

CHAPTER XVII

THE LESSER STARS

1. *Tyard, Belleau, Baïf.*

OF the remaining members of the Pleiad, Jodelle is chiefly known by his dramatic work and must therefore be reserved for a later chapter, while Dorat wrote little French poetry and that of no importance. Pontus de Tyard was a poet only in his younger days¹. He was a man of property and exercised much hospitality at his *château* of Bissy in the Mâconnais. In 1578 he was made bishop of Châlons-sur-Saône. He lived till the very end of our period, dying in 1605, the year in which Malherbe came to Paris. His first volume of poetry, composed chiefly of sonnets, entitled *Erreurs amoureuses*, appeared at the close of 1549². Like Du Bellay's *Olive*, which had appeared, as we have seen, earlier in the year, it shews strong marks of the combined influence of Petrarchism and the doctrine of spiritual love, and thus furnishes additional evidence of how closely at first the Pleiad trod in the footsteps of the school of Lyons. As in the case of Scève, Tyard's favourite models were the Italians who flourished at the close of the fifteenth century, especially Cariteo and Tebaldeo, whose sugared conceits he delights in reproducing. Two years later (1551) he shewed his interest in the subject of spiritual love by translating the *Dialoghi di amore* of Leo Hebraeus³ and in the same year he published *Continuation*

¹ 1521–1605. See Pasquier, *Recherches*, vii. c. x.; Jeandet, *Pontus de Tyard*.

² The printing was finished November 5; the date of the privilege is September 13, 1549.

³ It appeared without his name, but with his device; see *ante*, I. 137–8.

des Erreurs amoureuses. A third book of *Erreurs* and a volume entitled *Livre de vers lyriques*, both of which appeared in 1555, shew more traces of the influence of Ronsard, but throughout his short poetical career Tyard remained more or less independent of the chief of the Pleiad¹. His work is unoriginal, correct and dull, but one sonnet, which first appeared in the collected edition of his poems published in 1573, is worth quoting :

Père du doux repos, Sommeil, père du Songe,
 Maintenant que la nuit, d'une grande ombre obscure,
 Fait à cest air serain humide couverture,
 Viens, Sommeil désiré, et dans mes yeux te plonge.
 Ton absence, Sommeil, languissamment allonge
 Et me fait plus sentir la peine que j'endure.
 Viens, Sommeil, l'assoupir et la rendre moins dure,
 Viens abuser mon mal de quelque doux mensonge.
 Jà le muet Silence un escadron conduit
 De fantomes ballans dessous l'aveugle nuit ;
 Tu me dédaignes seul, qui te suis tant dévot !
 Viens, Sommeil désiré, m'environner la teste,
 Car, d'un vœu non menteur, un bouquet je t'appreste
 De ta chère morelle et de ton cher pavot².

It may be added that Tyard, true to his strong Italian proclivities, not only used *terza rima* but was the first to introduce the *sestina* into France. There are two examples of it in his *Erreurs amoureuses*³.

There remain Remy Belleau and Jean-Antoine de Baif, of whom Belleau is decidedly the better poet. With little originality or vigour he reaches by dint of careful observation, patient workmanship, good taste, and sincerity a high level of execution. He had a genuine love of country life and simple country ways, and his eclogues shew more of the spirit of Virgil than those of any other writer of his school. Of all the members of the Pleiad he was Ronsard's closest friend and most constant companion. Born, according to

¹ See F. Flamini, in *Rev. de la Ren.* 1. 43 ff.

² *Œuvres*, ed. Marty-Laveaux, p. 166; Saintsbury, *Specimens of French Literature*, p. 68.

³ L. E. Kastner, *History of French Versification*, p. 284, prints three strophes and the *envoi* of a *sestina*.

