

King John and Arthur of Brittany

AFTER studying, in the order of their composition, the authorities which refer to or discuss the death of Arthur and the alleged condemnation of King John by his peers in the French court, I have been led to feel considerable doubt concerning the orthodox view on the subject. That view is the negative conclusion reached by M. Bémont in his well-known thesis nearly a quarter of a century ago. With one important exception—M. Guilhiermoz—every scholar who has gone over the evidence since M. Bémont published his thesis, has agreed with the master.¹ And, indeed, every student of the period must feel that his opinion, whatever it may be, owes almost everything to the preliminary collection and criticism of the evidence by M. Bémont.

In the following pages I have not hesitated to leave unnoticed a good deal of the discussion, including the juridical arguments of M. Guilhiermoz. I have simply reviewed the evidence in the order, first, in which it became known to contemporaries, and secondly, of its composition. The chief conclusions at which the paper arrives may be thus summarised, in addition to the fact that no contemporary official documents before those of 1216 refer to the condemnation of King John :—

1. There was no certainty in contemporary knowledge of how Arthur died, but it does not follow that John was not condemned. What evidence there is, apart from the chronicle of Margam, goes to show that he was condemned, rather than the reverse. Thus the marginal entry in Matthew Paris and the Breton tradition are, though evidence of doubtful value, both independent of the documents of 1216, and find a parallel in the chronicle of Coggeshall, whose importance is indisputable.

2. The story of Arthur's death which is most likely to be true, and is corroborated by other evidence, is contained in the annals of Margam. The condemnation of John is an integral part of this story, which has no connexion with the documents of 1216 and is probably due to William of Briouze.

¹ For the literature of the whole subject see Petit-Dutaillis, *Studies supplementary to Stubbs' 'Constitutional History,'* i. 108; Lot, *Fidèles ou Vassaux* (Paris, 1904), p. 87, note.

3. Too much stress has been laid upon the argument from silence.

The second conclusion is the only new contribution to the subject, but in any case, as I have sought to show in the rest of the argument, there is no decisive evidence against John's condemnation.

I.

Within thirty or forty years of his death that great southerner Richard the Lion Heart had become a peculiarly English hero of English romance—romance full of confused reminiscences and picturesque nonsense, which in its amplified anti-French form was used by Shakespeare; and the notorious John suffered by comparison in popular history.² Most of the popular version of John's misdeeds may be put on one side; but the more critical narrative of Holinshed is a suggestive starting-point for a study of the medieval tradition. Holinshed gives his authorities. The story of Arthur's interview with Hubert is based on a contemporary Essex chronicle of Coggeshall. Holinshed repeats the three or four rumours made current by Matthew Paris in his *Historia Anglorum*, ii 95, that Arthur died of grief, or was drowned in trying to escape from the town of Rouen, or was killed by his uncle. The most authentic version of Arthur's death is unknown to Holinshed, and therefore to Shakespeare. Hence in the famous play, the Hubert scene naturally becomes the central theme.

There was a Breton tradition also, which was familiar in the fifteenth century and was worked into the narrative of the learned Breton historians of the seventeenth century.³ According to this version the barons and bishops of Brittany assembled in great numbers and charged John with the murder fifteen days after it was committed. On the strength of this charge King Philip of France condemned the English king to lose all his possessions. So far as this story is true, it can be traced, as M. Bémont pointed out, to the events described by the Essex chronicler, Ralph, abbot of Coggeshall, to whom I have referred.

King John captured Arthur at the castle of Mirabel on 1 August 1202. Arthur was between fifteen and sixteen years of age—nearly a man in those days—and had been invested by Philip with all the Angevin lands outside Normandy. At the time of his capture he was besieging his grandmother with some display of insolence. He was taken to Falaise and imprisoned in the tower. John is said to have promised that if, with the aid of William des Roches, the most powerful baron and official in Maine and Anjou, he succeeded in

² See G. Paris in *Romania*, xxvi. 357, 387. Compare Bishop Bale's long since forgotten play about King John, which Shakespeare is said to have used.

