FRANÇOIS VILLON:
A NOTE ON HIS MANUSCRIPTS.

By E. F. CHANEY, M.A.
HEADMASTER OF MANCHESTER CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL.

FOR about eighty years from 1460 Villon’s poems enjoyed great popularity. For the first forty years of this period there were a large number of Villon manuscripts in existence of which only seven have survived. Between 1489 and 1542 there were over thirty printed editions of his work of which copies have survived. We might reasonably surmise that there were others which left no survivor. When we attempt to construct a critical edition we use these seven manuscripts and two early printed editions. Since Longnon’s notable 1892 edition these nine sources have been known to scholars by the letters A, B, C, F, I, J, P, R, V. Of these the principal sources are A, C, F, I because they contain most of the poet’s known work while the subsidiary sources B, J, P, R, V contain only small portions of it.

The four major manuscripts all belong to the period 1480-1500. We will consider them in detail:—

A (Arsenal) is MS. 3523 (Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal). Three poems of Villon appear towards the end of a large MS. volume of 818 pages. These are:

Ballade de Fortune, pp. 719-720.
Le Lais François Villon, pp. 721-733.

Only the last bears a title. In the Testament, as a rule, there are three eight-lined stanzas and four lines of the next to a page.

Le Lais is by a better scribe who rigidly copies three stanzas to a page. The page of this MS. which we have reproduced is numbered 667. This is what it says (the italicised words represent abbreviations in the original):

Honnestes si furent vraiment
sans avoir repro floats ne blasmes
il est vray quaucommencement
une chascune de ses fames
si prindrent ains queuissent diffames
une ung lay ung cler et lautre ung moyne
pour estaindre damours les flammes
plus chaudes que feu saint anthoyne

Or firent selon se decrect
leurs amys et bien y appart
elles amoient en lieu seccret
ne nul autre ny avoit part
non obstant ceste amour sespart
car celle qui nen avoit quin
de celui sestrange et sepant
et aime mieulx amer chascun

Qui les melt adce je yimagine
sans lonneur des dames blasmer
que cest nature femenie
qui tout homme voudroit amer
autre chose ny say rimer
fors quon dit a rains et atrois
voire alisle et a saint omer
que six ouvriers font plus que trois

Or ont les faulx amans le bont
et les dames print la vollee
cest ledroit loyer quamans ont
toute foy yest viollee.

In these twenty-eight lines there are over thirty words
differing from the carefully edited version given by the Longnon-
Foulet edition of 1932. This fact will give some idea of the
difficulties which editors encounter!

Except for about six words this manuscript is easy to read.
I give here a list of those parts which do not appear in this MS. :

**Testament.**
- Ballade (Car ou soit ly sains apostolles) II. 385-412
- Stanza 46 (Aussi ces povres fameletes) II. 445-452
- Stanza 96 (Par fault d'ung uys j'y perdis) II. 998-1005
- Stanza 106 (Item et au Prince des Sotz) II. 1078-1085
- Envoi of Ballade (Sur mol duvet assis) II. 1503-1506
- Ballade (Car ou soies porteur de bulles) II. 1692-1719

**Poésies diverses**
- All missing except no. 12 (Fortune fus par clers).

**Le Lais**
- Stanza 22 (Item au Chevalier du Guet) II. 169-176
- Stanza 23 (Item a Perrenet Marchant) II. 177-184
In the scribe's orthography we find:—

(a) o for ou: lop, cop, coster, morir, mostier, hostilz, cloz (= clous), acostumer, oblier, englotir.
(b) ou for o: aproucher, pouvre, moutant (= m’ôtant), honnourer.
(c) l for ll: balade, molir, tailles.
(d) ll for l: faluer, polly, jolly, souliers, semellees, principalement.
(e) y for i: hayr, ravy, dy, sy, ayent, boyre, moy, yra.
(f) th for t: Gonthier, brethes, epithaphe, Cothart, thumbeau.
(g) qu for c: quourust, quouemart.
(h) eux for eurs: escumeaux, ribleux, mouveux.
(i) ses for ces: juc for jusque: z as a plural sign: s for z in 2nd person plural of verbs.

