bring forward not a shred of the direct evidence which is abundant enough in the *Testament* and the *Ballades*, the best evidence lies in the splendour of his best work.

We have seen him writing the *Petit Testament*. Now let us see what he has been writing.

The *Petit Testament* consists of exactly forty verses. Three hundred and twenty lines in all.

We may believe that it was written in a hurry. He states in the first few lines that he is off to Angers and that he is writing these same lines with the Christmas bells, so to speak, still ringing in his ears, and we know that he left for Angers almost immediately after Christmas. There is nothing in this production to prove that it was not written in a hurry. There is nothing of much value in it at all, with the exception of the statement about Katherine de Vaucelles in the first six verses, the light which the jesting legacies cast on his own mind and the persons of the legatees, the hard bright wit which we can only partially appreciate, and the revelation here and there of what seems almost a modern sense of humour.

All the same, it is a most interesting document. First of all, it gives us a date.

L'an quatre cens cinquante et six,  
Je Francois Villon, escollier,  
Considerant de sens rassis,  
La frain aux dents, franc au collier,  
Qu'on doit ses œuvres conseiller,  
Comme Vegèce le racompte,  
Saige Romain, grant conseiller,  
Ou autrement on se mescompte.

All that is worth having just for the sake of the precious date in the first line which pins this production down to the board.

In the next verse and the following six we have the reason for his projected journey to Angers. And that reason is love. Unrequited love.

Now, from the evidence of Guy Tabary, the reason of his journey to Angers was robbery; are these seven love-sick verses, then, to be taken as a jest or perhaps as a cloak for his real intention? I do not think so. That the man was inspired by a real passion for Katherine de Vaucelles is proved by the fact that five years later her memory could still move him to resentment. The verses themselves seem genuine; they bore one, they are long-winded, and they have, in fact, all the stamp of a lover's productions—a stamp which, with a few great exceptions, has never altered throughout the ages.

My own private opinion, as stated before, leans to the supposition that the projected robbery at Angers was an excuse to leave Paris and escape from further entanglements and from the proximity of the woman who would have no more to do with him. But even had the motive been

robbery, the desire to leave Paris on account of Katherine may have been conjoined with it.

For myself, I believe that his unfortunate love-affair with Katherine was at the root of the whole business.

Who was this Katherine de Vaucelles? There is absolutely no answer to that question. Both Payne and Stevenson supposed her to have been the niece of Pierre de Vaucel, one of the canons of St. Benoist, but the balance of opinion is now against this. The connection is entirely imaginary and based on the idea that the word Vaucel is a corruption of Vaucelles—which it is not.

Who was Noël le Jolis or Joly, the person who carried out the sentence of Katherine upon Villon? That question is also unanswerable.

Villon, having registered his complaint against this unknown woman so mysteriously veiled by time, proceeds in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Glorious Mother to bequeath to old Guillaume Villon his fair name and his armorial bearings, and also, to the woman who has treated him so badly, his dead heart, praying God to forgive her.

Then he proceeds to make other valuable gifts. First among the legatees comes Maître Ythier Marchand, to whom he leaves his sword of steel. Ythier Marchand we must presume to have been a friend of Villon in his student days; he was afterwards one of the officers of Louis XI. He was unfortunate in his love-affairs and more

unfortunate in politics, and seems to have always been plotting and intriguing, a dangerous game in the time of Louis XI, as Ythier found to his cost, for he was imprisoned in 1474—and died mysteriously in prison. Villon leaves this gentleman his sword, a perplexing enough legacy taken literally—in reality an unclean jest common among the blackguard students of the University and underscoring vividly the whole tone and matter of this precious *Petit Testament*.

Next—to Pierre de Saint-Amand he leaves the *Mule tavern* and *White Horse*, and to Blaru his diamond and the *Striped Ass*, and the decretal which begins *Omnis utriusque sexus*, to the priests. Now, Pierre de Saint-Amand was clerk to the treasury, and a person in a very good position, and the legacy is interesting inasmuch as it points to the fact, before mentioned, that Villon moved in good society when he was not moving in bad. As to the legacy, it holds no doubt a jest, the point of which is lost, and the same may be said of the gift to Blaru.

One may say at once that all the legacies to all the people mentioned in the *Petit Testament* are to be taken in the spirit of jest, that some of these jests are cruelly pointed, even to our eyes, and that others are quite obscure. Amongst the most notable is the gift of his breeches to Maître Robert Vallée, so that the said Maître Robert Vallée may clothe his mistress Jehanneton de Milliers more decently.

To the captain of the watch he leaves a *heaulme* (a closed helmet the wearing of which would make the said captain of the watch blinder than ever). To Perrenet Marchand, otherwise called the Bastard de la Barre, he leaves three trusses of straw :

Item à Perrenet Marchant,  
 Ou'on dit le Bastard de la Barre,  
 Pource qu'il est ung bon Marchant,  
 Luy laisse trois guyons de fouarre,  
 Pour estendre dessus la terre  
 A fuire l'ammoureux mestier,  
 Ou il luy fauldra sa vie querre,  
 Car il n'eschet autre mestier.

The point will be seen in the last four lines, and the spirit of the business is on a par with the legacy bequeathed to Ythier Marchand. Perrenet was one of the sergents of the Châtelet.

But the most tricky of all the legacies is the following. I give the original French.

Item je laisse, et en pitié,  
 A troys petits enfans tous nudz,  
 Nommez en ce present traictie  
 Povres orphelins impourvez  
 Tous deschassez, tous despourvez,  
 E desnuez comme le ver :  
 J'ordonne qu'ils seront pourvez,  
 Au moins pour passer cest yver.

Premierement Colin Laurens  
 Girard Gossoyen et Jehan Marceau  
 Desprins de biens et de parens,  
 Et n'ont Vaillant l'anse d'ung sceau :  
 Chascun de mes biens ung faisseau,  
 Ou quatre blancs, si l'ayment mieulx . . .  
 Ilz mangeront le bon morceau,  
 Ses enfans, quand je seray vieulx !



He leaves—so a rough translation runs—in pity, to three small children, quite naked, poor, impoverished orphans without boots (or stockings), naked as worms, the order that they shall be taken care of at least till the winter is over. He gives the names of these poor orphans. They are Colin Laurens, Girard Gossoyen, and Jean Marceau.

Who were these poor little children in reality? Colin Laurens was a merchant and money-lender of Paris; Girard Gossoyen was a money-lender and a speculator in salt; and Jean Marceau was a merchant of Rouen and Paris and also a money-lender who seems to have been pitiless in his transactions with his fellow-merchants.

These were the three poor children, naked as worms, to whom Villon left a share of his goods or four blancs (the blanc was one of the smallest coins of the day).

Villon, proceeding with his bequests, leaves his barber the clippings of his hair, without any deductions, his old boots to his bootmaker, and his old clothes to his tailor. He leaves the Mendicant Orders the Filles-Dieu and the Beguins the following legacy:

Item, je laisse aux Mendians,  
Aux Filles-Dieu et aux Beguynes,  
Savoureux morceaulx et frians,  
Chapons, pigeons, grasses gelines,  
Et puis prescher les Quinze Signes,  
Et abatre pain à deux mains,  
Carmes chevaulchent nos voisines,  
Mais cela ne m'est que du mains.

The pith of all that lies in the last two lines just as the pith of verse twenty-three lies in the last four lines.

We next find him leaving the Mortier d'Or (one of the famous grocery shops in Paris) to Jehan the grocer of la Garde, and a gibbet from St. Mor to act as a pestle for the pounding of his mustard. To Mairebeuf and Nicholas de Louvieux, each, an eggshell filled with francs and écus! and to Pierre de Ronseville, Governor of Gouvieux, all the money given him by the Princes who visit Gouvieux to distribute among the gaolers.

I have picked out these legacies from the most understandable in the *Petit Testament*. They are indicative of the spirit of the whole work—a work brilliant and satirical enough in those parts where the brilliancy still shows through the rust and dust of ages, and a work brilliant, no doubt, all through if we could clean away all the dust and rust of time and see fully the people whom the satirist touched on the raw and how cleverly he touched them.

But the brilliancy is the brilliancy of a street-lamp, not of a star. Villon was not a great satirist. On that side of his mind he touched not man, but men. He could make the captain of the watch ridiculous and laughter follow the fat usurers Colin Laurens and Jean Marceau; he could make Jehan de la Garde fume, and Mairebeuf and Nicolas de Louvieux objects of derision; but to

appreciate his satire one must consult old documents, not the human heart.

He was a caricaturist pure and simple when he took up the satirists' pen, and it was with that pen he wrote the *Petit Testament* and some verses of the *Grand Testament* as well.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE " GRAND TESTAMENT "

THE *Grand Testament* opens on a very different note.

En l'an trentiesme me de mon aage,  
Que toutes mes hontes j'ay beues,  
Ne du tout fol, ne du tout sage,  
Nonobstant maintes peines eues,  
Lesquelles j'ay toutes receues,  
Soubz la main Thibault d'Aussigny :  
S'evesue il est, seignant les rues,  
Qu'il soit le mien je le reny !

In the thirtieth year of his age he now takes up his pen, he is just free from the prison of Thibault d'Aussigny, and still broken and sore from that three months of torture and starvation. He recognises that he is not altogether a fool, yet not altogether a wise man. He is humble enough, but God ! how he must have hated Thibault !

Yet he holds himself in. Searching in all the pockets of Villon's mind, I would be better pleased to find curses in this pocket that holds the memory of Thibault d'Aussigny. There is something almost disturbing in his restraint. He says that Thibault is no bishop of his, etc., etc., and he

humbly wishes that if Thibault showed him mercy, God may show equal mercy to Thibault. It is a terrible malediction, and all the worse because it is mumbled.

When he is going to pray for Thibault he will begin his prayer with the seventh verse of the Psalm *Deus laudem*, which verse will express the hope that—

His days may be reduced to the smallest number, and that his bishopric may pass to another.

Then, forgetting Thibault, he gives praise to God and King Louis of France on whom he showers blessings.

Villon was an unlucky man. Most of his friends came to grief, many of the people he mentions in his writings, and nearly all the people to whom he wishes well. He brought sorrow to his mother and old Guillaume Villon. He now wishes Louis luck and twelve fair sons, brave as Charles the Great and good as St. Martial! He wishes luck to the Dauphin, Joachin, son of Charlotte de Savoie, and the Dauphin died at the age of eleven!

Then, having exhausted himself with good wishes and feeling very weak, he sets too on his *Testament* "written in the year 1461."

Escript l'ay l'an soixante et ung.  
Que le bon Roy me delivra,  
De la dure prison de Mehun.

This brings us up to the eleventh verse of the *Grand Testament*, and now immediately there follow

thirty verses of lamentation for the past, regret, self-excuse. There is nothing in literature quite like these thirty verses, this voice that comes to us from such a terrible distance in the past, these regrets and excuses for things and deeds that have been so long, long forgotten.

Je plains le temps de ma jeunesse.

He tells to himself the story of Alexander and the pirate Diomedes. It is all like a child trying to explain a fault.

The pirate, brought in chains before the great Emperor, makes bold to explain his case. It is all Fate. He was poor, and poverty makes men do wicked things. If only circumstances had been different, he might have been a king like Alexander.

Se comme toy me peusse armer,  
Comme toy empereur je fusse.

Upon which the Emperor said to Diomedes, "I will change your fortune from bad to good." As he said, so he did, and Diomedes became a reformed character.

If God had given Villon the luck of Diomedes the result would have been the same, Villon would have reformed—so he told himself.

It is a question open to doubt; but the story remains the same, and the teller, and the attempt at excuse made half a thousand years ago just as men make it to-day.

He mourns over his lost youth, which will never

return to him. Here he is, a wreck, useless, without money, aged, and forgotten by his relatives.

He looks over the tale of his past sins. What has he done ?

What has he really done that so much misery should have fallen upon him ? He has never been lecherous nor a glutton. The punishment has been so severe that his faults seem to be forgotten in the contemplation of it. Forgotten the death of Sermoise, forgotten the College of Navarre business, forgotten the numerous faults which he has no doubt been guilty of. He seems to be looking not at his acts but at his intentions. How many men do the same ! He feels that he has never willingly injured any man or woman, he feels no ill-will against the people of the world, with a reservation perhaps as regards Thibault and the two Perdryers. Why, then, should he have been so persecuted by Fate ?

He makes half an answer in the twenty-sixth verse.

Ho Dieu ! si j'eusse étudié  
Au temps de ma jeunesse folle,  
Et à bonnes meurs dedié  
J'eusse maison et couche molle !

That would sound strange coming after all the self-excuse if all this self-excuse and these regrets were a subterfuge to gain pity. It is, however, the seal of their genuineness. It is the "Ah dear me ! if I had only done better !" of the man who is reviewing his past in reverie.

In the next verse he retouches the matter and in two lines sums up an eternal truth.

Car jeunesse et adolescence . . .  
Ne sont qu'abus et ignorance.

You will now begin to understand what I said about the difference between the Villon of 1456 and the Villon of 1461. The difference, in very truth, between the penitent and the impenitent thief.

Penitence! you may say, a nice sort of penitence, seeing that the man only regrets the loss of material things and comforts—a house and a soft bed. To which I reply that penitence of whatever sort is precious if it directs our eyes over our past and over our misdeeds; if it makes us recognise what we have misspent; and more especially precious if it can find expression in such poetry as immediately follows in verse twenty-eight:

Mes jours s'en sont allez errant,  
Comme, dit Job, d'un touaille  
Sont les filetz, quant tisserant  
Tient en son poing ardente paille :  
Lors, s'il y a nul bout saille,  
Soudainement il le ravit.  
Si ne crains plus que rien m'assaille,  
Car à la mort tout s'assouvit.

He recognises that his days have been wasted. They are like the loose threads on the loom which the weaver burns off with a torch. What matter! —he finishes—death will free him at last.

Written by a young and strong man, those lines



would only strike us as the expression of a pose ; but death already has his hand on Villon's shoulder, and Villon knows it. Through all this *Testament* runs his swan song, over all of it lies the shadow of death. He bequeaths in it absurd legacies, he laughs, he jeers, he coughs, he spits, but death is always beside him.

It may be said of Villon that his true greatness never appeared till he came near death. In his natural frame of mind he was mostly animal ; under the immediate shadow of death he was all genius.

In his natural frame of mind he has given us work that must always live by virtue of its wonderful technique, its concision, brilliancy, and wit ; but now an entirely new form of his genius appears, and we have the first hint of it in verse thirty-six of the *Grand Testament*.

He suddenly drops the subject of poverty with which he has been playing, and turns to the subject of death.

Ah well ! he says, what matter ? At least I am alive, and my heart has often said to me it is better to be alive and poor than a dead lord rotting under a splendid tomb.

He continues to talk of this strange thing death that seizes all men somehow and sometime.

His father is dead, God rest his spirit ! His mother must soon die, and her son will not survive her. Poor and rich, wise men and fools, clergy and laymen, nobles and serfs, great and small,

women of all conditions, death seizes them without exception.

And be it Paris or Helen dying, whoever dies he dies in pain, and none may help him or take his place through that ordeal, neither children nor sister nor brother. Death makes him tremble and pale and sweat—ah! who can tell the salt and the bitterness of that sweat?

And even the bodies of women, so tender, so sweet, and so precious, must go through all this suffering—or else go straight alive to heaven.

Reverie has led him from height to height; the voice that a minute ago was mumbling about poverty has grown clear and sonorous; it rises higher still, and freeing itself from the verse of the *Testament* becomes bell-like and beautiful as the song which it has found to sing.

The song of all the women who have ever lived and died—the *Ballade du Dames des Temps jadis*.

There is nothing at all in lyric poetry to equal this ballade of thirty-six lines which speaks to the heart so poignantly, and yet in the form of statement says—nothing.

Every line is a question.

Never in the world has so much been upborne on so little, and never has a touch so light destroyed the commonplace for the purpose of revelation.

A revelation that includes the artistic soul of the man who five years ago left Maître Robert Valée his breeches, so that the said Maître Robert Valée might clothe his mistress more decently.

[Original French]

## BALLADE DES DAMES DU TEMPS JADIS

Dictes-moy où, n'en quel pays,  
 Est Flora, la belle Romaine ?  
 Archipiade, ne Thaïs,  
 Qui fut sa cousine germaine ?  
 Echo, parlant quand bruyt on maine  
 Dessus riviere ou sus estan,  
 Qui beaulté eut trop plus qu'humaine ? . . .  
 Mais où sont les neiges d'antan !

Où est la tres-sage Heloïs,  
 Pour qui fut chastré et puis moyne  
 Pierre Esbaillart, à Sainct-Denys ?  
 Pour son amour eut cest essoïne.  
 Semblablement, où est la Royne  
 Qui commanda que Buridan  
 Fust jetté en ung sac en Seine ? . . .  
 Mais où sont les neiges d'antan !

La royne Blanche comme ung lys,  
 Qui chantoit à voix de seraine,  
 Berthe au grand pied, Beatrix, Allys,  
 Haremburges, qui tint le Mayne,  
 Et Jehanne, la bonne Lorraine,  
 Qu'Anglois bruslerent à Rouen :  
 Où sont-ilz, Vierge souveraine ? . . .  
 Mais où sont les neiges d'antan !

## ENVOI

Prince, n'enquerez, de sepmaine,  
 Où elles sont, ne de cest an,  
 Car ce refrain le vous remaine :  
 Mais où sont les neiges d'antan !

Following this ballade comes the *Ballade of the Lords of Old Time*, less beautiful and less excellent

for a reason not inherent in the poet but in his subject. Just as men are far below women in all things lovable and most things excellent, so is this ballade far less powerful in appeal than its beautiful sister.

[*Original French*]

BALLADE DES SEIGNEURS DU TEMPS JADIS,  
SUYVANT LE PROPOS PRECEDENT

Quoi plus ! Où est le tiers Calixte,  
Dernier decedé de ce nom,  
Qui quatre ans tint le Papaliste ?  
Alphonse, le roy d'Aragon,  
Le gracieux duc de Bourbon,  
Et Artus, le duc de Bretagne,  
Et Charles septiesme, le Bon ? . . .  
Mais où est le preux Charlemaigne !

