



FRÉDÉRIC MISTRAL

PREFACE

This study of the poetry and life-work of the leader of the modern Provençal renaissance was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Columbia University. My interest in Mistral was first awakened by an article from the pen of the great Romance philologist, Gaston Paris, which appeared in the *Revue de Paris* in October, 1894. The idea of writing the book came to me during a visit to Provence in 1897. Two years later I visited the south of France again, and had the pleasure of seeing Mistral in his own home. It is my pleasant duty to express here once again my gratitude for his kindly hospitality and for his suggestions in regard to works upon the history of the Félibrige. Not often does he who studies the works of a poet in a foreign tongue enjoy as I did the privilege of hearing the verse from the poet's own lips. It was an hour not to be forgotten, and the beauty of the language has been for me since then as real as that of music finely rendered, and the force of the poet's personality was impressed upon me as it scarcely could have been even from a most sympathetic and searching perusal of his works. His great influence in southern France and his great personal popularity are not difficult to understand when one has seen the man.

As the striking fact in the works of this Frenchman is that they are not written in French, but in Provençal, a considerable portion of the present essay is devoted to the language itself. But it did not appear fitting that too much space should be devoted to the purely linguistic side of the subject. There is a field here for a great deal of special study, and the results of such investigations will be embodied in special works by those who make philological studies their special province. In the first division of the present work, however, along with the life of the poet and the history of the Félibrige, a description of the language is given, which is an account at least of its distinctive features. A short chapter will be found devoted to the subject of the versification of the poets who write in the new speech. This subject is not treated in Koschwitz's admirable grammar of the language.

The second division is devoted to the poems. The epics of Mistral, if we may venture to use the term, are, with the exception of Lamartine's *Jocelyn*, the most remarkable long narrative poems that have been produced in France in modern times. At least one of them would appear to be a work of the highest rank and destined to live. Among the short poems that constitute the volume called *Lis Isclo d'Or* are a number of masterpieces.

This book aims to present all the essential facts in the history of this astonishing revival of a language, and to bring out the chief aspects of Mistral's life-work. In our conclusions we have not yielded to the temptation to prophesy. The conflicting tendencies of cosmopolitanism and nationalism abroad in the world to-day give rise to fascinating speculations as to the future. In the Felibrean movement we have a very interesting problem of this kind, and no one can terminate a study of the subject without asking himself the question, "What is going to come out of it all?" No one can tell, and Pg viii so we have not ventured beyond the attempt to present the case as it actually exists.

Let me here also offer an expression of gratitude to Professor Adolphe Cohn and to Professor Henry A. Todd of Columbia University for their advice and guidance during the past six years. Their kindness and the inspiration of their example must be reckoned among those things that cannot be repaid.

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PART FIRST

THE REVIVAL OF THE PROVENÇAL LANGUAGE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The present century has witnessed a remarkable literary phenomenon in the south of France, a remarkable rebirth of local patriotism. A language has been born again, so to speak, and once more, after a sleep of many hundred years, the sunny land that was the cradle of modern literature, offers us a new efflorescence of poetry, embodied in the musical tongue that never has ceased to be spoken on the soil where the Troubadours sang of love. Those who began this movement knew not whither they were tending. From small beginnings, out of a kindly desire to give the humbler folk a simple, homely literature in the language of their firesides, there grew a higher ambition. The Provençal language put forth claims to exist coequally with the French tongue on French soil. Memories of the former glories of the southern regions of France began to stir within the hearts of the modern poets and leaders. They began to chafe under the strong political and intellectual centralization that prevails in France, and to seek to bring about a change. The movement has passed through numerous phases, has been frequently misinterpreted and misunderstood, and may now, after it has attained to tangible results, be defined as an aim, on the part of its leaders, to make the south intellectually independent of Paris. It is an attempt to restore among the people of the Rhone region a love of their ancient customs, language, and traditions, an effort to raise a sort of dam against the flood of modern tendencies that threaten to overwhelm local life. These men seek to avoid that dead level of uniformity to which the national life of France appears to them in danger of sinking. In the earlier days, the leaders of this movement

were often accused at Paris of a spirit of political separatism; they were actually mistrusted as secessionists, and certain it is that among them have been several champions of the idea of decentralization. To-day there are found in their ranks a few who advocate the federal idea in the political organization of France. However, there seems never to have been a time when the movement promised seriously to bring about practical political changes; and whatever political significance it may have to-day goes no farther than what may be contained in germ in the effort at an intense local life.