Colletet, in 1526 or 1527¹, he made his *début* in 1556 with the translation of "Anacreon" to which reference has already been made. His renderings are neat and graceful enough, but Ronsard hit the mark when, punning on his name, he said he was too sober to translate Anacreon². In the same year he became attached to the household of René de Lorraine, Marquis d'Elbeuf, a younger brother of the Duc de Guise, and accompanied him on the ill-starred expedition to Naples in 1557. Some six years later he became tutor to his son and took up his residence at the *château* of Joinville. His principal works are a comedy, of which hereafter, a *Bergerie*, and *Amours et nouveaux échanges de pierres précieuses*. The *Bergerie* is divided into a *première* and *seconde journée*, the first 'day' being published separately in 1565 and the complete work in 1572. It consists of various poems, more or less relating to country life, strung together on a loose thread of prose after the fashion of Sannazaro's *Arcadia*. Among the more noteworthy are a *Chant pastoral* on the death of Joachim du Bellay³, an *Epithalame* for Charles de Lorraine and Claude, daughter of Henry II⁴, and a song beginning *Douce et belle bouchelette*⁵. But the best and the best known is *Avril*⁶:

Avril, l'honneur et des bois
 Et des mois,
 Avril, la douce esperance
 Des fruits qui sous le coton
 Du bouton
 Nourrissent leur jeune enfance ;
 Avril, l'honneur des prez verds,
 Jaunes, pers,
 Qui d'une humeur bigarrée
 Emailent de mille fleurs
 De couleurs
 Leur parure diaprée.

¹ Colletet, whose Life is prefixed to Gouverneur's edition, says that he died March 7, 1577, aged fifty. The day of the month is wrongly given (see *post*).

² Tu es un trop sec biberon
 Pour un tourneur d'Anacréon. *Odes*, II. xxii.

³ *Œuvres*, ed. Marty-Laveaux, I. 293 (first published separately in 1560).

⁴ *ib.* 238.

⁵ *ib.* 279.

⁶ *ib.* 201; translated by A. Lang, *Ballads and Lyrics of Old France*, p. 19.

There is nothing highly original in this poem, written as it was after Ronsard's *Bel aubespïn florissant*, but it is exceedingly graceful and throughout the whole thirteen stanzas there is not a flaw in the workmanship. For such originality as Belleau possessed we must look to his *Pierres précieuses* or metamorphoses¹. Here his talent for portraying the physical aspect of things, which is comparable to that of Théophile Gautier, shews to advantage. The best of the purely narrative pieces is *L'Améthyste*, which contains the following elaborate and glowing description of the car of Dionysus :

D'un pied prompt et leger ces folles Bassarides
 Environnent le char ; l'une se pend aux brides
 Des onces mouchetez d'estoiles sur le dos,
 Onces à l'œil subtil, au pied souple et dispos,
 Au mufle herissé de deux longues moustaches ;
 L'autre met dextrement les tigres aux attaches
 Tisonnez sur la peau, les couple deux à deux :
 Ils ronflent de colère et vont rouillant les yeux.
 Un fin drap d'or frisé, semé de perles fines,
 Les couvre jusqu'au flanc, les houpes à crespines
 Flottent sur le genou : plus humbles devenus,
 On agence leur queue en tortillons menus.
 D'or fin est le branquar, d'or la jante et la roue
 Et d'yvoire indien est la poupe et la proue :
 L'une soutient le char, l'autre dans le moyeu
 Des rouleaux accouplez met les bouts de l'essieu,
 Puis tirant la surpente allegrement habile,
 Arreste les anneaux d'une longue cheville
 Dans les trous du branquar : le dessus est couvert
 De lierre menu et de ce pampre verd
 Où pendent à l'envy les grappes empourprées
 Sous les tapis rameux des feuillades pamprées².

*La Perle*³ is a fairly good lyric, though more descriptive than lyrical, but the gem of the whole series is the lyrical romance entitled *La pierre aqueuse* or Aquamarine—which begins as follows :

C'estoit une belle brune
 Filant au clair de la lune,

¹ *Les amours et nouveaux échanges de pierres précieuses : vertus et propriétés d'icelles*, 1576.

² *Œuvres*, II. 171.

³ *ib.* 186.