Semblablement, le roy Scotiste,  
Qui demy-face eut, ce dit-on,  
Vermeille comme une amathiste  
Depuis le front jusqu'au menton ?  
Le Roy de Chypre, de renom,  
Helas ! et le bon Roy d'Espagne,  
Duquel je ne sçay pas le nom ? . . .  
Mais où est le preux Charlemaigne !

D'en plus parler je me desiste :  
Ce n'est que toute abusion.  
Il n'est qui contre mort resiste,  
Ne qui treuve provision.  
Encor fais une question :  
Lancelot, le roy de Behaigne,  
Où est-il ? Où est son tayan ? . . .  
Mais où est le preux Charlemaigne !

## ENVOI

Où est Claquin, le bon Breton ?  
 Où le comte Daulphin d'Auvergne,  
 Et le bon feu duc d'Alençon ? . . .  
 Mais où est le preux Charlemaigne !

Then, without a break, comes the third ballade of this wonderful trilogy, calling up the shades of the Saints Apostles, the shades of Constantine's successor, and the ghost of the great French King "who stands far above all kings whose tales are told." The Lords of Dijon and Salins, the Dauphins of Grenoble and Vienne, their trumpeters, their heralds, and their pursuivants.

And even as these are gone—behold,  
 So all must go their fate to find,  
 Servants and sons, and young and old :  
 So much carries away the wind.

This ballade has been neglected by the translators of Villon, yet it has a charm and a beauty all its own—a touch of desolation, a whisper of the wind that blows over ruins and forgotten battlefields, a complaint vague and indeterminate as the complaint of the wind.

[*Original French*]

## BALLADE À CE PROPOS, EN VIEIL FRANÇOIS

Mais où sont ly saintz Apostoles,  
 D'aulbes vestuz, d'amicts coeffez,  
 Qui sont ceincts de saintes estoles,  
 Dont par le col prent ly mauffez,  
 De maltalent tout eschauffez ?  
 Aussi bien meurt filz que servans,  
 De ceste vie sont bouffez :  
 Autant en emporte ly vens.

Voire, ou soit de Constantinobles  
 L'Emperier aux poings dorez,  
 Ou de France ly Roy tres-nobles,  
 Sur tous autres roys decorez,  
 Qui, pour ly grant Dieux adorez,  
 Bastist eglises et convents ?  
 S'en son temps il fut honorez,  
 Autant en emporte ly vens.

Où sont de Vienne et de Grenobles  
 Ly Daulphin, ly preux, ly senez ?  
 Oû de Dijon, Sallins et Dolles,  
 Ly sires et ly filz aisnez ?  
 Oû (autant de leurs gens prenez)  
 Heraulx, trompettes, poursuyvans ?  
 Ont-ils bien bouté soubz le nez ? . . .  
 Autant en emporte ly vens.

## ENVOI

Princes à mort sont destineez,  
 Comme les plus povres vivans :  
 S'ils en sont courceez ou tennez,  
 Autant en emporte ly vens.

Thereafter the *Testament* continues—  
 Since all those have vanished from the world,  
 shall not he—Villon—also pass away ?

Mourrez-je pas ? Ouy, se Dieu plaist :  
 Mais que j'aye faict mes estrennes,  
 Honneste mort ne me desplaist.

The world is not perpetual. He counsels poor  
 old men to remember this fact.

If one pleases the world in youth, age takes  
 that charming gift from one.

An old ape always displeases.

So he goes on. From the height of the three

great ballades he has fallen—I was about to say to mediocrity.

He is unconsciously preparing the ground for *La Belle Heaulmière*.

He has been speaking of the poor old men gone to decay, and now he turns to speak of the poor old women.

Aussi, ces povres femmelettes,  
 Qui vieilles sont et n'ont de quoy,  
 Quand voyent jeunes pucelletes  
 Estre en aise et en requoy,  
 Lors demandent à Dieu pourquoi  
 Si tost nasquirent, n'à quel droit.  
 Nostre Seigneur s'en taist tout coy,  
 Car, au tancer, il le perdroit.

With that amazing jest he flings the curtain back and reveals her, immortal, and superb in her fury, her rags, and her age.

This *Ballade of La Belle Heaulmière* is not what it pretends to be, the lament of an old woman for her lost beauty; it is the lament of a man for the lost beauty of women grown old. It is entirely masculine, and all its virtue comes from that fact.

Here it is in the original, word for word, in all its nakedness and splendour, its falseness and truth.

[Original French]

LES REGRETS DE LA BELLE HEAULMIERE

JA PARVENUE A VIEILLESSE

Advis m'est que j'oy regretter

La belle qui fut heaulmiere,

Soy jeune fille souhaitter

Et parler en ceste maniere :

“ Ha ! viellesse felonne et fiere,  
 Pourquoi m’as si tost abatue ?  
 Qui me tient que je ne me fiere,  
 Et qu’à ce coup je ne me tue ?

“ Tollu m’as ma haulte franchise,  
 Que beaulté m’avoit ordonné  
 Sur clercz, marchans et gens d’Eglise :  
 Car alors n’estoit homme né  
 Qui tout le sien ne m’eust donné,  
 Quoy qu’il en fust des repentailles,  
 Mais que luy eusse abandonné  
 Ce que reffusent truandailles.

“ A maint homme l’ay reffusé  
 (Qui n’estoit à moy grand saigesse),  
 Pour l’amour d’ung garson rusé,  
 A qui je en faisoie largesse.  
 A qui que je feisse finesse,  
 Par m’ame, je l’amoye bien !  
 Or ne me faisoit que rudesse,  
 Et ne m’amoit que pour le mien.

“ Si ne me sceut tant detrayner,  
 Fouller aux piedz, que ne l’aymasse,  
 Et m’eust-il faict les rains trayner,  
 S’il m’eust dict que je le baisasse  
 Et que tous mes maux oubliasse,  
 Le glouton, de mal entaché,  
 M’embrassoit . . . J’en suis bien plus grasse !  
 Que m’en reste-t-il? Honte et peché.

“ Or il est mort, passé vingt ans,  
 Et je remains vielle chenuë.  
 Quand je pense, las ! au bon temps,  
 Quelle fus, quelle devenue,  
 Quand me regarde toute nue,  
 Et je me voy si treschangée,  
 Povre, seiche, maigre, menue,  
 Je suis presque toute enragée.



“ Qu'est devenu ce front poly,  
Ces cheveulx blonds, sourcilz voultыз,  
Grande entr'œil, et regard joly,  
Dont prenoye les plus subtilz,  
Ce beau nez droit, grant ne petiz,  
Ces petites jointes oreilles,  
Menton fourchu, cler vis traictis,  
Et ces belles levres vermeilles ?

“ Ces gentes espaules menues,  
Ces bras longs et ces mains traictisses,  
Petis tetins, hanches charnues,  
Eslevées, propres, faictisses  
A tenir amoureuses lysses,  
Ces larges reins, ce sadinet,  
Assis sur grosses fermes cuysses,  
Dedans son joly jardinet ?

“ Le front ridé, les cheveulx gris,  
Les sourcilz cheuz, les yeulx estains,  
Qui faisoient regars et ris,  
Dont maintz marchans furent attains,  
Nez courbé, de beaulté loingtains,  
Oreilles pendans et moussues,  
Le vis pally, mort et destains,  
Menton foncé, joues peaussues :

“ C'est d'humaine beaulté l'yssues !  
Les bras courts et les mains contractes,  
Les espaules toutes bossues,  
Mammelles, quoy ! toutes retraictes,  
Telles les hanches que les tettes.  
Du sadinet, fy ! Quand des cuysses,  
Cuysses ne sont plus, mais cuyssettes  
Grivelées comme saulcisses.

“ Ainsi le bon temps regretons  
Entre nous, pauvres vielles sottes,  
Assises bas, à croppetons,  
Tout en ung tas comme pelottes,

A petit feu de chenevottes,  
 Tost allumées, tost estainctes.  
 Et jadis fusmes si mignottes ! . . .  
 Ainsi emprend à maintz et maintes."

[*Translation*]

THE LAMENT OF LA BELLE HEAULMIERE

(LES REGRETS DE LA BELLE HEAULMIERE)

Methought I heard the mournful sigh  
 Of her who was the town's mistress,  
 Lamenting that her youth should die  
 And speaking thus in sore distress :  
 " Ah foul age, in your bitterness  
 And hate, why have you used me so ?  
 What hinders me in my duress  
 Ending this life so useless now ?

" Broken hast thou the spell so fair  
 That beauty once gave unto me ;  
 Merchants and clerks and priests once were  
 My slaves, and all men born to see  
 Were mine, and paid gold royally  
 For that without which hearts must break,  
 For that which now, if offered free,  
 No thief in all the town would take.

" And many a man have I refused—  
 So little wisdom did I show—  
 For love of one black thief who used  
 My youth as bee the flowering bow.  
 Though, spite my wiles, I loved him so,  
 And gave him that which I had sold,  
 For love he paid me many a blow ;  
 Yet well I know he loved my gold.

" Though many a blow and many a kick  
 He gave me, still my love held true ;  
 Though he bound faggots stick by stick  
 Upon my back, one kiss would do

To wipe away the bruises blue  
And my forgetfulness to win ;  
And how much am I fatter through  
That rogue ? whose pay was shame and sin !

" But he is dead this thirty years,  
And I remain, by age brought low,  
And when I think, alas ! in tears  
Of what was then and what is now,  
And when my nakedness I show  
And all my ruined change I see,  
Aged, dried, and withered, none may know  
The rage that fills the heart of me !

" Where now is gone my forehead white,  
Those eyebrows arched, that golden hair,  
Those eyes that once, so keen of sight,  
Held all men by their gaze so fair ;  
The straight nose, great nor small, and where  
Those little ears, that dimpled chin,  
The fine complexion, pale yet clear,  
The mouth just like a rose within ?

" Small shoulders with the grace that dips,  
The long arms and the lovely hands,  
The little breasts, and full-fleshed hips  
That once had strong men's arms for bands,  
High, broad, and fair as fair uplands  
The large reins ?

. . . . .  
. . . . .

" The forehead wrinkled, hair turned grey,  
The eyebrows vanished, eyes grown blind  
That once with laughter's light were gay,  
Now gone and never more to find ;  
Nose bent as if beneath some wind,  
Ears hanging, mossed with hair unclean,  
Life's colour now to Death's inclined,  
Chin peaked, and lips like weeds from Seine.



He strips her naked and clothes her with our pity—not our pity for her, but our pity for the ruin of fair things.

The mysterious nature of his genius is never more apparent than in this ballad, where shame is absolutely given the door and where shamelessness does not remain.

After the regrets comes a thing more real yet infinitely less worthy, the *Ballade de la Belle Heaulmière aux Filles de Joie*.

[Original French]

BALLADE DE LA BELLE HEAULMIERE AUX  
FILLES DE JOIE

“ Or y pensez, belle Gantiere,  
Qui m’escoliere souliez estre,  
Et vous, Blanche la Savetiere,  
Or est-il temps de vous congnoistre !  
Prenez à dextre et à senestre,  
N’espargnez homme, je vous prie :  
Car vielles n’ont ne cours, ne estre,  
Ne que monnoye qu’on descrie.

“ Et vous, la gente Saucissiere,  
Qui de dancer estes adextre,  
Guillemette la Tapissiere,  
Ne mesprenez vers vostre maistre :  
Tost vous fauldra clorre fenestre,  
Quand deviendrez vielle, flestrie.  
Plus ne servirez que vielle prebstre,  
Ne que monnoye qu’on descrie.

“ Jehanneton la Chaperonniere,  
Gardez qu’amy ne vous empestre.  
Katherine l’Esperonniere,  
N’envoyez plus les hommes paistre.

Car qui belle n'est ne perpetre  
 Leur bonne grace, mais leur rie.  
 Laide viellesse amour n'impetre,  
 Ne que monnoye qu'on descrie.

## ENVOI

" Filles, veuillez vous entremettre  
 D'escouter pourquoy pleure et crie :  
 C'est pour ce que ne me puyz mettre,  
 Ne que monnoye qu'on descrie."

[*Translation*]

BALLADE OF LA BELLE HEAULMIERE TO THE  
 FILLES DE JOIE

(BALLADE DE LA BELLE HEAULMIERE AUX FILLES DE JOIE)

Now hearken, La Belle Gantiere,  
 Scholar of mine, to me,  
 And Blanche la Savetiere  
 Fate in my fortune see.  
 Take right and left your fee  
 From men, however placed,  
 For age-bound women be  
 Useless as coin defaced.

And you, la Saulcissiere  
 Who danceth so cunningly,  
 Guillemette la Tapissiere,  
 Age must your windows free  
 Shutter, whilst Love, *pardie !*  
 Turns, as from some old priest,  
 Useless for love, as ye,  
 Useless as coin defaced,

Jeannette la Chaperonniere,  
 Guard thee from knavery ;  
 Katherine l'Esperonniere  
 Turn not a man from thee

Who pays—for thy beauty  
Endures not, and displaced  
Youth leaves Humanity  
Useless as coin defaced.

## ENVOI

Girls, would you gather why  
My tears and my sighs I waste ?  
Behold me, as here I lie  
Useless as coin defaced.

Less worthy in spirit, more worthy in form,  
Villon has written nothing with more swing and  
grace and nothing in which the words and the  
movement and music are more beautiful.

Tost vous fauldra clorre fenestre  
Quand deviendrez vielle flestrie.  
Plus ne servirez que vielle prebstre,  
Ne que monnoye qu'on descrie.

It is just the advice she might have given in  
prose to the young girls, "Grab what you can,  
whilst you can." At least it rings more like a  
human woman's voice than the Regrets.

Villon, having committed these two ballads to  
paper by the hand of his clerk Fremin—a mythical  
person—fears that people may blame him with  
casting discredit on honest women by talking so  
much of dishonest ones.

He agrees that men should only love good  
women, but—*pardieu!*—what were all these women  
he was speaking of but honest women—once ?

Honest they certainly were, without reproach

or blame—till each took some man (*ung lay, ung cleric*).

Pour estaindre d'amours les flammes  
Plus chaudes que feu Saint Antoine.

And each remained faithful—till she became unfaithful. Why? It is the feminine nature—he doesn't know any other reason, except the fact that six workmen are better than three.

There is little fidelity in love! Hunting, love, and war, they are all the same

Pour une joie cent doulours.

This brings him to the first of the dilactic ballades, the *Double Ballade of Good Counsel*. This is it.

[*Original French*]

DOUBLE BALLADE SUR LE MESME PROPOS

Pour ce, ayez tant que vouldrez,  
Suyvez assemblées et festes :  
En fin ja mieulx vous n'en vouldrez,  
Si n'y romprez, fors que vos testes.  
Folles amours font les gens bestes :  
Salomon en idolatrya,  
Samson en perdit ses lunettes. . . .  
Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a !

Orpheus, le doux menestrier,  
Jouant de fleustes et musettes,  
En fut en dangier du meurtrier  
Chien Cerberus à quatre testes,  
Et Narcissus, beau filz honnestes,  
En ung profond puy se noya,  
Pour l'amour de ses amourettes. . . .  
Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a !



Sardana, le preux chevalier,  
Qui conquist le regne de Cretes,  
En voulut devenir moulier  
Et filer entre pucelletes ;  
David le roy, saige prophetes,  
Craincte de Dieu en oublya,  
Voyant laver cuisses bien faictes. . . .  
Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a !

Ammon en vult deshonnorer,  
Feignant de manger tartelettes,  
Sa sœur Thamar et deflorer,  
Qui fut inceste et deshonestes ;  
Herodes (pas ne sont sornettes)  
Saint Jean Baptiste en decolla,  
Pour dances, saultz et chansonnettes. . . .  
Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a !

De moy, povre, je vueil parler :  
J'en fuz batu, comme à ru telles,  
Tout nud, ja ne le quiers celer.  
Qui me fait mascher ces groiselles,  
Fors Katherine de Vauselles ?  
Noé le tiers ot, qui fut là,  
Mitaines à ces nopces telles. . . .  
Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a !

Mais que ce jeune bachelier  
Laissast ces jeunes bachelettes,  
Non ! et, le deust-on vif brusler,  
Comme ung chevauteur d'escovettes.  
Plus douces luy sont que civettes.  
Mais toutesfoys fol s'y fia :  
Soient blanches, soient brunettes,  
Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a !

[*Translation*]

## DOUBLE BALLADE OF GOOD COUNSEL

(DOUBLE BALLADE SUR LE MESME PROPOS)

Go, love as much as love you will,  
 And forth to feasts and banquets stray,  
 Yet at the end there comes the bill,  
 And broken heads at break of day.  
 For light loves make men beasts of prey,  
 They bent towards idols, Solomon,  
 From Samson took his eyes away.  
 Happy is he that trades with none.

For this did Orpheus, who could thrill  
 With pipe and flute the mountains grey,  
 Come near to death where stands to kill  
 Four-headed Cerberus at bay ;  
 Also Narcissus, fair as May,  
 Who in a deep, dark pool did drown  
 For love of light loves fair and gay.  
 Happy is he that trades with none.

Sardana, praised in knighthood still,  
 Who conquered Crete, did yet betray  
 His manhood, nor disdained the frill  
 And skirt for this—or so they say.  
 King David, great in prophecy,  
 Forget his God for sight of one  
 Who, washing, did her thigh display.  
 Happy is he that trades with none.

And Amnon was a man until  
 Foul love cast him in disarray ;  
 Feigning to eat of tarts, his skill  
 O'ercame his sister till she lay  
 Dishonoured, which was incest, aye,  
 Most foul. See Herod, who made John  
 Headless, beneath a dancer's sway.  
 Happy is he that trades with none.

Next of myself—most bitter pill—  
 I, thrashed as washerwomen bray  
 Their clothes, in nature's deshabelle  
 Stood nakedly—and wherefore, pray?  
 Ask Katherine of Vaucelles, malgre  
 Noé had most part of the fun.  
 Such wedding gloves no loves repay;  
 Happy is he that trades with none.

But that young man impressible,  
 Turn him from those young maidens, nay,  
 Burn him upon the witches' hill,  
 He'd turn in burning to the fray.  
 They're sweet to him as civit—aye,  
 But trust them and your peace is gone;  
 Brunette or blonde one law obey.  
 Happy is he that trades with none.