The land of the Troubadours is now the land of the Félibres; these modern singers do not forget, nor will they allow the people of the south to forget, that the union of France with Provence was that of an equal with an equal, not of a principal with a subordinate. Patriots they are, however, ardent lovers of France, and proofs of their strong affection for their country are not wanting. To-day, amid all their activity and demonstrations in behalf of what they often call "*la petite patrie*," no enemies or doubters are found to question their loyalty to the greater fatherland.

The movement began in the revival of the Provençal language, and was at first a very modest attempt to make it serve merely better purposes than it had done after the eclipse that followed the Albigensian war. For a long time the linguistic and literary aspect of all this activity was the only one that attracted any attention in the rest of France or in Provence itself. Not that the Provençal language had ever quite died out even as a written language. Since the days of the Troubadours there had been a continuous succession of writers in the various dialects of southern France, but very few of them were men of power and talent. Among the immediate predecessors of the Félibres must be mentioned Saboly, whose *Noëls*, or Christmas songs, are to-day known all over the region, and Jasmin, who, however, wrote in a different dialect. Jasmin's fame extended far beyond the limited audience for which he wrote; his work came to the attention of the cultured through the enthusiastic praise of Sainte-Beuve, and he is to-day very widely known. The English-speaking world became acquainted with him chiefly through the translations of Longfellow. Jasmin, however, looked upon himself as the last of a line, and when, in his later years, he heard of the

growing fame of the new poets of the Rhone country, it is said he looked upon them with disfavor, if not jealousy. Pg 7 Strange to say, he was, in the early days, unknown to those whose works, like his, have now attained well-nigh world-wide celebrity.

The man who must justly be looked upon as the father of the present movement was Joseph Roumanille. He was born in 1818, in the little town of Saint-Rémy, a quaint old place, proud of some remarkable Roman remains, situated to the south of Avignon. Roumanille was far from foreseeing the consequences of the impulse he had given in arousing interest in the old dialect, and, until he beheld the astonishing successes of Mistral, strongly disapproved the ambitions of a number of his fellow-poets to seek an audience for their productions outside of the immediate region. He had no more ambitious aim than to raise the patois of Saint-Rémy out of the veritable mire into which it had sunk; it pained him to see that the speech of his fireside was never used in writing except for trifles and obscenities. Of him is told the touching story that one day, while reciting in his home before a company of friends some poems in French that he had written, he observed tears in his mother's eyes. She could not understand the poetry his friends so much admired. Rou Pg 8manille, much moved, resolved to write no verses that his mother could not enjoy, and henceforth devoted himself ardently to the task of purifying and perfecting the dialect of Saint-Rémy. It has been said, no less truthfully than poetically, that from a mother's tear was born the new Provençal poetry, destined to so splendid a career.

We of the English-speaking race are apt to wonder at this love of a local dialect. This vigorous attempt to create a first-rate literature, alongside and independent of the national literature, seems strange or unnatural. We are accustomed to one language, spoken over immense areas, and we rejoice to see it grow and spread, more and more perfectly unified. With all their local color, in spite of their expression of provincial or colonial life, the writings of a Kipling are read and enjoyed wherever the English language has penetrated. In Italy we find patriots and writers working with utmost energy to bring into being a really national language. Nearly all the governments of Europe seek to impose the language of the capital upon the schools. Unification of language seems a most desirable thing, and,

superficially consid Pg 9ered, the tendency would appear to be in that direction. But the truth is that there exists all over Europe a war of tongues. The Welsh, the Basques, the Norwegians, the Bohemians, the Finns, the Hungarians, are of one mind with Daudet and Mistral, who both express the sentiment, "He who holds to his language, holds the key of his prison."