A complete microfilm of Villon's work in this MS. is in the Manchester University Library.

C (Coislin) is MS. 20041 (Bibliothèque Nationale). This MS. consists of 153 leaves. Villon’s work begins at

107 vo. (Freres humains qui apres nous vivez).
108 ro. Le petit testament Villon.
112 vo. Sensuit l'appel dudit Villon (Que dictes vous de mon appel/Garnier).
113 ro. Le Testament villon (a later hand has written grät over the T of Testament).
152 ro. Espitre (!) (Aiez pictie aiez pictie de moy).
152 vo. Probleme (Fortune fuz par clerks jadiz nommee).
153 vo. Explicit le testament maistre francoys villon.

The manuscript once belonged to the marquis de Coislin. Villon’s work is in three different hands. The first wrote only 107 vo., the second 108 ro. to 113 vo. and both sides of leaf 130, the third all the rest. It is the best written and the most complete of the Villon manuscripts. I consider it to be our best source.

The following do not appear in this MS. :—

Le petit testament. Stanza 4 (Et se j'ay pris en ma faveur).
Stanza 5 (Le regart de celle m’a prins).
Stanza 6 (Pour obvier a ces dangiers).
Stanza 7 (Combien que le depart me soit).
Stanza 8 (Et puis que departir me fault).
Stanza 9 (Premièrement ou nom du pere).
Stanza 36 (Ce faisant je m’entroublie).
Stanza 37 (Et mesmement l’estimative).
Stanza 38 (Dont le sensitif s’esveilla).
Stanza 39 (Puis que mon sens fut a repos).

Le testament. Stanza 39 (Je connois que povres et riches).
Poésies diverses.

No. 1 (Hommes faillis beraudez de raison).
No. 2 (Tant grate chievre que mau gist).
No. 3 (Je congnois bien mouches en let).
No. 4 (Il n’est soing que quant on a fain).
No. 5 (Rencontré soit de bestes feu getans).
No. 6 (Jenin l’avenu).
No. 7 (Je meurs de seuf auprès de la fontaine).
No. 8 (O louee conception).
No. 10 (Le mien seigneur et prince redoubté).
No. 11 (Qu’est ce que j’oy ? Ce suis je ! Qui ? Ton cuer).
No. 13 (Je suis François dont il me poise).
No. 15 (Tous mes cinq sens : yeulx, oreilles et bouche).

From this it will be seen that C lacks a quarter of ‘Le petit testament’ and three-quarters of the ‘Poésies diverses’ but in the whole of the ‘Grant testament’, which consists of 2023 lines, only one stanza of eight lines is missing. The completeness of this portion of the work makes C the chief authority for the ‘Grant Testament’.

Manuscripts B and C have been photographed and published as ‘Deux Manuscrits de François Villon’, by A. Jeanroy and E. Droz—Librairie E. Droz, Paris, 1932.

F (Fauchet) is MS. 53 of the Royal Library, Stockholm. Like A this is an anthology and consists of 272 leaves. Villon’s work occupies about two-thirds of the first 70 of these.

2 vo. Ballade (Quoy que on tient belles langagieres).
3 vo. Ballade (Il nest soing que quant on a fain).
21 ro. Ballade (Se jayme et sers ma dame de bon het).
22 vo. Ballade (En reagal en arcenic rochier).
24 ro. Ballade (Tant grante chievre que mau gist).
25 ro. Ballade en jargon (En parouart la grant masse gau dy e).
25 vo. Ballade en jargon (Vous qui tenez voz terres et voz fiefz).
26 ro. Ballade en jargon (Ung gier coys de la vergne cygault).
26 vo. Ballade en jargon (Brouez benards eschecquez a la saulve).
27 ro. Ballade en jargon (Se devers quay par ung temps diernois).
29 ro. Le premier testament maistre francois villon.
34 ro. La complainte villon a son cuer (Quest ce que joy).
35 ro. Lepitaphe villon (Freres humains qui apres nous vivez).
35 vo. La louenge que feist villon a la court quant fu dit que il ne mourroit point et puis req... trois jours de relache (Tous mes cinq cens yeulx oreilles et bouche).
36 ro. La question que feist villon au clerc du guichet (Que vous semble de mon appel/garnier).
This MS. contains 39 of the 40 stanzas which make up the 'Petit Testament' and so becomes the principal source of this part of Villon's work. Stanza 29 (Item et jadjoings a la crosse) is missing and the others appear in this order: 1-12, 16, 13-15, 17-21, 24, 27, 28, 25, 26, 22, 31, 32, 34, 33, 23, 30, 35-40.