It is five years since his love-affair with Katherine de Vaucelles, yet the business still rankles in him, as the fifth verse of this ballade proves. "She betrayed me—don't trust any woman": that is the illogical *leit motif* of this delightful piece. He is entirely in earnest, but he is writing with the part of his mind in which that poisoned arrow Katherine is still sticking. He gives himself the lie later on in the ballade written round Robert d'Estouteville and Ambroise de Lorede—but at this present moment all women are faithless, and, not only that, fatal,

Soient blanches, soient brunettes,  
 Bien heureux est qui rien n'y a !

Villon has often been scoffed at on account of his scholarship, or rather want of scholarship. It has been hinted that his knowledge of the classics

was of such a superficial nature that he fancied Alcibiades to be a woman.

Do not be deceived. No verse writer ever wore the purple of the classics to better advantage than Villon. This *Ballade of Good Counsel* is an example. His knowledge may not have been profound, but it was fairly accurate. Even after five years' wandering, divorced from teachers and books, it was still fresh, and turning for an instance or a name he is never at a loss. One of the charms of Villon's work is his scholarship and the way he uses it. What a crowd he calls up for decorative and descriptive purposes, from Nabugodonosor to Sardanapalus, from "Saint Victor" to Calixtus. Sometimes he makes a delightful mistake, as when he confuses the master of the ceremonies at the marriage of Cana (*l'architriclin*) with the bridegroom, but these mistakes are not many and they detract nothing from the general effect. The *Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis* still glitters and burns undimmed in the night of time, and the *Ballade of Fortune* still wears with the assurance of right the jewellery of vanished emperors and departed kings.

These figures and these names lend value to their setting and draw a new value from their setting. They are like the figures and inscriptions in stained glass, the gems in mediæval gold work.

Finishing the *Ballade of Good Counsel*, the thought of Katherine de Vaucelles still remains in his mind. In the five verses that follow the ballade he talks

of her. She fooled him so completely, he says, that the sky seemed to him made of brass, a cabbage seemed a turnip, bad beer new wine, a sow a windmill, and a fat abbé a poursuivant.

Was ever an eternal truth better expressed! or the splendid idiocy of love so turned about for inspection!

He knew that the mental disease that afflicted him is universal, for he asks, Is there a man living who would not have acted as he has acted? He whom everyone calls *L'amant remys et renyé*. All the same, he has done with it. He has played the tune and now he puts the fiddle under the seat. If any man should resent his speaking like this, let him remember these words, "The dying shall tell everything to his heirs."

For he is dying in good sooth.

He describes his symptoms, horribly, and the symptoms are strongly like those of consumption.

Je crache blanc comme cotton,  
Jacobins gros comme ung esteuf.

He puts his disease down to Thibault d'Aussigny, and again he murmurs against Thibault in that terrible way in which speech seems not the expression of his anger but the bars that hold it from breaking loose.

Then he turns to the business in hand, the writing of his last will and testament.

He remembers that before leaving Paris in 1456 he made some legacies, which some people without

his consent named his Testament. If any of the legatees should not have received their gifts, he orders that after his death they shall make demand of his heirs—Moreau, Provins, and Robin Turgis. Turgis was landlord of the Pomme de Pin, Provins was a pastrycook, Moreau was a cook, and Villon almost certainly was in debt to the whole three.

He tells his clerk Fremin to sit close to his bed and prepare to write.

He commends his soul to the Blessed Trinity and to Our Lady.

Priant toute la charité  
Des dignes neuf Ordres des cieulx,  
Que par eulx soit se don porté  
Devant le trosne precieulx.

He leaves his body to grand mother earth. The worms won't find it very fat; hunger has had too much to do with it. It came from earth: let it return to earth.

De terre vint, en terre tourne  
Tout chose, se par trop n'erre,  
Voulientiers en son lieu retourne.

To Maître Guillaume Villon, "Qui ma esté plus doulx que mere," he leaves his library and the *Rommant du Pet au Diable* which Guy Tabary copied. It lies in loose sheets under some table. The matter is so full of interest that it makes up for any defects in the composition.

He asks Guillaume Villon not to search for him, but to leave him to his fate.

He most likely left the *Romance of the Pet au Diable* in his room at the Porte Rouge.

Now, if this had been an immoral piece of writing, as some suppose, the bequeathal of it would have been a strange thing coming in the same breath as that which inspired the preceding verse. To speak tenderly of a person and then to fling a dirty book at his head would be a proceeding outside the sanity that governs even the acts of a bad man. That the legacy was a bad jest levelled at a good man is an assumption destroyed by the fact that the name of the work is entirely misleading.

I should think that good old Guillaume Villon was as much stirred by the *Pet au Diable* affair as was the rest of the University. I am certain that the dons of the Oxford of a few years ago, though they took no part in the Town and Gown rows, held, in their private minds, a strong brief for the University and a sincere hope that it would always beat the town, and I am certain that the dons and good men of the University of Paris held the same. Guillaume Villon was not a member of the University at the time of the *Pet au Diable* affair, but he was in close touch with it, and to leave him a poem descriptive of a matter that touched the University so closely was an entirely understandable act. I labour over this point for several reasons easily to be understood. It touches the character not only of Villon but of his adoptive father as well. Everything we know of Guillaume Villon points to a sweet and saintly soul, everything

that Villon has said about him points to the poet's recognition of the good man's worth. Everything—except this gift of an “immoral romance” which was, in fact, no such thing.

This is the first legacy we find of Villon's not conceived in the spirit of ribaldry or jest, and immediately after comes another legacy worthy to stand beside it. He leaves to his mother the following ballade to help her in the worship of Our Lady.

[*Original French*]

BALLADE QUE FEIT VILLON À LA REQUÊTE DE SA  
MÈRE, POUR PRIER NOSTRE-DAME

Dame du ciel, regente terrienne,  
Emperiere des infernaulx paluz,  
Recevez-moy vostre humble chrestienne :  
Que comprinse soye entre vos esleuz,  
Ce non obstant qu'oncques rien ne valuz.  
Les biens de vous, ma dame et ma maistresse.  
Sont trop plus grans que ne suis pecheresse,  
Sans lesquelz biens ame ne peult merir  
N'avoir les cieulx. Je n'en suis menteresse :  
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

A vostre Filz dictes que je suis sienne :  
De luy soyent mes pechez aboluz.  
Pardonnez-moy, comme à l'Egyptienne,  
Ou comme il fait au cler Theophilus,  
Lequel par vous fut quitte et absoluz,  
Combien qu'il eust au diable faict promesse.  
Preservez-moy que je n'accomplisse ce !  
Vierge, portant, sans rompure encourir,  
Le sacrement qu'on celebre à la messe. . . .  
En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.



Femme je suis povrette et ancienne,  
 Qui riens ne sçay, oncques lettre ne leuz ;  
 Au monstier voy dont suis parroissienne,  
 Paradis painct, où sont harpes et luz,  
 Et ung enfer où damnez sont boulluz ;  
 L'ung me faict paour, l'autre joye et liesse.  
 La joye avoir fais-moy, haulte Deesse,  
 A qui pecheurs doivent tous recourir,  
 Comblez de foy, sans faincte ne paresse. . . .  
 En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

## ENVOI

Vous portastes, Vierge, digne princesse,  
 Jesus regnant, qui n'a ne fin ne cesse.  
 Le Tout-Puissant, prenant nostre foiblesse,  
 Laisa les cieulx et nous vint secourir.  
 Offrist à mort sa tres-chere jeunesse.  
 Nostre Seigneur est tel, je le confesse. . . .  
 En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir.

## [Translation]

BALLADE WRITTEN FOR HIS MOTHER AT HER  
REQUEST

(BALLADE QUE FEIT VILLON À LA REQUESTE DE SA MÈRE)

LADY of Heaven, earthly Queen,  
 Who hath all hell in empyr,  
 Receive a humble Christian  
 Whose prayer it is to dwell with thee.  
 Though I am worthless, as you see,  
 Thy boundless grace, that I would win,  
 Is greater far than my great sin.  
 None *sans* that grace, unless I lie,  
 The gates of heaven may enter in.  
 And in this faith I live and die.

Say to thy Son, on Him I lean,  
 His grace shall wash my sins from me,  
 He who forgave th' Egyptian ;  
 Theophilus, also, though he  
 Long time was held in Satan's fee.  
 Preserve me that my soul within  
 Finds joy where sorrow long hath bin,  
 Virgin, through whose grace even I  
 May touch God through the wafer thin.  
 And in this faith I live and die.

A poor old woman—old and lean—  
 Am I, who know not letters three,  
 Yet in the cloister have I seen  
 Heaven in those pictures heavenly.  
 Where saints and angels ever be  
 With harps and lutes, and, 'neath their din,  
 A hell with sinners scorched of skin.  
 'Twixt joy and fear to thee I fly  
 Who savest sinners from hell's gin.  
 And in this faith I live and die.

## ENVOI

Thou didst conceive, Princess Virgin,  
 Jesus, for whom no years begin  
 Nor end, and who from heaven did spin,  
 His robe from out our frailty.  
 Offering to death His youth—I ween  
 He is our Lord, to us akin,  
 And in this faith I live and die.

I have spoken about this ballade before, also I have said that the *Regrets of La Belle Heaulmière* seem carried by the voice of a man rather than the voice of a woman. No such remark can be applied to this poem.

The words are Villon's—yet it is not his voice

that comes to us. We hear the mother speaking with the tongue of the poet. There is nothing more beautiful than the simplicity and humility of this work of art, for the reason that the humility and simplicity are not feigned. The belief expressed is vibrant with life. The poor, mean old woman's soul revealed is a thing neither old, nor poor, nor mean. It is a thing beautiful and assured, despite its humility, or perhaps because of it.

"His mother was given piously, which does not imply very much in an old French woman, and quite uneducated," says one commentator.

Femme je suis povrette et ancienne,  
Qui riens ne sçay, oncques lettre ne leuz,

says the mother of Villon, commenting on herself.

The two statements hold truth between them, but with what different hands!—the hands of poetry and the hands of prose.

Immediately after this ballade comes verse eighty of the *Testament*,

Item, m'amour ma chere Rose :  
Ne luy laisse ne cueur ne foye, etc.

Who was Rose? The question goes back into the past and loses itself in utter silence. It is one of the surprises of an inquiry like this into the work and life of a man long dead that now and then one may almost catch a glimpse of what the past really is—a thing that is nothing, yet a thing

filled with life. Now the surprise comes as a voice that speaks to us like the voice of Jeanne de Montigny; now as the silence that follows a question such as I have just asked.

We have dropped a pebble into a well so deep that were we to listen for a thousand years we would never hear the splash.

Who was Rose ?

He leaves her neither heart nor liver—she loves something better than that. He leaves her nothing. She has a great silk purse stuffed with écus. He grumbles greatly against her on account of her niggardliness in love, then he says he doesn't care a bit. His desire is cold.

He has written a ballade for her with all the lines ending in R. He gives it to Perrenet the Bastard de la Barre to take to her on the condition that should Perrenet encounter ma damoyselle au nez tortu (Katherine of Vaucelles?), he shall say to her, "Orde paillarde, d'où viens tu?" I have put Katherine de Vaucelles' name down, but the connection is the merest supposition. Who was Rose? The question applies equally to Katherine—and the answer is the same.

Ythier Marchand, to whom in the *Petit Testament* he leaves an indecent jest, now comes before his mind and he leaves him a legacy.

The legacy consists of six lines; it is also a *De Profundis* for an old love of Ythiers.

Des quelles le nom je ne dis,  
Car il me hayroit a tous jours.

Here is the legacy :

[*Original French*]

LAY, OU PLUSTOST RONDEAU

Mort, j'appelle de ta rigueur,  
Qui as ma maistresse ravie,  
Et n'es pas encore assouvie  
Se tu ne me tiens en langueur.

Onc puis n'euz force ne vigueur !  
Mais que te nuysoit-elle en vie,  
Mort ?

Deux estions, et n'avions qu'ung cueur  
S'il est mort, force est que devie,  
Voire, ou que je vive sans vie,  
Comme les images, par cueur,  
Mort !

[*Translation*]

LAY ; OR, RATHER, RONDEAU

(LAY, OU PLUSTOST RONDEAU)

Death, I cry out against thee  
Who hast taken my lady away ;  
Thy cruelty nought will allay  
Till thou takest the life-blood of me.

I have strength nor desire—and she !  
What harm did she unto thee—say ?  
Death !

We were two, yet but one heart had we.  
It is dead, and I die, or here stay,  
Living, yet lifeless alway,  
As the statues without hearts that be,  
Death !

I spoke of it before and called it the only rondel with a soul.

Hugo once likened white butterflies to scraps of torn-up love-letters blown about by the winds of Spring.

Rondels are the butterflies of verse. Pick them up as they lie dead, or chase and catch them flying and you find what?—nothing—a woman's name, a line of passionate declaration—a bit of blank paper—a bit of stupidity.

But the little rondel above is a whole love-letter—to a dead woman, addressed not to her directly but under cover to death.

Having freed this butterfly, his mind takes a turn. He becomes no longer serious, and now begins a long list of gifts as absurd as the gifts in the *Petit Testament*.

He leaves to Maître Jehan Cornu the garden that Pierre Baubignon rents to him (Villon) on condition that Cornu mends the door and sets the gable up again. A garden with a gable carries something of obscurity to the vision, but the whole verse and the verse that follows are obscure. The only thing evident is the fact that he is making fun of Cornu. Jehan Cornu was an officer of finance and Pierre Baubignon was a clerk of the Treasury, and it is interesting to note the fact, pointed out by Marcel Schwob, that the majority of Villon's legatees were officers of finance—a race hated by the people.

Marcel Schwob even asks the question, "May

the *Testament* be looked upon as a political pamphlet, seeing that most of the legatees are government men, and that they are nearly all derided?" The question naturally occurs to the mind—to be dismissed at once.

The *Grand Testament* is a poem first and last. The ballades and rondels are not stuck in; they spring from the matter in the text. One finds, for instance, the thought of poverty, age, and ruin germinating in verse forty-three, and one can trace its growth to verse forty-six, where it flowers in the *Regrets of La Belle Heaulemière*.

The *Ballade of the Ladies of Old Time* is a descendant of what? The poverty of Villon and the thoughts arising from the consideration of that poverty. Read the thirty-sixth verse of the *Testament*:

En poverté me guermentant  
 Souventesfoys me dit le cuer :  
 " Homme, ne te doulouse tant  
 Et ne demaine tel douleur,  
 Se tu n'as tant qu'eust Jacques Cueur,  
 Mieulx vault vivre, soubz gros bureaux,  
 Povre, qu'avoir esté seigneur  
 Et pourrir soubz riches tumbeaux ! "

It is better to be alive, even if one is poor, than to be a rich seigneur rotting beneath a splendid tomb. So he goes on through five more verses, the thought steadily freeing itself from personal considerations and blossoming at last in the splendid *Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis*.

The *Double Ballade of Good Counsel* is led up to by thoughts arising from the *Regrets of La Belle Heaulmière*, and it infects with its motive the seven verses immediately following it.

Everywhere we find the personal and the real breaking into the strangest blossoms.

Far from being a political pamphlet, the *Testament* has the unity of a briar rose in flower, thorns that prick and wound, roots set deep in soil, branches material and tough, flowers more beautiful than garden flowers.

One might say of the briar rose that its blossoms are not in keeping with its thorns, but it is the briar rose and it has the unity of self.

The political hits in the *Grand Testament* are aimed not so much at men because they are officers of finance, as at officers of finance because they are men, and men who were personally known to Villon.

After Jehan Cornu the next legatee is a woman, the wife of Pierre Saint-Amant, clerk of the King's Treasury. Saint-Amant, or Saint-Amand, was an old acquaintance of Villon's. He receives a gift in the twelfth verse of the *Petit Testament*. He has married since then, and, like most married men, finds that his friends of his youth are not all acceptable to his wife. We may fancy that Villon tried to renew his acquaintanceship with his bachelor friend and that Madame Saint-Amant showed him the door. He bequeaths to this lady for the White Horse, a mare; and for the Mule,



a red ass. The point of the joke is lost, but you may be sure it had a point and a poisoned one. The White Horse was a tavern, so was the Mule, and the legacy he bequeathed to Saint-Amant in the *Petit Testament* consisted of the Mule and the White Horse. The two legacies would illuminate one another had we eyes to see their light. What we do know, however, clearly is the reason why Villon listed this lady in the ranks of his heirs—she looked down on him. He says so.

Sire Denis Hesselin is his next victim. Hesselin was a big figure in Paris. He was Provost of the Merchants from 1470 to 1474. He was a heavy drinker, perhaps. Villon bequeaths to him the fourteen casks of wine d'Aulnis which Villon stole from Robin Turgis, landlord of the Pomme de Pin. He advises Hesselin to put water in the barrel; wine destroys many a good house. He turns Hesselin off with this piece of advice and picks up Maistre Guillaume Charruau.

No one knows exactly who Charruau was. He seems to have been at the University before Villon's time and then to have turned merchant. Villon leaves him his sword without the scabbard and a royal in copper money levied on the toll of the market of the Temple.

Fournier—mon procureur Fournier—next receives a ghastly and fictitious present of money for his services in gaining for Villon certain causes. Fournier was procureur of the Châtelet; what the causes were, heaven knows, but at the end of the

legacy occurs a line the wisdom of which will be patent to every lawyer :

Even a good cause requires a good advocate.

After this come legacies to Maître Jacques Raguyer and a number of others, legacies that have lost through the rubbing of time their only value—their points. They bring us up to verse one hundred and fifteen, wherein he bequeaths to Maître Jehan Cotart the following oraison :

[*Original French*]

BALLADE ET ORAISON

Pere Noé, qui plantastes la vigne,  
 Vous aussi, Loth, qui bustes au rocher,  
 Par tel party, qu'Amour, qui gens engigne,  
 De vos filles si vous felt approcher  
 (Pas ne le dy pour le vous reprocher),  
 Architriclin, qui bien sceustes cest art :  
 Tous trois vous pry que vous vueillez percher  
 L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotart !

Il fut jadis extrait de vostre ligne,  
 Luy qui beuvoit du meilleur et plus cher,  
 Et ne deust-il avoir vaillant ung pigne,  
 Certes, sur tous, c'estoit un bon archer.  
 On ne luy sceut pot des mains arracher,  
 Car de bien boire oncques ne fut faitart.  
 Nobles seigneurs, ne souffrez empescher  
 L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotart !

Comme homme beu qui chancelle et trepigne,  
 L'ay veu souvent, quand il s'alloit coucher,  
 Et une foys il se fait une bigne,  
 Bien m'en souvient, à l'estal d'ung boucher.

Brief, on n'eust sceu en ce monde chercher  
 Meilleur pion, pour boire tost et tart.  
 Faictes entrer, quant vous orrez hucher,  
 L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotart.

## ENVOI

Prince, il n'eust sceu jusqu'à terre cracher.  
 Tousjours crioit : Haro, la gorge m'ard !  
 Et si ne sceut oncq sa soif estancher,  
 L'ame du bon feu maistre Jehan Cotart.

[*Translation*]

## BALLADE AND PRAYER

## (BALLADE ET ORAISON)

Father Noah, who planted the vine ;  
 You also Lot, who drank merrily,  
 And who 'neath the glamour of drink divine  
 Tasted your daughters' virginity  
 (Though nought of reproach I make, not I) ;  
 Architriclin, who made drink an art—  
 I pray you three to this toast reply,  
 The soul of the good master Jehan Cotart.

Born of your lineage and your line,  
 He drank of the best and of price most high  
 Never had he a sou to shine,  
 Yet good wine always could he descry.  
 Drinkers never yet found him shy,  
 None from his pot could make him part.  
 Noble lords, let no man decry  
 The soul of the good master Jehan Cotart.

Oft have I seen him totter and twine  
 When he'd go off on his bed to lie.  
 He banged his head when once in wine  
 On a butcher's stall, and was like to die.  
 High or low, or far or nigh,  
 Never such drinker could match your heart.  
 So let it in if you hear it sigh,  
 The soul of the good master Jehan Cotart.

## ENVOI

Prince, 'twas ever and ay his cry,  
 " *Haro !* Lord ! how my throat does smart ! "  
 Pray where it is 'tis no longer dry,  
 The soul of the good master Jehan Cotart.

That ballade comes reeling up to us out of the Middle Ages full of drink and life, it almost hiccoughs in one's face, and Villon, having dismissed it and sent it wandering into the world, forgets it, and takes up again the business of his will. Germaine de Merle, a merchant of Paris, attracts his attention and to Germaine he leaves the right to govern his—Villon's—bank, on condition that Germaine gives good change (for three écus six Breton targes, an écu being equal to two targes); and then he proceeds to roast again over the fire of his wit those little children naked as worms—poor impoverished orphans—Jean Marceau, Colin Laurens, and Girart Gossoyen, to wit.

He wills that these three fat usurers shall be sent to college under the care of Pierre Richer. The grammar of Ælius Donatus (a book that was put into the hands of young children) he considers too hard for them. Let them learn the *Ave salus, tibi decus*—that will be enough; the Grand Credo is too stiff for them.

So he goes on, dropping the usurers and picking up more people to decorate with his infernal legacies, till he comes to Robert d'Estouteville, Provost of Paris, to whom he presents a ballade.

The love-story of Robert d'Estouteville and

Ambroise de Lorede is conveyed to us by this ballade, which bears in acrostic the name of Ambroise de Lorede.

Robert d'Estouteville won his bride at a tourney given by King René.

This is the ballade :

[*Original French*]

BALLADE QUE VILLON DONNA À UNG GENTILHOMME  
NOUVELLEMENT MARIÉ, POUR L'ENVOYER A SON  
ESPOUSE, PAR LUY CONQUISE A L'ESPÉE

Au poinct du jour, que l'espervier se bat,  
Meu de plaisir, et par noble coustume,  
Bruyt il demaine et de joye s'esbat,  
Reçoit son past et se joint à la plume :  
Offrir vous vueil (à ce desir m'allume)  
Joyeusement ce qu'aux amans bon semble,  
Si qu'Averroys l'escript en son volume,  
Et c'est la fin pourquoy sommes ensemble.

Dame serez de mon cueur, sans debat,  
Entierement, jusques mort me consume,  
Laurier soüef qui pour mon droit combat,  
Olivier franc m'ostant toute amertume.  
Raison ne veult que je desacoutume  
(Et en ce vueil avec elle m'assemble)  
De vous servir, mais que m'y accoustume,  
Et c'est la fin pourquoy sommes ensemble.

Et qui plus est, quant dueil sur moy s'embat,  
Par fortune qui souvent si se fume,  
Vostre doulx œil sa malice rebat,  
Ne plus ne moins que le vent faict la fume.  
Si ne perds pas le graine que je sume  
En vostre champ, car le fruict me ressemble :  
Dieu m'ordonne que le harse et fume,  
Et c'est la fin pourquoy sommes ensemble.

## ENVOI

Princesse, oyez ce que cy vous resume :  
 Que le mien cueur du vostre desassemble,  
 J'à ne sera, tant de vous en presume,  
 Et c'est la fin pourquoy sommes ensemble.

[*Translation*]

## THE BALLADE OF THE BRIDEGROOM

(BALLADE QUE VILLON DONNA À UN GENTILHOMME NOU-  
 VELLEMENT MARIÉ)

*The two first verses give in acrostic the name Ambroise de Lorede,  
 in the original and also in the translation.*

At dawn of day the hawk claps wing,  
 Moved by his life's nobility  
 Before the day his song to fling,  
 Returns, and to the lure sweeps he.  
 Over you thus desire leads me,  
 Joyous, and, striking towards you, fleet,  
 Swiftly to take love's food from thee.  
 Espoused for this do we two meet.

Dear one, my heart to thee shall cling  
 Ever till Death makes his decree.  
 Laurel all victory to bring !  
 Olive to make the shadows flee !  
 Reason has written it that we  
 Ever shall find our life complete,  
 Devoted thus eternally.  
 Espoused for this do we two meet.

More—when to me comes suffering—  
 Fortune brings such fatality—  
 Before thy gaze all-conquering,  
 Driven like smoke by wind 'twill be.  
 And I will loose no husbandry,  
 Nor seed sown in thy garden, sweet ;  
 Its fruit shall hold my imagry.  
 Espoused for this do we two meet.

ENVOI

Princess, behold my fealty.  
Turn eyes ; my heart lies at thy feet.  
Thy heart is mine, mine yours, now see.  
Espoused for this do we two meet.

[The bridegroom was Robert d'Estouteville, the bride, Ambroise de Lorede.]

Poor Ambroise de Lorede died in 1468. She was one of those to whom Villon wished well.

Immediately after this ballade, as though its charm had exhausted for the moment his goodwill, he turns savagely on the two Perdryers, Jehan and François.

The Perdryers belonged to a rich family, and all the evidence goes to prove that François and Jehan kept up the family tradition of success.

François was a fish merchant among other things, and he was also connected with the royal kitchen.

What they did to Villon to raise his wrath no man knows, but the result was the *Ballade of Slandrous Tongues*. It is said that they betrayed him at Bourges. However that may be, the ballade remains—and what a ballade it is !

One of the most remarkable things about Villon is his contradictions of himself, an instance of which we have now. Up to now we admire his restraint. With his power of language and with the grudge he had against Thibault d'Aussigny what might he not have said against Thibault ! In effect he says very little ; he is almost Japanese

in his ferocious and freezing politeness. Thibault, whatever Villon may have done to deserve punishment, treated him with a hardness and a cruelty beyond words to express. The Perdryers, whatever they did, could not have done worse. Yet he directs against Thibault only a few lines of reproach, whilst against the Perdryers he lets loose this mad dog of a ballade to cling to their coat-tails for ever and ever. The thing is absolutely unprintable in English. The rage that inspires it is so living that one almost forgets the filth that composes it. It is for this reason that it is impossible to translate. The master hand being wanting, the rage would not be evident and the thing would be simply disgusting.

As it stands in the original it is unique.

Can it have been that Villon recognised in Thibault a man, detestable enough in his hardness and cruelty, but a man honest according to his lights, and in the Perdryers men venomous and mean, heartless as Thibault, but without his honesty, and that the difference in his treatment of the Bishop of Orléans and of the brothers Perdryer may have been due to this recognition ?

[*Original French*]

BALLADE

En reagal, en arsenic rocher,  
 En orpigment, en salpestre et chaulx vive ;  
 En plomb boillant, pour mieulx les esmorcher ;  
 En suif et poix, destrampez de lessive  
 Faicte d'estrons et de pissat de Juifve ;



En lavaille de jambes à meseaulx ;  
 En raclure de piedz et vieulx houseaulx ;  
 En sang d'aspic et drogues venimeuses ;  
 En fiels de loups, de regnards et blereaux,  
 Soient frites ces langues envieuses !

En cervelle de chat qui hayt pescher,  
 Noir, et si vieil qu'il n'ait dent et gencive ;  
 D'unq vieil mastin, qui vault bien aussi cher,  
 Tout enragé, en sa bave et salive ;  
 En l'escume d'une mulle poussive,  
 Detrenchée menu à bons ciseaulx ;  
 En eau où ratz plongent groings et museaulx,  
 Raines, crapauds et bestes dangereuses,  
 Serpens, lezards et telz nobles oyseaulx,  
 Soient frites ces langues envieuses !

En sublimé, dangereux à toucher,  
 Et au nombril d'une couleuvre vive ;  
 En sang qu'on veoit ès pallectes secher,  
 Chez ces barbiers, quand plaine lune arrive,  
 Dont l'unq est noir, l'autre plus vert que cive ;  
 En chancre et fiez, et en ces ords cuveaulx  
 Où nourrices essangent leurs drappeaulx ;  
 En petits baings de filles amoureuses  
 (Qui ne m'entend n'a suivy les bordeaulx).  
 Soient frites ces langues envieuses !

## ENVOI

Prince, passez tous ces friands morceaulx,  
 S'estamine n'avez, sacs ou bluteaux,  
 Parmy le fons d'une brayes breneuses.  
 Mais, paravant, en estrons de pourceaulx,  
 Soient frites ces langues envieuses !

Having dried the ink on that he proceeds:—  
 To Maître Andry Courault he bequeaths the  
 following ballade entitled *Les Contredictz de Franc  
 Gontier*.

Now, before the time of Villon the poet Philip Vitry wrote a poem extolling the joys of the simple life, in which a countryman Gontier and his wife Helaine are depicted living an out-of-door existence, rubbing their crusts with onions and finding happiness with no other roof above them but the sky. To this poem Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly made a reply. Pierre d'Ailly did not see the simple life with the eyes of Philip Vitry.

The whole of this Gontier business made a great stir in the circles of the learned and the polite. The intellectuals ranged themselves in two camps. King René of Anjou was the chief of the Gontierites, and, as we have seen, he put this thing into practice. Villon put his personal views on the business into poetry in the following ballade.

[*Original French*]

BALLADE INTITULÉE, "LES CONTREDICTZ DE FRANC-GONTIER."

Sur mol duvet assis, ung gras chanoine,  
 Lez ung brasier, en chambre bien nattée,  
 A son costé gisant dame Sydoine,  
 Blanche, tendre, pollie et attaintée :  
 Boire ypocras, à jour et à nuycitée.  
 Rire, jouer, mignoter et baiser,  
 Et nud à nud, pour mieulx des corps ayser,  
 Les vy tous deux, par un trou de mortaise.  
 Lors je congneuz que, pour dueil appaiser,  
 Il n'est tresor que de vivre à son aise.

Se Franc-Gontier et sa compaigne Helaine  
 Eussent tousjours cest' douce vie hantée,  
 D'oignons, civotz, qui causent forte alaine,  
 N'en mangeassent bise croute frottée.  
 Tout leur mathon, ne toute leur potée,

Ne prise ung ail, je le dy sans noysier.  
 S'ilz se vantent coucher soubz le rosier,  
 Ne vault pas mieulx lict costoyé de chaise ?  
 Qu'en dictes-vous ? Faut-il à ce muser  
 Il n'est tresor que de vivre à son aise.

De gros pain bis vivent, d'orge, d'avoine,  
 Et boivent eau tout le long de l'année.  
 Tous les oyseaulx, d'icy en Babyloine,  
 A tel escot, une seule journée,  
 Ne me tiendroient, non une matinée.  
 Or s'esbate, de par Dieu, Franc-Gontier,  
 Helaine o luy, soubz le bel esglantier :  
 Se bien leur est, n'ay cause qu'il me poise.  
 Mais, quoy qu'il soit du laboureur mestier,  
 Il n'est tresor que de vivre à son aise.

## ENVOI

Prince, jugez, pour tous nous accorder.  
 Quant est à moy, mais qu'à nul n'en desplaise,  
 Petit enfant, j'ay ouy recorder  
 Qu'il n'est tresor que de vivre à son aise.

## [Translation]

BALLADE ENTITLED, "LES CONTREDICTZ DE  
FRANC-GONTIER "

(BALLADE INTITULÉE "LES CONTREDICTZ DE FRANC-GONTIER")

*Who was an apostle of the simple life, exhibited in a little book entitled, "Les Ditz de Franc-Gontier," which Villon now attacks.*

On a soft-cushioned couch a fat priest lay.  
 Beside a brazier in a room lay he  
 With arrased walls, and there, as fair as day,  
 Beside him lay the lady Sydonie.  
 They drank of hypocras, and, laughing free,

Kissed and took joy with never thought or sigh,  
 Heedless of death and putting all care by.  
 And knew I, even as I spied on these,  
 Who cared for nought, there is beneath the sky  
 No treasure but to live and have one's ease.

If Franc-Gontier had always lived that way  
 With his companion, Helaine, more sweetly  
 Would they have lived, unforced, through hunger's sway,  
 To rub their crusts with onions, he and she.  
 Their cabbage-soup has little charm for me,  
 I mean no ill—but, in sincerity,  
 Is it not better on a couch to lie  
 Than under roses, and the skies that freeze?  
 Ask me what would I, and I make reply,  
 No treasure but to live and have one's ease.

Eating black bread, or bread of oatmeal grey,  
 And drinking water all the year, *pardie!*  
 Not all the singing-birds, however gay,  
 From here to Babylon on every tree  
 Would tempt me for a day for such a fee.  
 For God's sake, then, let Franc-Gontier reply  
 To Helaine's kisses where the wild birds fly,  
 Beneath the eglantine, the summer trees.  
 No treasure find I in such husbandry.  
 No treasure but to live and have one's ease.

## ENVOI

Prince, on these two opinions cast thine eye;  
 But as for me—though I would none displease—  
 I heard in childhood that man may descry  
 No treasure but to live and have one's ease.

He bequeaths this ballade to Maître Andry Courault, who was King René's procureur in Paris, and it has been suggested for this reason that the thing was a satire on King René. It seems more

in the nature of a criticism of the idea than of a satire directed against an individual ; leaving it at that, the bequeathal of it to René's procureur was a subtle stroke with more real wit in it than is found in most satires.

Immediately upon the gift of this ballade follows another to Mademoiselle le Bruyères and the young girls she looks after. In reality it is a gift to all men of the most joyous and delightful ballade ever written—the *Ballade of the Women of Paris*. Read it :

[Original French]

BALLADE DES FEMMES DE PARIS

Quoy qu'on tient belles langagieres  
 Florentines, Veniciennes,  
 Assez pour estre messaigieres,  
 Et mesmement les anciennes ;  
 Mais, soient Lombardes, Rommaines,  
 Genevoyses, à mes perilz,  
 Piemontoises, Savoysiennes,  
 Il n'est bon bec que de Paris.

De beau parler tiennent chayeres,  
 Ce dit-on, Neapolitaines,  
 Et que sont bonnes caquetieres  
 Allemandes et Prussiennes ;  
 Soient Grecques, Egyptiennes,  
 De Hongrie ou d'autre pays,  
 Espaignolles ou Castellennes,  
 Il n'est bon bec que de Paris.

Brettes, Suysses, n'y sçavent gueres,  
 Ne Gasconnes et Thoulouzaines ;  
 Du Petit-Pont deux harangeres  
 Les conclurent, et les Lorraines,

Angloises ou Calaisiennes  
 (Ay-je beaucoup de lieux compris ?),  
 Picardes, de Valenciennes. . . .  
 Il n'est bon bec que de Paris.

## ENVOI

Prince, aux dames Parisiennes,  
 De bien parler donnez le prix.  
 Quoy qu'on die d'Italiennes,  
 Il n'est bon bec que de Paris.

[*Translation*]

## BALLADE OF THE WOMEN OF PARIS

## (BALLADE DES FEMMES DE PARIS)

Take those famed for language fair,  
 Past, or in the present tense,  
 Each good as Love's messenger :  
 Florentines, Venetiennes,  
 Roman girls, Lombardiennes,  
 Girls whose names Geneva carries,  
 Piedmont girls, Savoysiennes ;  
 No lips speak like those of Paris.

Though for grace of language are  
 Famed the Neapolitans,  
 And in chattering Germans share  
 Pride of place with Prussians.  
 Taking Greeks, Egyptians,  
 Austrians, whom no rhyme marries,  
 Spanish girls, Castillians ;  
 No lips speak like those of Paris.

Bretonnes, Swiss, their language mar,  
 Gascon girls, Toulousiennes ;  
 Two fish-fags would close their jar  
 On Petit Pont, Lorrainiennes,  
 English girls, Calaisiennes—  
 All the world my memory harries—  
 Picard girls, Valenciennes ;  
 No lips speak like those of Paris.

## ENVOI

Prince, to fair Parisiennes  
Give the prize, nor turn where tarries  
One who saith "Italians."  
No lips speak like those of Paris.

For movement, laughter, "ring," and style is there another ballade to equal it? or for colour and irresponsible worth?

It is the only joyous ballade that Villon ever wrote. It is only twenty-eight lines in length, it is nothing when resolved into its constituents, yet it calls up the women of the world. Trooping and laughing they come from the Grand Canal and from the sea-steps of Naples, from the Plaza del Sol and the harbour of Marseilles, from Egypt, from Greece, from Hungary and Prussia, Lombardy and Rome, Lorraine and Toulouse. It bundles in among them the fish-fags of the Petit Pont, rings the whole crowd with an indestructible sentiment, and holds them there laughing and chatting for ever.

Its supposed motive—the apotheosis of the Parisian women as chatterers—is subordinated by the power of the pictorial effect. The magic of the music frees the imagination of the listener and fills it with voices, forms, and faces.