So Roumanille loved and cherished the melodious speech of the Rhone valley. He hoped to see the *langue d'oc* saved from destruction, he strove against the invasion of the northern speech that threatened to overwhelm it. He wrote sweet verses and preached the gospel of the home-speech. One day he discovered a boy whom he calls "l'enfant sublime," and the pupil soon carried his dreams to a realization far beyond his fondest hopes. Not Roumanille, but Frédéric Mistral has made the new Provençal literature what it is. In him were combined all the qualities, all the powers requisite for the task, and the task grew with time. It became more than a question of language. Mistral soon came to seek not only the creation of an independent literature, he aimed at nothing less than a complete revolution, or rather a com Pg 10plete rebirth, of the mental life of southern France. Provence was to save her individuality entire. Geographically at the central point of the lands inhabited by the so-called Latin races, she was to regain her ancient prominence, and cause the eyes of her sisters to turn her way once more with admiration and affection. The patois of Saint-Rémy has been developed and expanded into a beautiful literary language. The inertia of the Provençals themselves has been overcome. There is undoubtedly a new intellectual life in the Rhone valley, and the fame of the *Félibres* and their great work has gone abroad into distant lands.

The purpose, then, of the present dissertation, will be to give an account of the language of the *Félibres*, and to examine critically the literary work of their acknowledged chief and guiding spirit, Frédéric Mistral.

The story of his life he himself has told most admirably in the preface to the first edition of *Lis Isclo d'Or*, published at Avignon in 1874. He was born in 1830, on the 8th day of September, at Maillane. Maillane is a village, near Saint-Rémy, situated in the centre of a broad Pg 11 plain that lies at the foot of the Alpilles, the western-

most rocky heights of the Alps. Here the poet is still living, and here he has passed his life almost uninterruptedly. His father's home was a little way out of the village, and the boy was brought up at the *mas*, [1] amid farm-hands and shepherds. His father had married a second time at the age of fifty-five, and our poet was the only child of this second marriage.

The story of the first meeting of his parents is thus told by the poet:—

"One year, on St. John's day, Maître François Mistral was in the midst of his wheat, which a company of harvesters were reaping. A throng of young girls, gleaning, followed the reapers and raked up the ears that fell. Maître François (Mèste Francés in Provençal), my father, noticed a beautiful girl that remained behind as if she were ashamed to glean like the others. He drew near and said to her:—

"My child, whose daughter are you? What is your name?"

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"The young girl replied, 'I am the daughter of Etienne Poulinet, Maire of Maillane. My name is Délaïde.'

"What! the daughter of the Maire of Maillane gleaning!"

"Maître,' she replied, 'our family is large, six girls and two boys, and although our father is pretty well to do, as you know, when we ask him for money to dress with, he answers, "Girls, if you want finery, earn it!" And that is why I came to glean.'

"Six months after this meeting, which reminds one of the ancient scene of Ruth and Boaz, Maître François asked Maître Poulinet for the hand of Délaïde, and I was born of that marriage."

His father's lands were extensive, and a great number of men were required to work them. The poem, *Mirèio*, is filled with pictures of the sort of life led in the country of Maillane. Of his father he says that he towered above them all, in stature, in wisdom, and in nobleness of bearing. He was a handsome old man, dignified in language, firm in command, kind to the poor about him, austere with himself alone. The same may be said of the poet to-day. He Pg 13 is a strikingly handsome man, vigorous and active, exceedingly gracious and simple in manner. His utter lack of affectation is the

more remarkable, in view of the fact that he has been for years an object of adulation, and lives in constant and close contact with a population of peasants.

His schooling began at the age of nine, but the boy played truant so frequently that he was sent to boarding-school in Avignon. Here he had a sad time of it, and seems especially to have felt the difference of language. Teachers and pupils alike made fun of his patois, for which he had a strong attachment, because of the charm of the songs his mother sung to him. Later he studied well, however, and became filled with a love of Virgil and Homer. In them he found pictures of life that recalled vividly the labors, the ways, and the ideas of the Maillanais. At this time, too, he attempted a translation, in Provençal, of the first eclogue of Virgil, and confided his efforts to a school-mate, Anselme Mathieu, who became his life-long friend and one of the most active among the Félibres.

It was at this school, in 1845, that he formed Pg 14 his friendship with Roumanille, who had come there as a teacher. It is not too much to say that the revival of the Provençal language grew out of this meeting. Roumanille had already written his poems, *Li Margarideto* (The Daisies). "Scarcely had he shown me," says Mistral, "in their spring-time freshness, these lovely field-flowers, when a thrill ran through my being and I exclaimed, 'This is the dawn my soul awaited to awaken to the light!'" Mistral had read some Provençal, but at that time the dialect was employed merely in derision; the writers used the speech itself as the chief comic element in their productions. The poems of Jasmin were as yet unknown to him. Roumanille was the first in the Rhone country to sing the poetry of the heart. Master and pupil became firm friends and worked together for years to raise the home-speech to the dignity of a literary language.