³ See Bémont, *Revue Historique*, xxxii. (1886), 290-300; Stubbs, Introduction to *Walter of Coventry*, ii. p. xxxii.

defeating Arthur, he would act on William's advice. His trickery after the successful march on Mirabel and his cruelty to the prisoners cost him the allegiance of William and of the barons of the west. They joined with the Bretons and the rebels of Poitou. Some of the Normans were won over.⁴ The abbot of Coggeshall is the sole authority for what happened at Falaise.⁵ John's counsellors saw that so long as Arthur was kept in Falaise, away from his followers, yet safe and well and clamorous, John was in danger. It must be remembered that the king was already under sentence of deprivation at the French court, on account of the appeal of the Poitevin barons. If the alliance was not to be overwhelming Arthur ought either to be handed over to William des Roches or to be put out of the way. Some of John's friends suggested mutilation. In his anger at failure, after the only brilliant military achievement of his life, John agreed, and sent two servants to Falaise, where, his feet fettered by a triple chain, the young man was guarded by Hubert de Burgh, the chamberlain. Hubert, moved partly by the agony of Arthur, partly by the folly of the deed, prevented John's agents from accomplishing the royal command. Yet he felt also that the only way to coerce the Bretons was to convince them of Arthur's death. What folly there might be in mutilation or murder lay in the fact that John's subjects, especially his knights, would refuse to serve a parricide. Hubert announced that Arthur had died. For fifteen days (we see here the fifteen days of the Breton story) the rumour spread. The place of Arthur's burial was known also. Then the Bretons, fully roused, swore that they would never cease their attacks on the king of England after this atrocious deed. They believed that Arthur had been murdered. It is not at all unlikely that they held a solemn assembly; the Coggeshall narrative rather implies common action. In this case the chief facts of the Breton version would be true, and the fifteenth-century and later writers were following veracious but obviously independent annals in their detailed account of the gathering at Vannes. The error simply lay in this, that Arthur was not yet dead.

This explanation is the more probable because from that time Arthur disappeared. Hubert, when the danger increased rather than diminished, announced that he was alive, but the Bretons could have no proof of this. They would naturally prefer to believe that Arthur was dead, if he was not handed over. Philip and they clamoured for his release and offered hostages in vain. Their scepticism is expressed distinctly in the charter of King Philip in which he refers to Arthur 'if he still lives.'⁶ Till the spring of 1204 this

⁴ *Vie de Guillaume le Maréchal*, iii. 167-170; Coggeshall, p. 139.

Ibid. pp. 139-141.

Delisle, *Catalogue des Actes de Philippe-Auguste*, no. 783: Bémont, *Revue Hist.* xxxii. 42.

scepticism was maintained; then it became certainty that Arthur was dead; but there was no proof. The semi-official chronicler Rigord of St. Denis, who lived till about 1206, makes no mention of it. A few chroniclers tell us that Arthur was removed to Rouen; and no doubt, as time went on, this fact became common knowledge. But after that all was darkness and vague rumour. Only here and there—e.g. by the chronicler of Tours⁷—Arthur was supposed to have been killed. In 1204 Philip refused peace, partly because he was confident of success in war, partly and especially because he had heard that Arthur had been drowned in the Seine.⁸ Many years later even Matthew Paris, who was not exactly friendly to John, can only give the various stories of his death and hope doubtfully that the story of murder is not true. Gradually, in popular talk Arthur's fate became subject to the variations of time and place and incident which control all mysteries.

Such was the chief historical tradition concerning the relations between John and his nephew. Putting aside other evidence as valueless, M. Bémont has urged that it is sufficient to disprove the story that John was condemned, a second time, for the death of Arthur. It certainly does not prove it, but it is hard to see how it can be said to do more. The condemnation of John ought to be considered together with the question, When did Philip become morally certain of Arthur's death by murder? The orthodox view is as follows: John must have been condemned, if at all, in 1203; and, as Philip was uncertain of Arthur's fate in April 1204, John could not have been condemned at all. Now the only serious reason for the statement that John must have been condemned, if at all, in 1203 is that Philip continued the war in 1203, and sentence must come before the punishment.⁹ This in its turn seems to imply that Philip would not have invaded Normandy in 1203, if John had not been condemned. It is true that the later writers, looking back, are so much impressed by the crime that they say it caused the loss of Normandy, as indeed it did to a large extent. Philip was urged on by indignation.¹⁰ One or two very important witnesses, as we shall see, imply that Normandy was escheated because of the sentence. Indeed, if sentence was passed, this must have been true also. But all these considerations are irrelevant to the fact that Philip, while still uncertain or ignorant of Arthur's fate, invaded Normandy in 1203, and would have done so in any case. The evidence for the

⁷ *Historiens de France*, xviii. 295.