On the other hand the "Grand Testament" is an uneven piece of work. Except for the second and third stanzas of the 'Double Ballade' (ll. 633-648) and stanza 97 (ll. 1006-1013) the manuscript gives us almost a complete version down to l. 1413. Thereafter the work is full of gaps as the following stanzas are lacking: 141, 146-150, 153, 154, 160-166, 170, 173-176, 179, 180, as well as two whole stanzas of 'Franc Gontier' (ll. 1483-1506); the 'chanson'—Au retour de dure prison (ll. 1784-1795) and the two ballads which end the 'Grand Testament' (ll. 1968-2023). I can think of no explanation for these gaps except that the scribe was anxious to finish his task. That he was not very careful is, I think, proved by the fact that in the first half of the 'Grand Testament' there are seven cases of stanzas being deprived of a line each.

It may be that F is the oldest Villon manuscript that we have. It is exceedingly valuable for the smaller testament and throughout it often provides an acceptable reading when other MSS. are at fault.

A facsimile called 'Manuscrit LIII de Stockholm' with an introduction by Marcel Schwob was published by Honoré Champion in 1905. As only a hundred copies were printed it is a rarity to-day. A page by page transcription was issued by Blackwell in 1943.

The MS. page reproduced here contains the famous ballad of that hardened toper Jehan Cotart. This is what it says:

BALLADE.

Pere noel qui plantastes la vigne
vous aussi loth qui beustes ou rocher
par tel part quamours les gens engigne
et de voz filles si vous feist approcher
F MS. no. 53 (Royal Library, Stockholm).

[To face p. 28]
pas ne le dis pour le vous reprocher
archedeclin qui bien sceustes cest art
tous trois vous prye que vous vueillez percher
lame du bon feu maistre jehan cotart

Jadis il fut extraict de vosstre ligne
lui qui buvoit du meilleur et plus cher
et ne deust il avoir vaillant ung pigne
certes sur tous estoit ung bon archer
on ne lui eust sceu pot des mains arracher
de bien boire ne fut onques fetart
nobles seigneurs ne vueillez empeschier
lame du bon feu etc.

Comme homme beu qui chancelle et trepigne
lay veu souvent quant il saloit couchier
a une fois il se fist une bigne
bien men souvient a lestal dun bouchier
brief on neust sceu en ce monde sercher
meilleur pyon pour boire tost ou tart
faictes entre quant vous orrez huchier
lame, etc.

Prince il neust sceu jusques a terre crachier
tousjours croyoit haro la gorge mart
et ne sceust oncq sa soif estanchier
lame etc.

(The italics again represent MS. abbreviations.)

F once belonged to the bibliophile, Claude Fauchet (1530-1601), who was ‘Président de la Cour des Monnaies’. From Fauchet it passed to Pétart and thence in 1650 to Queen Christine of Sweden. Although the Queen left all her manuscripts to the Pope, this one remained in Stockholm where it is to-day.

I (Imprimé) is the oldest extant printed volume of Villon’s work. Produced by Pierre Levet in 1489. As the colophon says it was ‘Imprime a paris Lan mil CCC four vings et neuf’. This is a handsome book containing about 25 lines to the page. There are no stops except an occasional colon and full stop which nearly always occur in the body of the line. There are a number of misprints, re-written lines and substituted words which occasionally remove all meaning from a stanza. Quite a number of lines contain nine syllables and some only
seven. There are ten woodcuts; one representing Villon appears five times whilst the same figure of a woman represents La Grosse Margot, La beaute d’amours and La Belle Heaulmiere! There is also the figure of a bishop. The only noteworthy picture is the delightfully crude one showing three men hanging on a gallows. Two have short shirts on while the centre one is naked. They are such figures as very young children draw. This is what the book contains:

1. Cy comence le grant codicille et testament maistre francois villon. Then follows the ‘Grand Testament’ with explicit at the end.
2. Cause dappel dudit villon (Que vous semble de mon appel).
3. Le rondeau que feist ledit villon quant il fut jugie (Je suis francois dont ce me poise).
4. Epitaphe dudit villon (Freres humains qui apres nous vives).
5. Le debat du cuer et du corps dudit villon (Qui est ce que joy).
6. La requeste que bailla ledit villon a messeigneurs de parlement (Tous mes cinq sens).
7. La requeste que ledit villon bailla a monseigneur de bourbon (Le mien seigneur et prince redouble).
8. Autre ballade (Tant grate chevre que mal gist).
9. Autre ballade (Je congnois bien mouches en laict).
10. Le jargon et jobellin dudit villon (6 ballads):
   (a) A parouart la grant mathegaudie.
   (b) Coquillars enarvans a ruel.
   (c) Spelicans/Qui en tous temps.
   (d) Saupicquez fronans des gours arquez.
   (e) Joncheurs jonchans en joncherie.
   (f) Contres de la gaudisserie.

La fin du grant testament. du codicille : du jargon/et des ballades.

11. Sensuit le petit testament maistre francois villon (29 stanzas):

   Cy finist le grant testament
   maistre francois villon. Son
   codicille ses ballades et jargon
   Et le petit testament. Impri
   me a paris Lan mil CCC qua
   tre vings et neuf.

From the ‘Grand Testament’ are missing stanzas 97, 146, 165, the chanson ‘Au retour’, 167 and the final lines 2004-2023.

In the ‘Petit Testament’ stanzas 4-9, 23 and 36-39 are wanting. The 29 stanzas are arranged thus: 1-3, 10-12, 21, 13-20, 22, 24-35, 40. The 1489 edition was reproduced (500 copies) by ‘Editions des quatre Chemins’, Paris, 1924.
We now have to consider the minor sources which consist of four MS. and one printed book containing only small portions of Villon's work. The first is known as B.

B is MS. 1660 (Bibliothèque Nationale). This manuscript contains eighteen pieces—the second of which bears the date 1464. No. 18 beginning at page 236 ro. is the "Petit Testament". It has four stanzas to a page and ends on page 240 vo. At the top of page 236 ro. we read the title 'Le testament de maistre francois villon' and then follow 39 stanzas. At the end 'Cy fine le testament villon'. The missing stanza is no. 23 (Item a Perrenet Marchant). The 39 are arranged thus: 1-11, 13-15, 12, 16-18, 22, 19-21, 24-40. The whole is written in a small but clear handwriting. Bijvanck thought the scribe was careless but many people to-day consider it to be quite a good manuscript. It has considerable value because of its completeness and because of its legibility.

Longnon, noticing that this MS. is called 'Le testament', suggests that it might be dated round about 1460 before the longer testament was written. The date 1464 in the second piece would seem to preclude this. The probable date of the MS. is c. 1480 but it is quite possible that it was copied from a MS. which was written about 1460. Villon himself tells us (ll. 753-760) that in 1456 he wrote 'certains laiz . . . qu'aucuns sans mon consentement voulrent nommer Testament'. From which it would appear that at one time his smaller poem was entitled 'Testament' without qualification.

This MS. was, together with C, published by Droz, Paris, 1932.

J (Jardin de Plaisance) is a printed anthology published by Antoine Vérard at Paris in 1501. It contains certainly nine, and possibly ten, of Villon's poems. The words 'Balade' or more frequently 'Autre balade' appear at the head of each poem except one, which is called 'Rondel'. There are two columns on a page.

CVII vo. Que dictes vous de mon appel.
CVIII ro. Freres humains qui apres nous vivez.
,, Quest ce que joy? ce suis je/qui? ton cueur.
CVIII vo. Tous mes cinq sens/yeulx oreilles et bouche
Tant grate chieure que mal gist.
CIX ro. Jenin lanemy.
" En reagal/en arcenic rocher.
" Se jayme et sers la belle de bon hait.
CIX vo. Je congnois bien mouches en laict.
CC vo. Rencontre soit des bestes feu gectans.