At seventeen Mistral returned home, and began a poem in four cantos, that he has never published; though portions of it are among the poems of *Lis Isclo d'Or* and in the notes of *Mirèio*. This poem is called *Li Meissoun* (Harvest). His family, seeing his intellectual supe Pg 15riority, sent him to Aix to study law. Here he again met Mathieu, and they made up for the aridity of the Civil Code by devoting themselves to poetry in Provençal.

In 1851 the young man returned to the *mas*, a *licencié en droit*, and his father said to him: "Now, my dear son, I have done my duty; you know more than ever I learned. Choose your career; I leave you free." And the poet tells us he threw his lawyer's gown to the winds and gave himself up to the contemplation of what he so loved,—the splendor of his native Provence.

Through Roumanille he came to know Aubanel, Croustillat, and others. They met at Avignon, full of youthful enthusiasm, and during this period Mistral, encouraged by his friends, worked upon his greatest poem, *Mirèio*. In 1854, on the 21st of May, the *Félibrige* was founded by the seven poets,—Joseph Roumanille, Paul Giera, Théodore Aubanel, Eugène Garcin, Anselme Mathieu, Frédéric Mistral, Alphonse Tavan. In 1868, Garcin published a violent attack upon the *Félibres*, accusing them, in the strongest language, of seeking to bring about a political separation of southern France from the rest of the country. This Pg 16 apostasy was a cause of great grief to the others, and Garcin's name was stricken from the official list of the founders of the *Félibrige*, and replaced by that of Jean Brunet. Mistral, in the sixth canto of *Mirèio*, addresses in eloquent verse his comrades in the Provençal *Pléiade*, and there we still find the name of Garcin.

Tù' nfin, de quau un vènt de flamo
Ventoulo, emporto e fouito l'amo
Garcin, o fiéu ardènt dóu manescau d'Alen!

(And finally, thou whose soul is stirred and swept and whipped by a wind of flame, Garcin, ardent son of the smith of Alleins.)

This attack upon the *Félibrige* was the first of the kind ever made. Many years later, Garcin became reconciled to his former friends and in 1897 he was vice-president of the *Félibrige de Paris*.

The number seven and the task undertaken by these poets and literary reformers remind us instantly of the *Pléiade*, whose work in the sixteenth century in attempting to perfect the French language was of a very similar character. It is certain, however, that the seven Pg 17 poets who inaugurated their work at the Château of Font-

Ségugne, had no thought of imitating the Pléiade either in the choice of the number seven or in the reformation they were about to undertake.

They began their propaganda by founding an annual publication called the *Armana Prouvençau*, which has appeared regularly since 1855, and many of their writings were first printed in this official magazine. Of the seven, Aubanel alone besides Mistral has attained celebrity as a poet, and these two with Roumanille have been usually associated in the minds of all who have followed the movement with interest as its three leaders.

Mistral completed *Mirèio* in 1859. The poem was presented by Adolphe Dumas and Jean Reboul to Lamartine, who devoted to it one of the "Entretiens" of his *Cours familier de littérature*. This article of Lamartine, and his personal efforts on behalf of Mistral, contributed greatly to the success of the poem. Lamartine wrote among other things: "A great epic poet is born! A true Homeric poet in our own time; a poet, born like the men of Deucalion, from a stone on the Crau, a primi Pg 18tive poet in our decadent age; a Greek poet at Avignon; a poet who has created a language out of a dialect, as Petrarch created Italian; one who, out of a vulgar *patois*, has made a language full of imagery and harmony delighting the imagination and the ear.... We might say that, during the night, an island of the Archipelago, a floating Delos, has parted from its group of Greek or Ionian islands and come silently to join the mainland of sweet-scented Provence, bringing along one of the divine singers of the family of the Melesigenes."

Mistral went to Paris, where for a time he was the lion of the literary world. The French Academy crowned his poem, and Gounod composed the opera *Mireille*, which was performed for the first time in 1864, in Paris.

The poet did not remain long in the capital. He doubtless realized that he was not destined to join the galaxy of Parisian writers, and it is certain that if he had remained there his life and his influence would have been utterly different. He returned home and immediately set to work upon a second epic; in another seven years he completed *Calendau*, published Pg 19 in Avignon in 1866. The success of this poem was decidedly less than that of *Mirèio*.