Qui laissa choir son fuzeau
 Sur le bord d'une fontaine :
 Mais courant après sa laine
 Plonge la teste dans l'eau,
 Et se noya la pauvrete :
 Car à sa voix trop foiblete
 Nul son desastre sentit,
 Puis assez loin ses compagnes
 Parmi les verdes campagnes
 Gardoyent leur troupeau petit.
 Hâ ! trop cruelle aventure !
 Hâ ! mort trop fière et trop dure !
 Et trop cruel le flambeau,
 Sacré pour son hymenée,
 Qui l'attendant l'a menée,
 Au lieu du lit, au tombeau¹.

The year after the publication of *Les pierres précieuses*, Belleau died, and Ronsard wrote for him the shortest and best of his epitaphs :

Ne taillez, mains industrieuses,
 Des pierres pour couvrir Belleau :
 Luy-mesme à basty son tombeau
 Dedans ses pierres précieuses².

Jean-Antoine de Baïf was, as we have seen, the member of the Pleiad whose association with Ronsard was of longest date. The son of a man who was not only in high place but was of considerable distinction as a humanist, he had from his tenderest years the most distinguished scholars in France for his tutors, Charles Estienne, Jacques Toussain and Jean Dorat³. His father died in 1547 leaving him a house in Paris and a small property in Anjou. He was only twenty when he published a narrative poem, imitated from Moschus,

¹ *Œuvres*, II. 248.

² Ronsard, *Œuvres*, VII. 247. Belleau was buried on the 6th of March, 1577, so that Colletet is wrong in giving March 7 as the day of his death.

³ He was born at Venice in February 1532 :

*Oust (Août) dans Paris vit le carnage (the massacre of St Bartholomew) ;
 Le fevrier davant, mon âge
 L'an quarantième accomplissoit.*

For an account of his early life see the poem *Au roy*, which was prefixed to the collected edition of his poems published in 1572-3. He died in 1589.

entitled *Le ravissement d'Europe* (1552)¹, and it is doubtful whether he ever wrote anything better. It has the merit of grace and elegance and a lively fancy, and to these qualities Baif added little in later life. At the close of the same year he published another small volume entitled *Amours*, addressed to a fictitious lady under the name of Meline². It is noteworthy that little more than half the pieces are sonnets—in the second part there are only two—and that these are much inferior to the other poems, which are chiefly odes of a light character.

The odes are at any rate natural, being alike in form and matter far better suited than the Petrarchian sonnet to Baif's temperament. For he was neither a man of strong emotions nor a conscientious artist. Unfortunately in his next attempt, having meanwhile found a real mistress³ who treated him with the orthodox Petrarchian cruelty, he reverted to the sonnet-form with increased energy, and the new volume, entitled *Amours de Francine*, and divided into four books, serves to shew that a real mistress can inspire just as cold and artificial poetry as a fictitious one. In the two latter books there are no sonnets, and one of the best pieces *Après les vents* is written in *terza rima*, but it is characteristic of Baif, who was nothing if not an *improvisatore*, that the execution falls off considerably towards the close of the poem⁴. In 1572–3 he published a collected edition of his works in four volumes. The fourth, entitled *Les passetemps*, contains his most celebrated poem *Du printemps*⁵, which is often compared with Belleau's *Avril*. But the execution is more commonplace and by no means so uniformly careful. If we compare the poem with Meleager's original, we see how Baif shirks the little details and delicate touches of the Greek artist. The best stanza is the last:

¹ *Œuvres*, ed. Marty-Laveaux, II. 421; *Poésies choisies*, ed. Becq de Fouquières, p. 78.

² *Les amours de Jan Antoine de Baif*, 1552; the printing was finished on December 10.

³ She was sister to the lady whom Jacques Tahureau celebrated under the name of *l'Admirée*.

⁴ *Œuvres*, II. 97; *Poésies choisies*, p. 152.

⁵ *Œuvres*, IV. 210; *Poésies choisies*, p. 233.

Et si le chanter m'agrée,
N'est-ce pas avec raison,
Puisqu'ainsi tout se recrée
Avec la gaye saison.