All the above except the rondel ‘Jenin lanemy’ are known from other sources to be Villon’s work. The rondel is ascribed to him because it occurs after three of his undoubted ballads and immediately before three others. It is of no significance but as a curiosity I give it in full:

Jenin lanemy
Vaten aux estuues
Et toy la venu
Jenin etc.

Si te laue nud
Et te baigne es cuues
Jenin etc.

A facsimile reproduction of ‘Le Jardin de Plaisance et Fle~
de Rethorique’ appeared in 1910 as one of the publications of the ‘Société des Anciens Textes Français’. A microfilm of the Villon pages is in the University Library.

P is MS. 1719 (Bibliothèque Nationale). This manuscript of 182 leaves contains a wide variety of poems, many extremely licentious. They were all catalogued by Marcel Schwob in ‘Le Parnasse Satyrique’ (1905), pages 23 to 50. Towards the end of the MS. appear fifteen of Villon’s poems:

151 vo. En reagal en archenic rochier.
152 vo. Pere noe qui plantastes la vigne.
153 ro. Dictes moy ou ne en quel pays.
153 vo. Qui plus est le tiers calixte.
154 ro. Le myen seigneur et prince redoubte.
155 ro. Se jayme et sers la belle de bon hait.
155 vo. Tant grate chievre que mal gist.
156 ro. Je congnois bien mouches en lait.
157 ro. Chartreux aussi celestins.
157 vo. Que vous semble de mon appel.
158 ro. Freres humains qui apres nous vyves.
159 ro. Qui est ce que joy ce suis je qui ton ceur:
On 160 vo. is a ballad 'Je vy le temps que ayme jestoie' which Bijvanck wanted to ascribe to Villon because of its position among his undoubted writings. Longnon rightly rejects it on account of its 'envoi':

Rossignol du boys promptement
alles porter ceste ballade
dictes que scay bien comment
on maymme mieulx sain que mallade.

He finds it difficult to imagine Villon choosing a nightingale to bear his ballad. The scribe (or some subsequent reader) had his doubts because he drew a long line in the margin covering 25 of the 28 lines.

Many of the leaves of this MS. show the ravages of time round the edges but very nearly everything written can still be read. The scribe probably wrote fast and his writing is not always easy to read. The specimen page given is 157 ro. Here is the transcription with MS. abbreviations in italics:

Chartreux aussi celestins
aux mendiens et aux devotes
amusars et clicque patins
a servantes et filles mignotes
portans surcotz et justes cotes
aux cuydereaux damours transsys
chaussans sans me haing fauves botes
je cry a toutes gens mercys.

A fillettes monstrans tetins
pour avoir plus largement hostes
alibleurs meneurs de hutins
abateleurs traynans marmottes
afolz et folles soetz et sothes
qui sen vont sifflant cinq et six
a veusves et amariottes (? marrottes)
je cry a toutes gens mercys.

Sy non aux tristes chiens matins
qui mont fait chier dures crotes
menger mains soirs et moins matins
que ores je ne crains pas troys crotes
pour eulx je feisse petz et rotes (corr. routes)
je ne puis car je suis assys
comblen pour evitter ryotes
je cry a toutes gens mercys.

The date of this manuscript is c. 1500. A microfilm of Villon’s part is in the University Library.

R (Robertet) is MS 12490 (Bibliothèque Nationale). This MS was copied for the Robertet family and belonged to them. In the eighteenth century it came into the possession of Lenglet-Dufresnoy who presented it to the Royal Library. It is the latest in date of our MS. sources and was copied about 1515. It is in much better preservation than P and far easier to read. I call it well written. Villon’s work begins on 84 ro. and continues to 98 vo. It is headed ‘Balades extraictes du testament et Codicille to francois villon’:

84 ro. Dictez moy ne en quel pais.
84 vo. Qui plus ou est le tiers calixte.
85 ro. Car ou soit ly saintz apostolles.
86 ro. Balade treple (!) Pour ce aymez tant que vous vouldrez.
87 ro. Dame des cieulx regente terrienne.
87 vo. Pere nohe qui plantastez la vigne.
88 ro. En reagal en arcenic rochier.
89 ro. Sur mol duvet assiz ung gras chanoisne.
89 vo. Quoy que tiennent belles langagieres.
90 ro. Se jayme et sers la belle de bon hait.
91 ro. Car or soies porteur de bulles.
91 vo. Espitaphe de villon—Cy gist et dort en ce sollier.
92 ro. Rondeau—Repos eternel donne a cil.
92 ro. A chartreux aussi celestins.
93 ro. Que vous semble de mon appel.
93 vo. Tetrastique quant il fut juge—Je suis francois dont ce me poise.
93 vo. Epitaphe dudit villon—Frerez humains qui aprez nous vivez.
94 ro. Le debat du cueur et du corps dudit villon (only the title appears on this side of the leaf).
94 vo. Qui est ce que joy ? ce suis je. qui ? ton cueur.
95 ro. La requeste que bailla ledit villon a messeigneurs de parlement—
   Tous mes cinq cens yeulx oreille et bouche.
96 ro. La requeste que bailla ledit villon a mon seigneur de bourbon—
   Le mien seigneur et prince redouble.
96 vo. Tant grate chievre que mal gist.
97 vo. Je cognois bien mouches en lait.
98 ro. Rencontre soit de beste feu gectant.
98 vo. Cy finent les ballades de villon.
Scholars have noticed some relationship between I, P and R. They have so many features in common that it has been supposed that P and R were copied from I or from some related printed edition. Perhaps it would be safer to suppose that I, P, R all derive from a common MS. source. Here is a transcription of the specimen page 93 ro.:

Que vous semble de mon appel
Guernier feiz je sens ou foulie
Toute beste garde sa pel
Qui la contraint efforce ou lie
Selle peut elle se delie
Quant en ceste peine arbitraire
On me jugea par tricherie
Estoit il lors temps de moy taire.

Se fusse dez hoirs hue capet
Qui fut extrait de boucherie
On meust parmy ce drapel
Fait boire de telle escorcherie
Vous entendez bien joncherie
Ce fut son plaisir voluntaire
De moy juger par tricherie
Estoit il lors temps de moy taire.

Cuidez que soubz mon capel
Ny eust tant de philosophie
Comme de dire jen appel
Si avoit je vous certifie
Combien que point trop my fie
Quant on me dist present notaire
Penduz serez je vous affie
Estoit il lors temps de moy taire.

There are very few abbreviations in this MS. and only one in the above 24 lines. A microfilm of pages 84-98 is in the University Library.

V (La Vallière) is MS. 25458 (Bibliothèque Nationale). This is the personal book of Charles d'Orléans and consequently dates from the middle years of the fifteenth century. It contains two of Villon's works which are not found elsewhere.

1. The poem which Longnon entitled 'Le dit de la naissance Marie d'Orléans' beginning

O louee conception
Envoyee sa jus des cieulx.
of the work to somebody else. The next is Thuasne’s 1923 edition. Its text is very good and the notes are a mine of erudition. In spite of his boast that he copied and collated all the manuscripts himself there are still too many errors in his critical apparatus. Some errors seem copied direct from Longnon. The last is Longnon-Foulet edition of 1932. Using Longnon as his basis M. Lucien Foulet has produced an edition which avoids most of the errors of Longnon and Thuasne. If one ventured to criticise such a wonderful piece of work it would be to say that there are in the text too many forms which have no MS. authority whatsoever. It is true to say that no one has a wider knowledge of the Villon manuscripts than M. Foulet who has contributed to ‘Romania’ in the last thirty years a number of erudite notes on difficult parts of Villon’s text.

Nevertheless there would seem to be room for another edition in which the variants are correctly given and in which forms without manuscript authority are not allowed. I wonder also whether it is worth while to aim at consistency of spelling when we remember that no single manuscript is consistent and that spelling was in a very fluid state in the Middle Ages.

The MS. pages reproduced here are three from unpublished manuscripts A, P, R and one from F. The 1905 edition of the latter consisted of a hundred copies so that it is almost impossible to obtain to-day. B, C, I, J have all been published.