He continues his will. To Montmartre he gives Mont Valerien for some lost reason or another.

To varlets and chambermaids he leaves pheasants, tarts, *flans et goyeres, et grand ravaudiz a*

*minuict*, seven or eight pints of wine apiece, and license to do as they please when the lights are out.

To good girls who have fathers and mothers he leaves nothing; he has left all that he has to give to the servants.

He grumbles that the religious orders, such as the Celestins and Chartreux, live so well whilst the poor girls of the street are half starved.

Jacqueline and Perrette and Isabeau often have to go hungry, whilst the tables of the clergy are groaning with food and delicacies.

The voice of Villon bears heavy testimony as to the condition of the Church in his time, and thinking of these unfortunate girls who fared so hard whilst the fat Carthusians fed so well, his mind seems to have been led to a combination of the two—the fat Margot.

To the fat Margot, fair of face and sufficiently devout, he leaves his most notorious ballade—the *Ballade of Villon and La Grosse Margot*.

It is a description of his life as, shall we say, a henchman of this fat lady whose house was a house where disorder reigned.

He talks of the business as frankly as though he were speaking of the management of a fruit shop.

The thing is not an allegory but a piece of real life; the details are too minute—*vide* verse three—to allow of any other supposition. But it was not written for the purpose of detailing an experience. Had it been so written it would not be what it is, nor would it reveal what it reveals.



It is the recognition of defeat.

"This is how I live and get my living," jauntily say the first three verses. The whole thing is leading up to the envoi and the last three unforgettable lines :

Ordure amons, ordure nous affuyt ;  
 Nous deffuyons honneur, honneur il nous deffuyt,  
 En ce bourdeau, où tenons nostre estat.

The bitterness revealed preserves the matter from corruption and raises the whole production to the highest level in art.

The envoi seizes on what has gone before and what has been carefully prepared for it to seize upon. Rain, hail, or snow, it says, my bread is safe. I am what she is—where's the difference ? It is a case of bad cat to bad rat. We have filth, filth clings to us like a lover. We fly from honour, honour flies from us.

Twice he underscores the fact that his bread is obtained by this method of life. A shameful admission, you will say.

[*Original French*]

BALLADE DE VILLON ET DE LA GROSSE MARGOT

Se j'ayme et sers la belle, de bon haict,  
 M'en devez-vous tenir ne vil ne sot ?  
 Elle a en soy des biens à fin souhaict.  
 Pour son amour, ceings bouclier et passot.  
 Quand viennent gens, je cours, et happe un pot :

Au vin m'en voys, sans demener grant bruyt.  
 Je leur tendz eau, frommage, pain et fruit.  
 S'ils payent bien, je leur dy : " Que bien *stat* !  
 Retournez cy, Quand vous serez en ruyt,  
 En ce bourdeau, où tenons nostre estat " !

Mais, tost après, il y a grant deshait,  
 Quand sans argent s'en vient coucher Margot :  
 Veoir ne la puis, mon cueur à mort la hait.  
 Sa robe prens, demy-ceinct et surcot :  
 Si luy prometz qu'ilz tiendront pour l'escot.  
 Par les costez ze prend, cest Antechrist ;  
 Crie et jure, par la mort Jesuchrist,  
 Que non sera. Lors j'empongne ung esclat,  
 Dessus le nez luy en fais ung escript,  
 En ce bourdeau, où tenons nostre estat.

Puis, paix se faict, et me lasche ung gros pet,  
 Plus enflée qu'ung venimeux scarbot ;  
 Riant, m'assiet son poing sur mon sommet,  
 Gogo me dit, et me fiert le jambot.  
 Tous deux yvres, dormons comme ung sabot,  
 Et, au reveil, quand le ventre luy bruyt,  
 Monte sur moy, que ne gaste son fruit.  
 Soubz elle geins, plus qu'ung aiz me faict plat,  
 De paillarder tout elle me destruiet,  
 En ce bourdeau, où tenons nostre estat.

## ENVOI

Vente, gresle, gelle, j'ay mon pain cuict !  
 Je suis paillard, la paillarde me duit.  
 Lequel vault mieux ? Chascun bien s'entresuit,  
 L'ung l'autre vault : c'est à mau chat mau rat.  
 Ordure amons, ordure nous affuyt ;  
 Nous deffuyons honneur, il nous deffuyt,  
 En ce bourdeau, où tenons nostre estat.

In the next verse of the *Testament* appear two women's names, Marion l'Ydolle and big Joan of

Brittany. He gives them the right to keep a public school where the scholars shall teach the masters, and the thought of these two seems to lead his imagination to the Hôtel Dieu, to which he bequeaths nothing: he has left his goose to the mendicants; he can only leave the bones to the Hôtel Dieu.

But the thought of the Hôtel Dieu leads him to Colin Galerne, the barber surgeon, and to Colin he bequeaths a big lump of ice taken from the Marne, with the recommendation that he should clap it on his stomach.

Following this lost joke comes a *Ballade bequeathed to the Lost Ones who frequent Marion l'Ydolle*.

The ballade is without refrain or envoi. It is the second of what I have called the didactic ballades. It is a sermon in twenty-four lines, and it is addressed to his evil companions. I said before that Villon's connection with the Coquillards, though it may have involved his name and part of his time and energy, did not involve his soul. This ballade with the one already mentioned and the one to follow gives us clear evidence on that point.

It is a "straight talk."

[*Original French*]

BELLE LECON DE VILLON AUX ENFANS PERDUZ

Beaulx enfans, vous perdez la plus  
Belle rose de vo chapeau,  
Mes clercs apprenans comme gluz.  
Si vous allez à Montpippeau

Ou à Ruel, gardez la peau :  
 Car, pour s'esbatre en ces deux lieux,  
 Cuydant que vaulsist le rappeau,  
 La perdit Colin de Cayeux.

Ce n'est pas ung jeu de trois mailles,  
 Où va corps, et peut-estre l'ame :  
 S'on perd, rien n'y vault repentailles,  
 Qu'on ne meure à honte et diffame ;  
 Et qui gaigne n'a pas à femme  
 Dido la royne de Carthage.  
 L'homme est donc bien fol et infame  
 Qui pour si peu couche tel gage.

Qu'ung chascun encore m'escoute :  
 On dit, et il est verité,  
 Que charreterie se boyt toute,  
 Au feu l'hyver, au bois l'esté.  
 S'argent avez, il n'est enté,  
 Mais le despendez tost et viste.  
 Qui en voyez-vous herité ?  
 Jamais mal acquest ne proufite.

[*Translation*]

BALLADE OF GOOD ADVICE

(BELLE LEÇON DE VILLON AUX ENFANS PERDUZ)

FAIR children, in waste ye strew  
 The roses that for you blow.  
 My clerks, who can clutch like glue,  
 If ye journey to Montpippeau,  
 Or Reul, have a care, ye know  
 For the dice that there he threw—  
 Risking a second throw—  
 Was lost Colin de Caileux.

This is no little game,  
 For body and soul are fee ;  
 If ye lose, from a death of shame  
 Repentance will not save ye.

And the winner, what gain has he ?  
No Dido for wife he's bought.  
Bad, and a fool, must be  
The man who risks all for nought.

Now, listen unto this song,  
For it is the truth I say,  
A barrel will last not long  
By hearth or in woods of May.  
Money soon runs away,  
And when it is spent and gone  
Where is your heritage, pray ?  
Evil brings good to none.

It holds up the fate of Colin de Cayeux, and then it goes on gravely to point out that this is no little game where body and soul are involved; that if the game is lost, repentance will not save them.

Bad and a fool must be  
The man who risks all for nought,

continues this strange preacher, who ends up with a statement that cuts up to us like a sword—

Evil brings good to none.

This is no Coquillard who is speaking, but a man of sense and understanding addressing brothermen. But he has not done with the lost ones yet. Here follows the third of the didactic ballades.

[*Original French*]

BALLADE DE BONNE DOCTRINE

A CEUX DE MAUVAISE VIE

Car or' soyés porteur de bulles,  
Pipeur ou hazardeur de dez,  
Tailleur de faulx coings, tu te brusles,  
Comme ceux qui sont eschaudez ;

Traistres pervers, de foy vuydez,  
 Soyés larron, ravis ou pillés :  
 Où en va l'acquest, que cuydez ?  
 Tout aux tavernes et aux filles.

Ryme, raille, cymballe, luttés,  
 Comme folz, faintis, eshontés ;  
 Farce, broille, joue des flustes ;  
 Fais, és villes et és citez,  
 Fainctes, jeux et moralitez ;  
 Gaigne au berlan, au glic, aux quilles :  
 Où s'en va tout ? Or escoutez :  
 Tout aux tavernes et aux filles.

De telz ordures te recullés ;  
 Laboure, fauche champs et prez ;  
 Sers et panse chevaulx et mulles,  
 S'aucunement tu n'és lettrez ;  
 Assez auras, se prens en grez.  
 Mais, se chanvre broyés ou tilles,  
 Où tendront labours qu'as ouvrez ?  
 Tout aux tavernes et aux filles.

## ENVOI

Chausses, pourpointz esguilletez,  
 Robes, et toutes vos drapilles,  
 Ains que soient usez, vous portez  
 Tout aux tavernes et aux filles.

[*Translation*]BALLADE OF GOOD DOCTRINE TO THOSE OF EVIL  
LIFE

(BALLADE DE BONNE DOCTRINE)

" Tout aux tavernes et aux filles "

Be ye carriers of bulls,<sup>1</sup>  
 Cheats at dice—whate'er ye be,  
 Coiners—they who risk like fools,  
 Boiling for their felony.

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<sup>1</sup> Smugglers of Papal bulls.

Traitors perverse—so be ye—  
Thieves of gold, or virgin's pearls,  
Where goes what ye get in fee ?  
All on taverns and on girls.

Song, jest, cymbals, lutes—  
Don these signs of minstrelsy.  
Farce, imbroglio, play of flutes,  
Make in hamlet or city.  
Act in play or mystery,  
Gain at cards, or ninepin hurls.  
All your profits, where go they ?  
All on taverns and on girls.

Turn, before your spirit cools,  
To more honest husbandry ;  
Grooms of horses be, or mules,  
Plough the fields and plant the tree.  
If you've no Latinity.  
No more learning than the churls,  
Work—nor cast your money free  
All on taverns and on girls.

ENVOI

Stockings, pourpoint, drapery,  
Every rag that round you furls,  
Ere you've done, will go, you'll see,  
All on taverns and on girls.

This fine ballade is among the best that Villon ever wrote. It has a swing and go absolutely lost in the absurd travesty of it which W. E. Henley published under the name of a translation.

The man who could render the ringing "Tout aux tavernes at aux filles" by "Booze and the blowens cop the lot" did more than miss the music of the original, he missed the mind of the poet and the method and manner of the writer.

Villon knew the worth and the worthlessness of slang and argot—none better; and to represent the poet as speaking in the language of a pot-house when he is speaking in his own tongue is to misrepresent him.

As though these two ballades were not enough, he continues in the verse of the Testament that follows them to call again to the Lost Ones.

Gardez-vous tous de ce mauvais hasles,  
Qui noircist gens quand ilz sont mortz.

Beware of the evil sun that blackens men when they are dead.

Then he drops the subject and relapses into his old mocking mood.

He leaves to the “*Quinze Vingtz*” (the hospital for the blind) his spectacles (reserving the case), so that they may pick out the bad from the good in the Cemetery of the Innocents.

After this jest, in the next four verses comes a picture of the cemetery and the dead that therein lie.

I do not know the secret of these four verses about the dead lying in the Cemetery of the Innocents or why they produce in one a little shiver of the mind.

Turning the page, and half laughing at the gift of the spectacles, the laughter is stricken from our lips.

Of a sudden we find ourselves looking over the old cemetery wall, at the tombs and charnels, at



the half-revealed bones and the tombstones leaning crookedly with the weight of years.

Icy n'y a ne rys ne jeu !  
Que leur vault avoir eu chevances,  
N'en grans lictz de parement geu,  
Engloutir vin en grosses pances,  
Mener joye, festes et dances—

Truly there are here neither grand beds nor good food and wine, neither joy nor feasting nor dances—nothing.

Villon points out to us the charnel-houses and speaks of the heads there lying, the heads of bishops and of basket carriers, of lords and ladies.

People who bowed one to another in life, some who ruled and some who served, all tumbled together here pell-mell, cleric and master, without appeal.

God take their souls, seigneurs and dames tenderly nourished on cream, frumenty and rice, their bones now crumbling to dust !

Plaise au doux Jesus les absouldre !

We talk of old French—there is in fact no such thing ; what we call old French is the lisping of France in her childhood, it is the very youth of language that we hear in the verse of Villon, in the ballades of Charles of Orléans, in the rondels of the Vidame de Chartres.

Plaise au doux Jesus les absouldre !

The prayer comes to us like the voice of a child, and like the thoughts of a child made audible comes all that ingenuous speech about the dead.

And how it hits us !

They have nothing to eat, neither joy nor feasts nor dances, neither laughter nor play nor beds of honour ! Nothing could be more obvious, nothing more commonplace to say about the dead than that, yet coming up from that terrible old cemetery across all the years that divide us from Villon, those lines with the lisp in them, those thoughts so naïve and childlike, touch the heart as only truth can touch the heart and touch the mind as only wisdom can touch it.

Villon, in fact, has said in those four verses all that can be said about the condition of the dead. Five hundred years have passed since he laid down his pen, and they have passed without adding a stroke or comma to his statement.

Even the Cemetery of the Innocents itself has vanished, destroyed by the growth of Paris ; and the bishops and lords and ladies, the bourgeois, the men-at-arms, the shopkeeper, all the company that once crowded its space, have long been deprived even of that last faint tie to earth—the tomb. Nothing in connection with them remains but the prayer of a robber :

Plaise au doulx Jesus les absouldre !

His next legacy is a rondel bequeathed to Jacques Cardon, the rich draper to whom in the

*Petit Testament* he left his silk gloves, and among other things the acorns that grow on willows.

The contrast between the high spirits of that jest and the legacy which he now leaves Cardon lies before you in the *rondel*:

[*Original French*]

LAYS

Au retour de dure prison  
Où j'ay laissé presque la vie,  
Se Fortune a sur moy envie,  
Jugez s'elle fait mesprison !  
Il me semble que, par raison,  
Elle deust bien estre assouvie,  
Au retour.

Cecy plain est de desraison,  
Qui vueille que du tout desvie.  
Plaise à Dieu que l'ame ravie  
En soit, lassus, en sa maison,  
Au retour !

[*Translation*]

LAYS

On return from that hard prison  
Where life near was reft from me,  
If Fate still shows cruelty,  
Judge if she shows not misprision !  
For it seems to me, with reason,  
She hath found satiety,  
On return,

For the Fate is but unreason,  
That still wills my misery.  
Grant, God ! I find sanctuary,  
In Thy house from her dark treason,  
On return !

To Maître Lomer, an official connected with Notre Dame who had a power of surveillance over the light women of the Cité, Villon—*comme extraict que je suis de fée*—leaves a spell which will render the unfortunate Lomer well loved by women but incapable of loving. The fairies were supposed to have this power over mortals.

Then to the love-sick he gives Alain Chartiers' lay *l'Hôpital d'Amour*, a bowl of tears, and, for a sprinkler, a branch of eglantine (*en tout temps verd*), on condition that they say a prayer for the soul of poor Villon.

To Maître Jacques James—Master of Works of the City of Paris—he gives all the women he requires, but no wife. Let all the money he has made from women go back from where it came.

He gives Camus the seneschal the right of shoeing ducks and geese as well as horses, and to the Captain of the Watch he bequeaths two pretty pages, Phlippot and fat Marquet, who have already served Tristan Prévost des Marescheaulx (Tristan the Hermit).

He leaves to Chappelain (possibly one of the sergents of the Châtelet) his "chapelle à simple tonsure," charging him to say a low Mass. Villon would have also given Chappelain his cure of souls, but for the fact that the said Chappelain only cares for confessing ladies and chambermaids.

The right of revising this *Testament* he gives to

Jehan de Calais. Jehan de Calais was probably a notary of the Châtelet whose business it was to inspect wills.

Then he orders that his body shall be interred at Ste. Avoye, a convent whose chapel possessed no graveyard.

He requires no monument of stone, it would break the floor down—the chapel of Ste. Avoye was on the ground floor—just a picture done in ink, if ink is not too dear, and over that in letters of charcoal, taking care not to damage the plaster, the following :

[*Original French*]

EPITAPH

CY GIST ET DORT, EN CE SOLLIER,  
QU'AMOUR OCCIST DE SON RAILLON,  
UNG POVRE PETIT ESCOLLIER,  
QUI FUT NOMMÉ FRANÇOIS VILLON.  
ONCQUES DE TERRE N'EUT SILLON.  
IL DONNA TOUT, CHASCUN LE SCET :  
TABLE, TRETTEAUX ET CORBILLON.  
POUR DIEU, DICTES-EN CE VERSET.

[*Translation*]

EPITAPH

HERE IN THIS PLACE SLEEPS ONE WHOM LOVE  
CAUSED, THROUGH GREAT CRUELTY, TO FALL,  
A LITTLE SCHOLAR, POOR ENOUGH,  
WHOM FRANCOIS VILLON MEN DID CALL.  
NO SCRAP OF LAND OR GARDEN SMALL,  
HE OWNED. HE GAVE HIS GOODS AWAY.  
TABLE AND TRESTLES, BASKETS—ALL.  
FOR GOD'S SAKE SAY FOR HIM THIS LAY !

[*Original French*]

## RONDEL

Repos eternal donne à cil,  
 Sire, clarté perpetuelle,  
 Qui vaillant plat ny escuelle  
 N'eut oncques, n'ung brin de percil.  
 Il fut rez, chef, barbe, sourcil,  
 Comme un navet qu'on ret et pelle.  
 Repos !

Rigueur le transmit en exil,  
 Et luy frappa au cul la pelle,  
 Nonobstant qu'il dist : *J'en appelle !*  
 Qui n'est pas terme trop subtil.  
 Repos !

[*Translation*]

## RONDEL

Repose eternal give to him,  
 O Lord, and Light that never dies ;  
 Even unto him whose platter lies  
 Empty of meat—yea, even to him  
 Who standeth bald, in turnip trim,  
*Sans* beard, *sans* hair above the eyes.  
 Repose !