But if Baïf was an indifferent poet, he was a man of an active and enterprising mind who delighted to experiment in various directions. He translated the *Antigone* of Sophocles and the *Eunuchus* of Terence and adapted the *Miles Gloriosus* of Plautus to French readers. But his most popular and at the same time his most original work is *Mimes, enseignements et proverbes*, of which two books were published in his lifetime and two after his death¹. The term *mimes* was due to the fact that the chief source of the work was the *Sententiae* of Publilius Syrus, a mime-writer of the first century B.C., whose mimes or farces contained numerous wise and moral sayings, which were collected in the first century of our era and largely added to during the middle ages. They were edited by Henri Estienne, and were frequently translated into French in the course of the sixteenth century². Besides this source Baïf drew from Theognis and Phocylides, and from two modern collections of sayings, the *Adages* of Jean le Bon and a collection of Italian proverbs with French equivalents which was published in 1548. Thus his *Mimes* consist of a variety of satirical and moral reflexions, with the occasional introduction of a short fable, strung together with little or no attempt at unity and written in a jerky octosyllabic metre. The one addressed to Villeroy may serve as a specimen. The opening lines give an account of the writer's various literary performances :

Quand je pense au divers ouvrage
Où j'ai badiné tout mon âge,
Tantost epigrammatisant,
Tantost sonnant la tragedie,
Puis me gossant en comedie,
Puis des amours petrarquisant³.

¹ Book I was published in 1576, I and II together in 1581 and the whole four books in 1597.

² P. Syrus is often quoted by Montaigne, once by name.

³ *Œuvres*, v. 41; *Poésies choisies*, p. 287.

There is more unity about the last *mime* of the fourth book, in which Baif, writing as a catholic and a loyalist, advocates as Ronsard had done in his earliest *discours* a reform of the church from within. As poetry the *mimes* are hardly superior to Marot's *coq à l'ânes*, on which Du Bellay poured such contempt, but the style is well-suited to Baif's facile and slipshod method of production. Another novelty was a didactic poem on Meteorology, imitated from Aratus, Virgil and Manilius, but only one book appeared¹.

Baif's other experiments were in the direction of language and metre. In 1574 he published a volume entitled *Etrenees de poésie fransoëze en vers mezurés*², in which he not only adhered with a few modifications to the system of spelling advocated by Ramus, but gave specimens of poems written in classical metres. It is obvious that such an attempt is far more difficult in French than in English, and that at any rate Baif was not the man to accomplish so great a revolution. Although some other poets, Marc-Claude de Buttet, D'Aubigné, Passerat, and especially Rapin, made similar experiments, the attempt to introduce 'measured' verse met with little favour³. Baif however persevered for a time in his task, and among the poems unpublished at his death were a translation of the Psalms (completed in 1573) and three books of *Chansonnettes in vers mesurés*⁴. In spite of his failure it is possible that if a stronger poet, Ronsard for instance, had gone to work on somewhat different lines there might have been introduced into French poetry at this critical stage of its development a

¹ *Le premier des météores*, 1567; *Œuvres*, II. 1; *Poésies choisies*, pp. 7 ff.

² *i.e.* verse scanned according to quantity.

³ See for these attempts Pasquier, *Recherches*, VII. c. xi; D'Aubigné, *Œuvres*, I. 453; Darmesteter and Hatzfeld, pp. 113 ff.; Kastner, *op. cit.* 295 ff. (an excellent account). About the year 1562 Jacques de la Taille wrote a treatise entitled *La manière de faire des vers en françois comme en grec et en latin*, but it was not published till after his death in 1573.

⁴ He also introduced a line of fifteen syllables, scanned in the ordinary way, which he called *vers baifin*:

*Je veux donner aux François un vers de plus libre accordance
Pour le joindre au luth sonné d'une moins contraincte cadance.*

He also invented other rhythms, which shew however more ingenuity than taste.

certain amount of quantitative measurement, and as a consequence a larger musical element.

