

# **THE PROVENCAL LYRIC**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649316526

THE PROVENCAL LYRIC by Lewis F. Mott

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**LEWIS F. MOTT**

**THE PROVENCAL  
LYRIC**



THE  
PROVENÇAL LYRIC

BY

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NEW YORK

WILLIAM R. JENKINS

851-853 SIXTH AVENUE

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PRESS OF WILLIAM R. JENKINS, NEW YORK

NOTE

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





## THE PROVENÇAL LYRIC

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

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

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

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

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