Fate sent him forth to exile dim,  
 And struck him hard, above the thighs ;  
 Yet clear he cried, as still he cries,  
 “ *Lord, I appeal !* ” yea, even to him  
 Repose !

He orders that they shall toll for him the great bell of Notre Dame, “ le gros beffroy,” only sounded

for the death of kings, and that four loaves be given to each of the ringers, or half a dozen if four be not enough.

These are the names of his executors: Maître Martin Bellefaye, Lieutenant du cas Criminel, Sire Colombel, and Michel Jouvenel.

Colombel was councillor to the King; he had been a usurer and was pretty generally hated. Michel Jouvenel was the sixth son of Jouvenel des Urcines, the Advocate-General. Michel was very rich, one of the officers of Finance and given to letters.

In case these three gentlemen are unable to act as executors, Villon appoints Philippe Brunel and Maître Jacques Raguyer, two of the biggest blackguards in Paris—at least one of the greatest drinkers in the person of Jacques Raguyer, and one of the greatest ruffians in the person of Philippe Brunel, seigneur de Grigny.

As though the coupling of Martin Bellefaye, Sire Colombel, and Michel Jouvenel with the names of Brunel and Raguyer were not a sufficient insult to the three former, Villon clinches the matter by appointing as a third executor Maître Jacques James the libertine.

And he pours boiling oil over the unfortunates by declaring that these three men are so honourable that he gives them a free hand without control over his affairs.

He will not give a cent to the Maître des Testaments; he gives the fee to a young priest Colas

Tricot, wishing that he, Villon, could go with Tricot and spend the fee in drink at the Trou Perrette.

As regards the lighting of the chapel, let Guillaume du Ru see to it.

Let his executors choose the pall bearers, and now, being in great pain, "penil, cheveulx, barbe, sourcilx" it is time to cry "mercy" to all men.

"Que crie a toutes gens merciz"

So ends this amazing document.

It is followed by two ballades :

[*Original French*]

BALLADE POUR LAQUELLE VILLON CRYE MERCY A  
CHASCUN

A Chartreux et à Celestins,  
A Mendians et à devotes,  
A musars et cliquepatins,  
A servans et filles mignottes,  
Portant surcotz et justes cottes ;  
A cuyderaulx, d'amours transis,  
Chaussans sans meshaing fauves bottes :  
Je crye à toutes gens merciz !

A filles monstrans leurs tetins  
Pour avoir plus largement hostes ;  
A ribleux meneurs de hutins,  
A basteleurs traynans marmottes,  
A folz et folles, sotz et sottes,  
Qui s'en vont sifflant cinq et six ;  
A veufves et à mariottes :  
Je crye à toutes gens merciz !

Sinon aux traistres chiens mastins,  
Qui m'ont fait manger dures crostes  
Et boire eau maintz soirs et matins,  
Qu'ores je ne crains pas trois crottes.



Pour eulx je feisse petz et rottes ;  
 Je ne puis, car je suis assis.  
 Au fort, pour eviter riottes,  
 Je crye à toutes gens merciz !

## ENVOI

S'on leur froissoit les quinze costes  
 De gros maillets, fortz et massis,  
 De plombée et de telz pelottes,  
 Je crye à toutes gens merciz !

[Translation]

## BALLADE

(BALLADE POUR LAQUELLE VILLON CRYE MERCY À CHASCUN)

To Chartreux and to Célestins,  
 To Mendicants and to *dévotés*,  
 To idlers and to *cliquepatins*,  
 To servants and to *filles mignottes*,  
 Wearing *surcotes* and *justes cottes*,  
 To all the young bloods that you see  
 Who wear o'er ankles soft-tanned boots :  
 To all these folk I cry *Mercy !*

To girls whose breasts are naked twins  
 To draw to them the eye that gloats,  
 To brawlers, clowns whose clamour dins,  
 To showmen training their *marmottes*,  
 To *Folz* and *Folles*, *Sotz* and *Sottes*  
 Who pass by whistling frank and free,  
 To widows and to *mariottes* :  
 To all these folk I cry *Mercy !*

Except those traitors—*chiens mastins !*  
 Who made me gnaw their rotten crusts  
 And drink cold water for my sins  
 For whom I care not now three *cottes*.  
 I'd make them (here for words place dots) . . .<sup>1</sup>  
 But that I lie here sick, *pardie !*  
 No matter, to avoid their plots,  
 To all these folk I cry *Mercy !*

<sup>1</sup> Unprintable.

## ENVOI

So long as their stout ribs get lots  
 Of mallet-blows dealt heavily,  
 Or strokes from whips with leaden knots,  
 To all these folk I cry *Mercy !*

[*Original French*]

## BALLADE POUR SERVIR DE CONCLUSION

Ici se clost le Testament,  
 Et finist, du povre Villon,  
 Venez à son enterrement,  
 Quant vous orrez le carillon,  
 Vestuz rouges com vermillon,  
 Car en amours mourut martir.  
 Ce jura-il sur son callon,  
 Quand de ce monde vout partir.

Et je croy bien que pas ne ment,  
 Car chassié fut, comme un soullon,  
 De ses amours hayneusement,  
 Tant que, d'icy à Roussillon,  
 Brosse n'y a ne brossillon  
 Qui n'eust, ce dit-il sans mentir,  
 Ung lambeau de son cotillon,  
 Quand de ce monde vout partir.

Il est ainsi, et tellement,  
 Quand mourut n'avoit qu'ung haillon.  
 Qui plus, en mourant, mallement  
 L'espoingnoit ? D'amours l'esguillon,  
 Plus agu que le ranguillon  
 D'un baudrier, luy faisoit sentir  
 (C'est de quoy nous esmerveillon),  
 Quand de ce monde vout partir.

## ENVOI

Prince, gent comme esmerillon,  
 Saichiez qu'il fist, au departir :  
 Ung traict but de vin morillon,  
 Quand de ce monde vout partir.

FIN DU GRAND TESTAMENT

[Translation]

## VILLON'S LAST BALLADE

(BALLADE POUR SERVIR DE CONCLUSION)

Here is closed the Testament  
And finished of poor Villon.  
Let your steps to his grave be bent  
When you hear the carillon.  
Vesture of crimson don,  
For a martyr of love lies low.  
So swore he on his *callon*<sup>1</sup>  
When he turned from the world to go.

And I know what he said he meant,  
Nor lied, who from love was spun  
Like a ball and a wanderer went  
From Paris to Rousillon.  
Leaving a rag upon  
Each hedge for the wind to blow,  
So he swore ere his breath was gone,  
When he turned from the world to go.

And thus, with his last sou spent,  
He finished his race anon.  
Whilst yet for his soul's torment  
Love's arrow still spread poison  
In his heart, which was heavy undone;  
And such was his dying woe  
We wondered as we looked on  
When he turned from the world to go.

## ENVOI

Yet, Prince, in his dying swoon  
He turned to the red wine's glow,  
And he drank the red wine down  
When he turned from the world to go.

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<sup>1</sup> Cap.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE BALLADES NOT CONTAINED IN THE "TESTAMENTS"

IN the oldest editions of Villon's poems we find the contents thus up to the year 1520 :

*Le Grand Testament Villon et le Petit, son codicile,  
Le Jargon et ses Ballades.*

After that date we find a different order of title-page.

The printer now speaks of *The Works of François, Villon*, including *Le Monologue du Franc Archier de Baignollet* and *Le Dyalogue des Seigneurs de Mallepaye et de Baillevent*.

Villon has now become a tradition and all sorts of stuff is being fastened on him. Just as a man with a reputation for humour is made the originator of all the jokes about town, so the carcase of every lost ballade or likely bit of verse that cannot find an owner is laid on Villon's tomb.

The *Repues Franches* is an instance.

This doggerel, yards in length and descriptive of the antics of a cheat who robs innkeepers for the benefit of himself and his companions, has been bound up with the works of Villon, who certainly

did rob innkeepers, but who certainly did not write the *Repues Franches*.

The dialogue of M. de Mallepaye and M. de Baillevent has spirit and go in it, but it is not the work of Villon, nor the monologue of the Franc Archier.

The authentic work of Villon, outside the two Testaments and the ballades contained in the *Great Testament*, are as follows.

1. The *Je suis François* quatrain and its attendant ballades—the *Ballade des Pendus*, the *Garnier Ballade*, and *The Request*.

2. The *Ballade of Fortune*. This is certainly one of the finest ballades that Villon ever wrote, yet it is little known.

[*Original French*]

BALLADE OF FORTUNE

Fortune fuz par clercez jadis nommée,  
Que toy, François crie et nomme meurtrière.  
S'il y a hom d'aucune renommée  
Meilleur que toy, faiz user en platrière,  
Par povreté, et fouyr en carrière,  
S'a honte viz, te dois tu doncques plaindre ?  
Tu n'es pas seul ; si ne te dois complaindre.  
Regarde et voy de mes faitz de jadis,  
Maints vaillans homs par moy mors et roidiz,  
Et n'eusses-tu envers eulx ung soullon,  
Appaise-toi, et metz fin en tes diz :  
Par mon conseil prends tout en gré, Villon !

Contre grans roys je me suis bien armée,  
Le temps qui est passé : car, en arrière,  
Priame occis et toute son armée ;  
Ne lui valut tour, donjon, ne barrière.  
Et Hannibal, demoura-il derrière ?

En Cartage, par moy, le feiz actaindre ;  
 Et Scypion l'Affricquain feiz estaindre ;  
 Julius Cesar au senat je vendiz ;  
 En Egipte Pompée je perdiz ;  
 En mer noyay Jazon en ung boullon ;  
 Et, une fois, Romme et Rommains ardiz . . .  
 Par mon conseil prends tout en gré, Villon !

Alexandre, qui tant fist de hamée,  
 Qui voulut voir l'estoille poucynière,  
 Sa personne par moy fut inhumée.  
 Alphasar roy, en champ, sous la bannière,  
 Ruay jus mort, cela est ma manière.  
 Ainsi l'ay fait, ainsi le maintendray ;  
 Autre cause ne raison n'en rendray.  
 Holofernes l'ydolastre mauldiz,  
 Qu'occist Judic (et dormoit entandiz !)  
 De son poignart, dedens son pavillon ;  
 Absallon, quoy ! en fuyant suspendis . . .  
 Par mon conseil prends tout en gré, Villon !

## ENVOI

Povre François, escoute que tu dis  
 Se rien peusse sans Dieu de paradiz,  
 A toy n'aultre de demourroit haillon :  
 Car pour ung mal lors j'en feroye dix :  
 Par mon conseil prends tout en gré, Villon !

[*Translation*]

## THE BALLADE OF FORTUNE

To men of old time Fortune was my name,  
 Whom thou, François, misnamest bitterly,  
 Yet many a man of better worth and fame  
 I hold beneath the lash of poverty,  
 Making him labour in the stone quarry  
 Or plasterer's yard—Of what do you complain ?  
 You're not alone, so cease to strive in vain.

*Ballades not in the "Testaments" 221*

Look at the things that I have done of old,  
The warriors I have stiffened in the mould  
Beside whom thou art nought to look upon.  
Peace then, and let those murmurings be controlled,  
Take all that comes, 'tis my advice, Villon.

Against great kings I armed myself and came  
In days long past that now behind me lie :  
Priam I slew and all his army—them  
Towers, donjons availed nought, nor barriers high ;  
And Hannibal in Carthage he did die,  
By me, by me alone his life was ta'en ;  
By me was Scipio Africanus slain ;  
By me was Cæsar to the senate sold ;  
In Egypt Pompey's fate by me was told,  
And by my hand was Jason's drowning done ;  
Rome and the Romans my flames did enfold.  
Take all that comes, 'tis my advice, Villon.

And Alexander, that great king—the same  
Who aimed to reach the stars that spread the sky,  
I buried where the worms o'er man make game ;  
And King Alphasar,<sup>1</sup> where the banners fly,  
I laid in death : that is my fashion ; I  
Ever do thus and always will maintain  
My way, and never turn to look again ;  
See Holofernes, worshipper of cold  
False Gods, whom Judith slew beneath the fold  
Of his high tent (dedans son pavillon),  
And Absalom, whom high I hung—behold !  
Take all that comes, 'tis my advice, Villon.

ENVOI

Poor François, mark and learn what I have told ;  
If I could gain release from God His hold  
I'd work my will on all beneath the sun ;  
For each ill deed I'd render manifold :  
Take all that comes, 'tis my advice, Villon.

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<sup>1</sup> Arphaxad, king of the Medes, defeated and slain in battle by Holofernes.

3. The *Ballade Against the Enemies of France* might have been written yesterday, had Villon been alive to write it. It was written over four hundred years ago, yet its spirit still lives and breathes.

[*Original French*]

BALLADE CONTRE LES MESDISANS DE LA FRANCE

Rencontré soit de bestes feu gectans  
 Que Jason vit, querant la Toison d'or ;  
 Ou transmué d'homme en beste, sept ans,  
 Ainsi que fut Nabugodonosor ;  
 Ou bien ait perte aussi grievve et villaine  
 Que les Troyens pour la prinse d'Helaine ;  
 Ou avallé soit avec Tantalus  
 Et Proserpine aux infernaulx pallus ;  
 Ou plus que Job soit en grievve souffrance,  
 Tenant prison en la court Dedalus,  
 Qui mal vouldroit au royaume de France !

Quatre mois soit en un vivier chantant,  
 La teste au fons, ainsi que le butor ;  
 Ou au Grand Turc vendu argent comptant,  
 Pour estre mis au harnois comme ung tor ;  
 Ou trente ans soit, comme la Magdelaine,  
 Sans vestir drap de linge ne de laine ;  
 Ou noyé soit, comme fut Narcisus  
 Ou aux cheveux, comme Absalon, pendus,  
 Ou comme fut Judas, par desesperance ;  
 Ou puist mourir comme Simon Magus,  
 Qui mal vouldroit au royaume de France !

D'Octovien puisse venir le temps :  
 C'est qu'on luy coule au ventre son tresor ;  
 Ou qu'il soit mis entre meules rotans,  
 En un moulin, comme fut saint Victor ;  
 Ou transgloutis en la mer, sans halaine,  
 Pis que Jonas au corps de la balaine ;



Ou soit banny de la clarté Phoebus,  
Des biens Juno et du soulas Venus,  
Et du grant Dieu soit maudit à outrance,  
Ainsi que fut roy Sardanapalus,  
Qui mal voudroit au royaume de France !

ENVOI

Prince, porté soit des clers Eolus,  
En la forest où domine Glocus,  
Ou privé soit de paix et d'esperance,  
Car digne n'est de posseder vertus,  
Qui mal voudroit au royaume de France !

[*Translation*]

BALLADE AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF FRANCE

(BALLADE CONTRE LES MESDISANS DE LA FRANCE)

Now may he meet with beasts that vomit flame,  
Like Jason, hunter of the Fleece of Gold,  
Or change from man to brute seven years, the same  
As King Nebuchadnezzar did, or hold  
To heart the times of suffering and pain  
The Trojans held for their princess Helaine,  
Or have a place as deep as Tantalus  
And Proserpine in hell's infernal house.  
May he, like Job, find grief and sufferance,  
Prisoned in the same court with Dædalus,  
Who could wish ill unto the realm of France.

For four months let him like the bittern scream  
Head downward, or to the Grand Turk be sold  
For money paid right down and with the team  
Be harnessed like a bull to till the mould ;  
Or thirty sad years, like to Magdalene,  
Live without cloth of wool or linen clean ;  
Or let him drown the same as Narcissus ;  
Or hang like Absalom by lengthy tress ;  
Or swing like Judas, viewed by all askance.  
Let him like Simon Magus die, even thus,  
Who could wish ill unto the realm of France.

For him again may days Octavian gleam  
 And in his belly molten coin grow cold ;  
 And like Saint Victor crushed, as by a beam,  
 Beneath the mill-wheels may his corpse be rolled ;  
 Or may his breath fail neath the deep sea green  
 As once did Jonah's in the whale obscene.  
 Let him be banned for ay from fair Phœbus,  
 And damned for ay from Venus amorous,  
 And cursed by God beyond all utterance,  
 Even as old was Sardanapalus,  
 Who could wish ill unto the realm of France.

## ENVOI

Prince, let him forth be borne by Æolus  
 To Glaucus in that forest far from us  
 Where hope or peace may never on him glance.  
 For he holds nought in him but worthlessness  
 Who could wish ill unto the realm of France.

4. Here follows the *Ballade written from the Pit of Meung*.

[*Original French*]

## EPISTRE EN FORME DE BALLADE, A SES AMIS

Ayez pitié, ayez pitié de moy,  
 A tout le moins, si vous plaist, mes amis !  
 En fosse giz, non pas soubz houx ne may,  
 En cest exil ouquel je suis transmis  
 Par fortune, comme Dieu l'a permis.  
 Filles, amans, jeunes, vieulx et nouveaulx ;  
 Danceurs, saulteurs, faisans les piez de veaux,  
 Vifs comme dars, agus comme aguillon ;  
 Gousiers tintans, clers comme gastaveaux :  
 Le lesserez là, le povre Villon ?

Chantres chantans à plaisance, sans loy ;  
 Galans, rians, plaisans en faictz et diz ;  
 Coureux, allans, francs de faulx or, d'aloï ;  
 Gens d'esperit, ung petit estourdiz :  
 Trop demourez, car il meurt entandiz.

Faiseurs de laiz, de motets et rondeaux,  
Quand mort sera, vous luy ferez chandeaux.  
Il n'entre, où gist, n'escler ne tourbillon ;  
De murs espois on luy a fait bandeaux :  
Le lesserez là, le povre Villon ?

Venez le veoir en ce piteux arroy,  
Nobles hommes, francs de quars et de dix,  
Qui ne tenez d'empereur ne de roy,  
Mais seulement de Dieu de Paradiz :  
Jeuner luy fault dimanches et mardiz,  
Dont les dens a plus longues que ratteaux ;  
Aprés pain sec, non pas après gasteaux,  
En ses boyaulx verse eau à gros bouillon ;  
Bas enterré, table n'a, ne tretteaux :  
Le lesserez là, le povre Villon ?