For at the bottom of Baïf's attempted reforms both in spelling and in versification was the belief which he shared with Ronsard¹ in the close connexion between poetry and music. It was this belief which led him to found under the patronage of Charles IX the *Académie de poésie et de musique*². Established at the close of 1570³ it consisted of two classes of members, Musicians or poets and Listeners (*Auditeurs*), the former class being paid stipends provided by the subscriptions of the latter. At the weekly meetings which were held on Sundays, as a rule in Baïf's house, the Musicians recited their poems, apparently to the accompaniment of music⁴. During the lifetime of Charles IX, who accepted the title of Protector and First Listener of the society, the Academy flourished greatly, and numbered the chief poets of the day among its members. Its chief business was, as Sainte-Beuve says, the determination of the quantity of sounds⁵, a work with which, as we have seen, the phonetic reforms, proposed by Baïf and others, were closely connected. And not only in the matter of quantity, but in everything connected with poetry, Baïf endeavoured to revive classical practices. It was before the Academy that he recited his versions of

¹ *La musique, disoit-il, est la sœur puisnée de la poésie...sans la musique la poésie est presque sans grace.* Binet, *Vie de Ronsard*.

² See É. Fremy, *L'académie des derniers Valois*, 1887.

³ Date of letters-patent, November, 1570.

⁴ *Les musiciens seront tenus tous les jours de dimanche chanter et reciter leurs lettres et musique mesurées, selon l'ordre convenu par entr'eux, deux heures d'horloge durant en faveur des auditeurs écrits au livre de l'academie où enrigristreront les noms, surnoms et qualitez de ceux qui se cottisent pour l'entretien de l'academie, ensemble la somme en laquelle se seront de leur gré cottisez; et pareillement les noms et surnoms des musiciens d'icelle et les convenances sous lesquelles ils seront entrez, receus et appointez.* (Statute 2.)

The twelfth statute is so admirable that I cannot forbear quoting it also:

Les auditeurs, durant que l'on chantera, ne parleront ny ne s'acousteront ny feront bruit, mais se tiendront le plus coy qu'il leur sera possible, jusques à ce que la chanson qui se prononcera soit finie; et durant que se dira une chanson, ne frapperont à l'huis de la sale qu'on ouvrira à la fin de chaque chanson pour admettre les auditeurs attendans.

⁵ *Mesurer les sons élémentaires de la langue* (Tableau, p. 81).

Sophocles and Terence, and made suggestions for the introduction on the French stage of the rhythmical movements of the classical chorus¹. After the death of Charles IX the Academy languished for a time till in the year 1576 it was reconstituted. Baif himself soon after the realisation of his project began to suffer from the complaint of which he eventually died, and the remainder of his life was clouded not only by the straitened circumstances in which the religious wars involved so many men of letters, but by ill-health. He survived however all the members of the Pleiad except Pontus de Tyard, and died on September 19, 1589, while the new king, Henry IV, was fighting against the League at Arques. Nature had not endowed Baif with more than a slender portion of poetic genius, and he did not sufficiently cultivate that portion. The faults more or less common to the whole school, the dependence on models, the pedantry, the artificiality, are more conspicuous in him than in any other member of it. But the classical Renaissance had no more enthusiastic or enterprising champion, not even in Ronsard himself.

2. *Magny, Tahureau, Louise Labé, Jamyn.*

Outside the actual Pleiad, the most productive and, with the exception of Louise Labé, the most interesting poet, at any rate of those who confined themselves to non-dramatic poetry, is Olivier de Magny. He has been compared to Alfred de Musset, and certainly he reminds us of Sainte-Beuve's remarks on that poet: "*il entra dans le sanctuaire lyrique tout éperonné, et par la fenêtre, je le crois bien,*" and again, "*il osa avoir de l'esprit, même avec un brin de scandale.*" And Magny might have said of himself, as Musset did:

*Il était gai, jeune et hardi,
Et se jetait en étourdi
A l'aventure;
Librement il respirait l'air,
Et parfois il se montrait fier
D'une blessure.*

¹ See Baif's *Au roy* (*Poésies choisies*, p. 52).