ENVOI

Princes nommez, anciens, jouvenceaux,  
Impetrez-moy graces et royaulx sceaux,  
Et me montez en quelque corbillon.  
Ainsi le font l'un à l'autre pourceaux,  
Car, où l'un brait, ilz fuyent à monceaux.  
Le lesserez là, le povre Villon ?

[*Translation*]

LETTER, IN FORM OF A BALLADE, TO HIS FRIENDS

(EPISTRE, EN FORME DE BALLADE, À SES AMIS)

Written from the pit in Meung

Have pity on me, have pity I pray,  
My friends ; may I pray you to grant this grace,  
For far from the hawthorn-trees of May  
I am flung in this dungeon in this far place  
Of exile, by God and by Fate's disgrace.  
New married and young ; girls, lovers that kneel ;  
Dancers and jugglers that turn the wheel,  
Needle-sharp, quick as a dart each one,  
Voiced like the bells 'midst the hills that peal :  
Will you leave him like this—the poor Villon ?

Singers who sing without law your lay,  
 Laughing and jovial in words and ways ;  
 Feather-brained folk, yet always gay,  
 Who run without coin, good or bad, your race,  
 You have left him too long who is dying apace ;  
 Makers of ballads for tongues to reel,  
 Where lightning shows not nor breezes steal,  
 Too late you will praise him when he is gone,  
 Around whom the walls are like bands of steel :  
 Will you leave him like this—the poor Villon ?

Come hither and gaze on his disarray,  
 Nobles who know not the tax-man's face,  
 Who homage to kings nor emperors pay,  
 But only to God your pride abase.  
 Behold him who, Sundays and holidays,  
 Fasts till like rakes his teeth reveal.  
 Who after crusts, but never a meal,  
 Water must suck till his belly's a tun.  
 With stool nor bed for his back's appeal :  
 Will you leave him like this—the poor Villon ?

## ENVOI

Princes, young, or whom years congeal,  
 A pardon I pray with the royal seal ;  
 Then hoist me in basket the earth upon.  
 So even will swine for each other feel,  
 And rush to help at the hurt one's squeal :  
 Will you leave him like this—the poor Villon ?

5. The debate between the heart and body of Villon. Villon in this ballade has written something that stands out as vividly from the rest of his work as does the *Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis*. That ballade was built entirely of questions. Here we have a dialogue between two voices rising from a darkness black as the pit of Meung—the voice of the heart and the voice of the body of a man.

*Ballades not in the "Testaments" 227*

[*Original French*]

LE DEBAT DU CUEUR ET DU CORPS DE VILLON EN  
FORME DE BALLADE

Qu'est-ce que j'oy ?

— Ce suis-je.

— Qui ?

— Ton Cueur,

Qui ne tient mais qu'à ung petit filet.

Force n'ay plus, substance ne liqueur,

Quand je te voy retraict ainsi seulet,

Com provre chien tappy en recullet.

— Pourquoi est-ce ?

— Pour ta folle plaisance.

— Que t'en chault-il ?

— J'en ay la desplaisance.

— Laisse m'en paix !

— Pourquoi ?

— J'y penseray.

— Quand sera-ce ?

— Quand seray hors d'enfance.

— Plus ne t'en dy.

— Et je m'en passeray.

— Que penses-tu ?

— Estre homme de valeur.

— Tu as trente ans.

— C'est l'aage d'ung mulet.

— Est-ce enfance ?

— Nenny.

— C'est donc folleur.

Qui te saisit ?

— Par où ?

— Par le collet.

— Rien ne congnois.

— Si fais : mouches en laict :

L'ung est blanc, l'autre est noir, c'est la distance.

— Est-ce donc tout ?

— Que veulx-tu que je tance ?

Si n'est assez, je recommenceray.

— Tu es perdu !

— J'y mettray résistance.

— Plus ne t'en dy.

— Et je m'en passeray.

— J'en ay le duel ; toi, le mal et douleur.

Si fusse ung povre ydiot et folet,

Au cueur eusses de t'excuser couleur :

Se n'as-tu soing, tout ung tel, bel ou laid,

Ou la teste as plus dure qu'ung jalet,

Ou mieulx te plaist qu'honneur ceste meschance.

Que répondras à ceste consequence ?

— J'en seray hors, quand je trespaseray.

— Dieu ! quel confort !

— Quelle saige eloquence !

— Plus ne t'en dy.

— Et je m'en passeray.

— D'ond vient ce mal ?

— Il vient de mon malheur.

Quand Saturne me fait mon fardelet,

Ces maulx y mist, je le croy.

— C'est foleur :

Son seigneur es, et te tiens son valet.

Voy, Salomon escript en son roulet :

“ Homme sage, ce dit-il, a puissance

Sur les planetes et sur leur influence.”

— Je n'en croy rien : tel qu'ils m'ont faict seray.

— Que dis-tu ?

— Rien.

— Certes, c'est ma créance.

Plus ne t'en dy.

— Et je m'en passeray.

#### ENVOI

— Veux-tu vivre ?

— Dieu m'en doint la puissance !

— Il te fault. . .

— Quoy ?

— Remors de conscience ;

Lire sans fin.

— Et en quoy ?

— En science.

Laisse les folz !

— Bien ! j'y adviseray.

— Or le retiens ?

— J'en ay bien souvenance.

— N'attends pas trop, que tourne à desplaisance  
Plus ne t'en dy.

— Et je m'en passeray.

[*Translation*]

THE DISPUTE OF THE HEART AND BODY OF  
FRANÇOIS VILLON

LE DEBAT DU CUEUR ET DU CORPS DE VILLON  
(EN FORME DE BALLADE)

What's that I hear ? It is I, thine heart,  
That holds to thee by a little string.  
I have no peace ; from my blood I part  
Seeing thee here, a wretched thing,  
Like a dog whining and shivering—  
And why do I so ?

For thy pleasures' cost.

Why shouldst thou care ?

I feel the frost.

Leave me at peace.

And why ?

To dream.

When wilt thou mend ?

When childhood's lost.

—I say no more.

It were best, I deem.

What thinkest thou art ?

Why, a worthy man.

Thirty art thou.

'Tis the age of a mule.

Art thou a child ?

Nay !

*François Villon*

Tell to me then, is it from Lust thou art  
 Still a fool, and knowest thou aught  
 Learned in life's school ?  
 Yea, know I well in milk the flies  
 Black on the white before mine eyes.  
 —No more ?

What more can I say ?  
 'Twould seem, thou art lost.  
 Yet even the lost may rise.  
 I say no more.—It were best, I deem.

I have the sorrow and thou the pain.  
 If thou wert mad or soft of mind  
 Then indeed thou mightest hide thy shame ;  
 But if to wickedness thou art blind  
 Either thy head is a stone, I find,  
 Or else from good and from grace 'tis shy.  
 What unto this canst thou make reply ?  
 I will find rest in Death his stream.  
 —God ! what a hope !

How thy tongue doth fly !  
 I say no more.  
 It were best, I deem.

Whence came this ill ?  
 From my distress.  
 When Saturn packed my traps for me  
 He packed these ill.

What stupidity !  
 Slave art thou to stupidity.  
 Remember Solomon, what saith he ?  
 A wise man power hath o'er the stars  
 And on their bent for peace or wars.  
 —I know that they made me as I seem.  
 What sayst thou ?  
 Nothing, my faith hath bars.  
 I say no more.

It were best, I deem.



ENVOI

Wouldst thou be living ?  
Then must thou——  
Find penitence. Read—  
In deep science, and turn from folly  
To truth's white gleam. Wilt thou do this ?  
Do so, or worse may come perchance.  
I say no more.

God help me, yes !  
What ?  
And read what ?  
I will find me sense.  
It were best, I deem.

6. Ballade (*Je congnois bien mouches en laict*).

[*Original French*]

BALLADE

Je congnois bien mouches en laict ;  
Je congnois à la robe l'homme ;  
Je congnois le beau temps du laid ;  
Je congnois au pommier la pomme ;  
Je congnois l'arbre à veoir la gomme ;  
Je congnois quand tout est de mesme ;  
Je congnois qui besongne ou chomme ;  
Je congnois tout, fors que moy-mesme.

Je congnois pourpoint au collet ;  
Je congnois le moyne à la gonne ;  
Je congnois le maistre au valet ;  
Je congnois au voyle la nonne ;  
Je congnois quand piqueur jargonne ;  
Je congnois folz nourriz de cresseme ;  
Je congnois le vin à la tonne ;  
Je congnois tout, fors que moy-mesme.

Je congnois cheval du mulet ;  
Je congnois leur charge et leur somme,  
Je congnois Bietrix et Bellet ;  
Je congnois gect qui nombre et somme

Je congnois vision en somme ;  
 Je congnois la faulte des Boesmes ;  
 Je congnois filz, varlet et homme ;  
 Je congnois tout, fors que moy-mesme.

## ENVOI

Prince, je congnois tout en somme ;  
 Je congnois coulerez et blesmes ;  
 Je congnois mort qui nous consomme ;  
 Je congnois tout, fors que moy-mesme.

[*Translation*]

## BALLADE

I know on the white milk the flies,  
 By his coat what a man's state may be ;  
 I know cloudy days from blue skies,  
 I know the ripe pear on the tree,  
 And the tree, by its gum ; I can see  
 Each thing in its place on the shelf,  
 The workman, the man who is free ;  
 All things do I know but myself.

Of the pourpoint the flap makes me wise,  
 By the monk's frock I know his degree,  
 The master from man I can size,  
 And the veil tells the nun unto me.  
 I can patter in argot, *pardie*,  
 I know the fool fattened by pelf,  
 By the cork what the flask holds in fee ;  
 All things do I know but myself.

From my sight horse nor mule can disguise  
 Its shape, nor the work it can dree,  
 Beatrix and Bellet in mine eyes  
 Stand apart—and I know, one, two, three,  
 The dice, and the black heresy  
 That stalks the Bohemian, like elf ;  
 Men know I, and humanity.  
 All things do I know but myself.

ENVOI

Prince, know I all things, verily,  
All colours from multi to self.  
I know Death who eats us *mal gré*,  
All things do I know but myself.

7. The *Jargon Ballades*.

All these are most certainly the work of Villon. I am not touching upon the more doubtful work or the verse that has been included in the various editions for no more reason, it seems to me, than that it is verse.

## CHAPTER XX

### SOME NAMES AND PEOPLE

THE first name mentioned by Villon in his writings occurs in verse nine of the *Little Testament*. It is the name of *Guillaume Villon*, the next is *Maître Ythier Marchand*. The person hiding behind this name is rather obscure, but we must suppose him to be the same Ythier Marchand who was in the service of the Duc de Guienne, the same who joined against Louis XI in the Ligue du Bien Public and conspired with the Duc de Bourgogne in 1473 to poison the monarch.

After this comes the name of *Blarru*. There was Pierre Blaru studying at the University with Villon, and some people have connected him with the Blarru mentioned by Villon. This Pierre Blaru was a sober student, dying Canon of St. Dié in 1510. We will disconnect the tentacles of the *Petit Testament* from his reputation and fix them where they belong in more likelihood—that is to say, on to the shade of Jean de Blarru, goldsmith, who lived on the Pont au Change and was a well-known character in Paris.

Bracketed with the name of Blarru comes the name of *Saint-Amant* or *Saint-Amand*. This per-

son was *clerc du trésor du roi*, and had a fine house at the corner of the Rue St. Bon. He must have occupied a good position, as one of his clerks was Jacques de Canlers, son of Jacques de Canlers, secretary to the King; so at the very outset we see the puzzling way in which Villon seemed mixed up with high and low in Paris, with priests and blackguards, Government men and criminals. It might be supposed that he dragged the names of celebrated or notorious people into his verse without knowing the owners of the names personally. It does not seem so, however. Villon in the *Petit Testament*, at least, wrote about things right under his nose; one is certain that some personal thread connected him with his victims. He was not a man to waste ink by throwing it too far across the Seine.

After Saint-Amand comes a butcher, *Jehan Tronne*, and after him *Maître Robert Vallée*. Now, this Robert Vallée was a fellow-student of Villon's at the University and a man of about the same age. He belonged to a rich bourgeois family, and Villon had a grudge against him for some reason or another. Robert, like most things common, lasted well. He outlasted Villon.

*Jehanneton de Millièrès* is one of those charming woman names that sprinkle like flowers the pages of Villon. The owner of it was Robert's mistress.

Next comes *Jacques Cardon*, a full-blooded figure, somehow, despite the fact that the poet only gives him a few lines. Cardon was a draper, also,

one fancies, a *bon viveur*, and he was rich enough to buy a house in the Place Maubert.

Then comes *René de Montigny*, that tragic figure whose history has been given; and after Montigny the *Seigneur de Grigny*. This was the infamous *Philippe Brunel*, tyrant and ruffian in general, son of Étienne Brunel and Huguette de Vielchastel, a man of good family who ought to have been born where he lived—in the gutter.

*Jacques Raguyer*, who comes next, is an interesting character. He was the son of Antoine Raguyer, a councillor of the King. He was a great drinker—Villon left him in jest the *Abreuvoir Popin*, a watering-place for horses—and, despite his drinking and other habits, he became Bishop of Troyes. He died in 1518.

*Perrenet Marchand*, otherwise named the Bastard de la Barre, was in reality *Pierre Marchand*, a sergent of the Châtelet. Villon's grudge against him comes out in his verses. Pierre died in 1493.

*Jehan la Loupe* and *Casin Chollet* come linked together, both scamps, stealers of ducks from the moat of Paris, and goodness knows what else; and after these inconsiderable people come *Colin Laurens*, *Girard Gossouyn*, and *Jean Marceau*, already described, three financiers and all rogues battenning on the people. Villon holds them up to ridicule as three poor children, naked as worms:

Povres orphelins impourveuz,  
Tous deschaussez, tous despourveuz,  
Et dennez comme le ver.

Next come *Guillaume Cotin* and *Thibault de Vitry*, "poor clerics also naked." They were both Canons of Notre Dame!

*Jehan the grocer of la Garde* comes after these reverend ones, and *Rouseville, Governor of Gouvieulx*, follows Jehan.

Other names of interest are those of *Angelot l'Herbier*, who lived in the parish of St. Germain le Vieux in the Cité and carried on his trade there. He was evidently a well-known character, though Villon's jesting legacy to him is obscure.

*Frere Baulde*, another legatee, was a poet, also a religious man; and *Mademoiselle le Bruyères* we already know. She was, one may note, the daughter of *Jean de Béthisy* and *Marie de Chanteprime*. She married *Girard le Bruyères*, Treasurer of the Finances.

*Colin de Cayeulx's* name comes strangely enough after hers. Colin was a right-down bad lot—ranking in this respect only after Montigny. Son of a locksmith, he developed into a pick-lock, sacrilege was his last act, and the gibbet his end.

After Colin comes reeling drunken old *Jean Cotard*, and after him the noble figures of *Robert d'Estouteville* and his charming wife *Ambroise de Lorede*.

*Colin Galerne* the barber follows these—he was Churchwarden of St. Germain le Vieux in the Cité; and *Robin Turgis*, landlord of the *Pomme de Pin*, walks behind him.

Turgis was a great character in his day, and his tavern the Pomme de Pin, situated in the Rue de la Juiverie, was perhaps the most celebrated public-house in the Paris of Villon's time. The Mule came next, and in future years was to outstrip the Pomme in celebrity. Rabelais frequented it.

The subject of drink brings up a lady, *l'Abbesse de Port Royal des Champs*, otherwise known as *l'Abbesse de Pourras*—also known to the populace as *l'Abbesse de Poilras* (shaven-poll). This lady casts a lurid light on the social life of the time. Every house of wickedness knew her; she drank like a man, and dressed like a man, and lived like a beast. Descended from a high family, there were very few crimes she left uncommitted. Villon knew her, and the precious pair lit one day on the unfortunate barber Perrot Girard of Bourg la Reine, just outside Paris, lived with him for a week, drank his wine, devoured his brood of sucking pigs, and went off without paying a penny. I say that this lady casts a lurid light on the social conditions of the Paris of her day, not because she drank and swore, and lived like a harlot, and turned the religious house of which she was head into a brothel, actually taking payment at its door, but because she did all these things openly, because she was grumbled about and not instantly suppressed.

A woman like this is of more value to the historian than all the parchments in his desk. The fact that she lived and was let live is a blood-red



score under all I have written to demonstrate the miasma in the air of the Paris of 1430 to 1463.

You will remember Tristan l'Hermitte in Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, the ferocious prévôt de maréchaux who wanted to hang Pierre Gringoire. He was alive in Villon's time and is mentioned in the *Great Testament*, verse one hundred and fifty-eight.

You will remember Claude Frollo in the same great book—the Archdeacon de Joas (Josas, to be more correct). Notre Dame had three archdeacons—de Paris, de Josas, and de Brie, and Claude Frollo was Archdeacon de Josas in 1482. Hugo says that Frollo got the post by the grace of his suzerain Messire Louis de Beaumont, who had become Bishop of Paris in 1472 on the death of Guillaume Chartier. It is interesting to note that on July 14, 1472, the Archdeacon of Josas made an adverse report about one of Villon's acquaintances, Philippe Brunnel, the Seigneur de Grigny.

Hugo's wonderful creation might have been this same archdeacon or his immediate successor; he might have been a fellow-student with Villon at the University—if he had ever lived.

## CHAPTER XXI

### MODERN COMMENTATORS, WRITERS, AND TRANSLATORS

ONE of the earliest of the modern articles upon Villon is to be found in the *Journal des Savants* of September 1832, from the pen of M. Dannou.

In 1844 an article appeared in the *Revue Française* by Théophile Gautier.

Other writers and commentators from 1844 to the present day include Profilet (*De la Vie et des Ouvrages de Villon*, Châlons, 1856), Antoine Campaux, Dr. S. Nagel, M. W. G. C. Bijvanck, Prompsault, Sainte-Beuve, Auguste Vitu, Auguste Longnon, Marcel Schwob, Robert Louis Stevenson, John Payne (who translated the complete works of Villon into English), Louis Moland, and Pierre Champion (whose monumental book *François Villon, sa Vie et son Temps* was published in 1913). Swinburne translated *Les Regrets de la Belle Heaulmière*, *A Double Ballade of Good Counseil*, *Fragments on Death*, *Ballade of the Lords of Old Time*, *Ballade of the Women of Paris*, *Ballade written for a Bridegroom*, *Ballade against the Enemies of France*, *The Dispute of the Heart and Body of Villon*, *The Epistle in Form of a Ballade to his Friends*, and

*The Epitaph in Form of a Ballade.* Rossetti translated *The Ballade of the Ladies of Old Time* and a *Rondel*; Synge translated *Les Regrets*; Henley, the *Tavern Ballade*; and the present writer has translated, often badly enough, nearly everything in the way of lyric poetry that Villon wrote. If I have omitted any other translator, I beg his pardon.

After the commentators, writers, and translators on and of François Villon comes the band of literary and other men whose admiration for his works has earned for them the title of Villonists; and nothing speaks more strongly in favour of the dead poet than the fact that the admiration of these enthusiasts for the works of the poet is mixed with a feeling of friendliness for the man.

It is a great thing to be able to make friends after you have been dead four hundred years and more. Saints exact our homage, geniuses our respect, soldiers our admiration, but even St. Francis d'Assisi, the most lovable of saints, is now a shade without form, Dante a form without heart, Alexander a legend—whilst this thief of a Villon is still a man.

One of the most terrible things about Death is its dehumanising effect. There are few dead modern men with whom you can shake hands; they are separated from us by a viewless barrier, chill and resisting as ice; and as we penetrate further and further into the past the fewer we find amongst the numberless shades and statues that people the years that are gone.

It is not Shakespeare's knowledge of humanity that makes us love him, but his humanity; Johnson lives, Congreve no longer lives, Herrick lives and will live for ever; Bacon is long dead, and perhaps nothing is more destructive to the Baconian theory than the fact that Shakespeare is alive—you cannot be dead and alive.

Push further back, and the silence and heartlessness become terrible. There are few living figures; they are all dead Romans, dead Greeks, dead Egyptians.

The classics, in fact, can be divided into two great camps, the cold and the warm, the lifeless and the living, and the greatest intellect amongst the cold lies below the lowliest intellect amongst the warm. Would you barter Johnson for Aristotle?

Villon exists among the warm, and, leaving everything else aside, it is this fact that is the crowning fact about him; it is for this reason that so many men have written about him, commented on his works, and laboured over his life; it is for this reason that to-day, despite his sores and diseases, his wickedness, his crimes, we feel him to be a brother-man with a living voice, a fellow-sinner more near to our hearts than any dead saint.

He showed us human nature in showing us his heart, Shakespeare showed us his heart in showing us human nature. Villon's method is far the more dangerous to the exhibitor's reputation.

I have just said that the vitality of Villon is

accountable for the large amount of time that modern men have devoted to the study of his work, to say nothing of the enthusiasm they have brought to the business. For years after the poet's death edition after edition of his works issued from the press, his reputation increased, reached its zenith, and then swiftly waned. For nearly three hundred years it remained under a cloud, the mass of the French nation knew nothing and cared nothing about him; and yet, all the time, he was there, peeping out now in the works of Rabelais, now hinting of himself in the writings of Regnier and La Fontaine. Boileau was one of his earliest commentators, but failed to understand him fully.

Yet all the time of this darkness Villon had friends and readers amongst the discriminating, and was read by many an obscure person or illustrious. Three different editions of his work were produced in the early part of the eighteenth century, and other editions later on—editions small enough, no doubt, but still editions.

Then in 1844 the cloud began to part. Théophile Gautier lent the splendour of his name to the name of Villon. It was not much of a help to Villon to be included amongst *Les Grottesques*, though it drew attention to him, but the effort was nearly enough to damn Gautier for ever as a critic.

John Payne excuses Gautier. "Gautier was fain to dissimulate the fervour of his admiration under the transparent mask of partial depreciation, and to provide for his too bold enterprise of re-

habilitation a kind of apologetic shelter by classing the first great poet of France with far less worthy writers under the title of *Les Grottesques*." Just as though I, believing in some unknown singer, were to blacken his face and produce him before the London Public as a Christy minstrel so as to give him a really good chance. Rubbish! The author of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* failed to understand the author of *Les Regrets*. There was all the difference between them of a sensuous piece of marble and a sensitive piece of flesh; both were great in their way, but one of the chief attributes of greatness is not always the understanding of greatness.

Reverse the cases and make Villon the critic of Gautier. Gautier to Villon would have undoubtedly been a "grotesque," and with better reason. But other minds were at work, as I have indicated at the beginning of this article, and slowly but surely the poet so long left in neglect was coming to recognition.

Théodore de Banville read him and produced ballades, a host of other ballade-writers sprang up, and over the dead poet's grave appeared a gigantic crop of mushrooms.

Then came John Payne, who died the other day, a fine scholar and a most excellent critic. He was the first Englishman to appreciate the fine stuff lying before him in the two *Testaments*, the first man of modern times to see in his subject more than a writer of ballades. He translated the whole

of Villon into English verse—a wonderful and appalling task which you will recognise if you have ever tried your hand on the substance of the *Testaments*.

Then Swinburne and Rossetti took fire, and a host of others followed suit.

Villon's fame, a delicate importation, was beginning to root and blossom in English soil and was promising all sorts of fruit when along came a man and watered it with vinegar. Robert Louis Stevenson, of all people in the world! One's love for the works of Stevenson is so great that it is hard to speak harshly of Stevenson the critic. His article on Villon, however, calls for this expression of opinion: His viciousness against the subject of the article seems too vivid and living to have been inspired by a man long dead; it seems rather to have been created or inflamed consciously or unconsciously in him by the circle, or some members of the circle, of living men who were at that time showing in their works a mistaken appreciation of Villon. The earliest of the Decadents. However that may be, this article is his one cretin child. A very nasty sneering spirit, no less ugly because self-righteous, peeps out occasionally in the writings of Stevenson. It jumped out entirely and showed itself in this paper by the man who declared that there is so much bad in the best of us and so much good in the worst of us that fault-finding by any of us is an unseemly piece of work.

Stevenson's article gave Villon to the English

world as a loathsome trickster, a heartless loafer. It sneered at him, turned him about, and held up his poor rags to a British Public whose estimate of an author's books was regulated, as a rule, by its estimate of his bank-book.

I have been reproved, kindly enough, by several critics for what I have said about R. L. S. in this respect, nor would I have said it had Stevenson been dead and unable to reply. He is not dead; he will live for ever; and the splendour of his work is like the splendour of the work of Villon, it replies to all detractors, and even to those who, recognising that he once committed a grave injustice, speak out their minds for the sake of the other man.

After all these commentators, critics, and translators comes a musician, Claude Achille Debussy, who has set to music three of Villon's Ballades:

1. Ballade de Villon à s'amyé.
2. Ballade que Villon fist à la requeste de sa mère.
3. Ballade des Femmes de Paris.



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## 248 *Bibliographical Notes on the Various*

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DISTIQUE DU DICT MAROT :

Peu de Villons en bon savoir,  
Trop de Villons pour decevoir.

On les vend à Paris en la grant salle du Palais en la boutique de Galiot du Pré. (Au recto du dern. f.): “ Fin des œuvres de Francoys Villon . . . et furent parachevées de imprimer le dernier iour de Septembre, L'an mil cinq cens trente et troys, ” petit in-8° de 6 ff. prelim., et 115 pp. chiff., lettres rondes.

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## INDEX

Abelard, 15, 153  
 Absalon, 222  
 Æolus, 223  
 Ailly (Pierre d'), 192  
 Alcibiades, 170  
 Alençon (Jean, Duc d'), 155  
 Alexander (the Great), 148  
 Alphasar, 221  
 Alphonse (d'Aragon), 154  
 Amant Remys, etc., 171  
 Amnon, 168  
 Angelot l'Herbier, 237  
 Angers, 66, 79, 80  
 Anjou (René d'), 79  
 Arc (Jeanne d'), *see* Maid of  
 Orléans  
 Archipiade, 153  
 Architriclin, 170  
 Aristotle, 32  
 Artus (Duc de Bretagne), 154  
 Aubriot (Hugues), 17  
 Augustus (Philip), 8  
 Aussigny (Thibault), 101, 102,  
 146, 147, 170  
 Auvergne (Dauphin de), 155  
 Averroës, 32  
 Bacon, 102  
 Bacon (Roger), 15  
 Ballades :  
 La Requête, 88  
 Ballade Villon, 96  
 L'Épithaphe en forme de  
 Ballade, 121  
 Ballade of Villon's Appeal, 124  
 The Request to the Court of  
 Parliament, 126

Ballades (*continued*):  
 Ballade des Dames du Temps  
 Jadis, 153  
 Ballade des Seigneurs du  
 Temps Jadis, 154  
 Ballade à ce propos en vieil  
 François, 155  
 Les Regrets . . . , 157  
 Ballade de la Belle Heaul-  
 mière aux Filles de Joie,  
 163  
 Double Ballade, 166  
 Ballade for his Mother, 174  
 Ballade et Oraison, 184  
 Ballade for Robert d'Es-  
 touteville, 187  
 The Perdryer Ballade, 190  
 Les Contredietz de Franc-  
 Gontier, 192  
 Ballade of the Women of  
 Paris, 195  
 Ballade de Villon et de la  
 Grosse Margot, 199  
 Belle Leçon de Villon aux  
 Enfants Perduz, 201  
 Ballade de bon Doctrine, 203  
 Ballade pour Laquelle Villon  
 crye Merci . . . , 214  
 Villon's Last Ballade, 217  
 Ballade of Fortune, 219  
 Ballade against the Enemies  
 of France, 222  
 Ballade—à ses Amis, 224, 225  
 Le Debat du Cœur et du  
 Corps de Villon, 227  
 Ballade, 231  
 Barbers, 57

- Bastard de la Barre, 142, 178, 236  
 Baubignon, Pierre, 180  
 Baudet, Harenc, 100  
 Baulde (Frère), 237  
 Beauvais (Bishop of), 77  
 Behaigne (Ladislav), 154  
 Bellafaye (Martin de), 53, 213  
 Belle Gantière, 163  
 Belle Heulmière, 157, 180  
 Benoit (Saint), 55  
 Berthe (au grand pied), 153  
 Bijvanck, 240  
 Blanche (Reine), 153  
 Blanche la Savetiere, 163  
 Blarru (Jean de), 234  
 Blaru (Pierre), 141, 234  
 Blois, 91, 101  
 Boèce, 32  
 Bohemians, 85  
 Boileau, 243  
 Bourbon (Duc de), 87, 88, 89, 90  
 Bourg la Reine, 238  
 Breban (family), 4  
 Brittany (Big Joan of), 113  
 Brunel (Etienne), 236  
 Bruyères (Mademoiselle de), 21, 34, 35, 195  
 Burgundy (John, Duke of), 92  
  
 Calais (Jean de), 211  
 Calaisiennes, 196  
 Calixte III (Pope), 154  
 Campaux (A.), 240  
 Canlers (Colette de), 75, 76  
 Capet (Hugh), 124  
 Cardon, Jacques, 208, 235  
 Cayeux (Colin de), 4, 63, 77, 203  
 Cerberus, 168  
 Champion, Pierre, 51, 102, 240  
 Charlemagne, 154  
 Charles V, 8  
 Charles (VII), 76, 104, 107  
 Charriau (Guillaume), 53, 112, 183  
 Chartier (Alain), 210  
 Chartrain (Robert), 76  
 Chartres (Vidame de), 207  
 Cheval Blanc, *see* White Horse  
 Chollet (Casin), 112, 236  
 Cicero, 32  
 Claquin (le bon Breton), 155  
 Clotaire, 126  
 Coiffier (Guillaume), 68  
 Colombel (Guillaume), 213  
 Conflans (Jean), 43  
 Contredictz de Franc-Gontier, 192  
 Coquillards, 4, 47, 201  
 Cornu (Jean), 180  
 Cotart (Jehan), 112, 184, 185, 186  
 Cotin (Guillaume), 237  
 Courault (Andry), 113, 191  
 Cousin (Henry), 9, 67  
  
 Danon (M.), 240  
 Dauphin (Joachin), 147  
 David (King), 168  
 Décret, 30  
 Des Loges (François), 23  
 De Tusca, 114  
 Dijon, 49  
 Diomedes, 148  
 Dogis Robin, 118  
  
 Edward V of England, 132  
 Estouteville (Robert d'), 39, 106, 186  
  
 Feast of Fools, 33  
 Ferrebouc (François), 118  
 Fèvre (Henri le), 41  
 Flora of Rome, 108, 153  
 Fournier (Perrenet), 4, 50, 183  
 Fremin, 172  
 Frollo (Claude), 9, 239  
  
 Galerne, Colin, 237  
 Garde (Jehan de la), 113, 144  
 Garnier (Etienne), 124  
 Gautier, Théophile, 240, 243  
 Gilles (priest), 55, 56  
 Glaucus, 223

- Gossoyen (Girard), 143  
 Grève (Place de), 20, 35  
 Grigny (Seigneur de), 113, 213, 236  
 Hainnonville (Jennat de), 27  
 Hannibal, 221  
 Hélène, 192  
 Héloïse, 108, 153  
 Henley, W. E., 205  
 Herod, 168  
 Hesselin (Denis), 183  
 Holofernes, 221  
 Hôtel Dieu, 10, 58  
 Hue (Jean), 27  
 Hugo Victor, 180, 239  
 Hypocras, 192  
 Isabeau, 56  
 Italiennes, 196  
 James (Maître Jacques), 210  
 Jargon et Joblin, 50, 51  
 Jargon (of schools), 32  
 Jason, 221  
 Jean de Salisbury, 32  
 Jehan (Petit), 63  
 Jehanneton de Milliers, 141, 235  
 Job, 150  
 Joly (Noël le), 61, 62, 140  
 Josas (Archdeacon), 239  
 Jouvenal (Michel), 213  
 Judas, 222  
 Juvenal des Ursines, 10  
 La Barre (bastard), 142  
 La Fontaine, 243  
 L'amant rémys et renyé, 171  
 Lancelot de Behaigne, 154  
 Laurens (Colin), 143  
 Le Cornu, *see* Cornu  
 Le Mardi (Jean), 55  
 Levet, Pierre, 51  
 L'Hermite (Tristan), 239  
 Light women, 45  
 Linacre, Thos., 133  
 Lombard, 89  
 Longnon, Auguste, 110, 240  
 Lorede, Ambroise de, 188, 189  
 Louis XI, 104, 106, 140  
 Loupe (Jehan le), 112, 236  
 Ma Douce Amour (song), 112  
 Magus (Simon), 222  
 Maid of Orléans, 108  
 Manasses (Tour de), 102, 103  
 Marceau (Jean), 143  
 Marchand, Pierre, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 77  
 Marchand (Ythier), 112, 140, 178, 234  
 Mardi (Jean le), 55  
 Margot (La Grosse), 110, 199  
 Marion (l'Ydolle), 113, 201  
 Medicine, 54  
 Merle (Germaine de), 186  
 Meung sur Loire, 101  
 Montcorbier (F. de), 23  
 Montigny (Regnier de), 4, 75, 76, 109  
 Moreau, 172  
 Mortier d'Or, 144  
 Moulins, 37, 88  
 Moustier (Hutin de), 118  
 Mouton (Michel), 57  
 Mule Tavern, 33, 53, 63, 118, 141  
 Nabugodonosor, 108, 170, 222  
 Nagel, 240  
 Narcissus, 168, 222  
 Navarre (Collège de), 63, 78, 116  
 Nicholas (Dom), 163  
 Orléans, 101  
 Orléans (Charles d'), 91, 92, 93, 94, 96  
 Orpheus, 168  
 Ouvrez votre huys Guillemette (song), 114  
 Paris, 6 (et seq.)  
 Patay (Woods of), 90  
 Patron (l'Abbé), 102

- Payne (John), 110, 140, 240, 243  
 Perdryer (Jean and François), 189, 190  
 Pet au Diable, 34, 35, 42, 172  
 Pichart (Rogier), 118  
 Pin (Pomme de), 53, 111  
 Pompey, 221  
 Pontoise, 120  
 Popin (Abrevoir), 113  
 Port Royal des Champs, 238  
 Porte Rouge, 43  
 Pourras (Abbesse de), 22, 53  
 Poutrel (Laurens), 116, 117  
 Profflet, 240  
 Prompsault (l'Abbé), 240  
 Provins (Jean), 172  
  
 Quinze Vingtz (hospital for blind), 206  
  
 Rabelais, 118, 130, 131, 132, 133, 243  
 Rabustel (Jean), 49  
 Raguier (Jacques), 4, 184, 213, 236  
 Regnier, 243  
 René d'Anjou, 79, 80  
 Repues Franches, 96, 218  
 Richer, Denis, 112  
 Rondels, Quatrain, etc.  
     Je suis François, 120  
     Lay, ou plustost Rondeau, 179  
     Lays, 209  
     Epitaph, 211  
     Rondel, 212  
 Rose, 177  
 Rossetti, 245  
 Rou (Jehan), 112  
 Roussillon, 101  
  
 Saint-Amand, 141, 182, 234  
 Saint-Beuve, 240  
 Salisbury (Jean de), 32  
 Samson, 168  
 Sardana, 168  
 Sardanapalus, 223  
 Savoie (Charlotte de), 147  
 Schwob, Marcel, 50, 51, 180, 240  
 Scipio (Africanus), 221  
 Senlis (Bishop of), 77  
 Sermoise (Philippe), 55, 56  
 Solomon, 168  
 Stevenson (R. L.), 58, 240, 245  
 Swinburne, 240  
 Syngé, 241  
  
 Tabary, Guy, 42, 63, 109, 139  
 Thaïs, 108  
 Thibaud (Little), 71, 73  
 Tricot, Colas, 214  
 Turgis, Robin, 172, 183, 238  
  
 Valée (Robert), 141, 152, 235  
 Vallette, Jehan, 112  
 Vaucel (Pierre de), 140  
 Vaucelles (Katherine de), 60, 61, 139, 168  
 Venus, 222  
 Victor (Saint), 222  
 Vielchastel, 236  
 Villiers (Jacques de), 106  
 Villon (mother), 23  
 Villon, Guillaume, 26, 27, 140, 172  
 Vitrey (Thibaut de), 237  
 Vitu, 240  
  
 White Horse, 141, 182



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