⁸ *Saevebat autem permaxime pro nece Arturi, quem in Sequana submersum fuisse audierat*: Coggeshall, p. 145.

⁹ *Revue Historique*, xxxii. 55.

¹⁰ The anonymous chronicler of Laon, who is especially interested in Anglo-Norman history, puts the case retrospectively exactly: 1203 'Iohannes rex Anglie Arturum . . . crudelissime iugulavit. . . . Guera inter regem Francie et regem Anglie fit solito gravior' (ed. Cartellieri, p. 61).

condemnation is not invalidated because some of the witnesses thought that it caused a war already in progress. This fact shows that their evidence has to be carefully examined, since it is not free from error. The truth is that Philip and John were at war and that there was no break. M. Bémont has shown that Philip regarded Normandy as escheated in 1202, together with Poitou and the other possessions of King John. There is no hint that the military operations from the opening of war in 1202 to the surrender of Rouen in June 1204 were not regarded as continuous, or were only broken by natural causes. Rigord says explicitly that there was no truce at the end of 1202;¹¹ and there was certainly no break at the end of 1203. Hence it is impossible to connect the operations of 1203 exclusively with Arthur's death or the condemnation of John. So far as this argument goes, it shows that the condemnation might have been passed in 1203 or 1204 or 1205, or any other year. At the same time Philip, who had been urging on war all the more fiercely because of his suspicions, became convinced that Arthur was dead. In reply to every suggestion of peace he said, 'Either produce Arthur, or, if you have killed him, surrender all your continental possessions.' At last he felt sure. He had heard, says Ralph of Coggeshall, that he was drowned. This was in the spring of 1204, and the condemnation, if it was passed, would most naturally follow then. Philip did not know the exact details, nor do I think that he knew them until some years had gone by.

Our chief authority for this summary has been the abbot of Coggeshall. All historians, except Miss Norgate, are convinced of the value of this writer.¹² His narrative is at bottom annalistic, embroidered by tales of visitors and neighbours. There is no attempt at continuous history, but, mixed with jejune summaries, we find two kinds of story, both of which show the sort of authority upon which they are based. One of them is the religious marvel, the other the striking political incident. We do not need the abbot's explicit statement to know that a special source—a visitor, a monk who has been on business, a neighbouring baron—has produced these stories. The vivid narrative of Richard's capture was related by the royal chaplain, Anselm.¹³ Another eye-witness, Hugh de Nevill, brought back a story of the crusade.¹⁴ In spite of Miss Norgate's criticism the account of the first condemnation of John in 1202 has been amply verified by French scholars; nor is there any reason to disbelieve the circumstantial relation of the events at Falaise, though they are not mentioned by any other

¹¹ Rigord, ed. Delaborde, i. 153. Winter put an end to hostilities, without any truce, *marchiis munitis*.

¹² Cf. Petit-Dutaillis, p. 111.

¹³ Coggeshall, p. 54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 45.

writer. Now it seems to me to be a valid argument that, if the widespread tale of Arthur's supposed death at Falaise has only come down in one chronicle, his mysterious fate would be still more likely to pass unchronicled, or would only be revealed accidentally through the gossip of the few people who knew what had happened. It is only when a chance discovery, like that of the biography of the Marshall, brings some unknown authority to light that we can realise faintly what a vast story lies untold. By accident or good fortune a chronicler here and there heard one thing out of a hundred, or a rhyming biographer put down the reminiscences of his hero. Except in rare and definite cases the argument *e silentio* is invalid for the medieval historian. Further, when there is reason for secrecy, the chances of truth are of course less. Arthur *subito evanuit*, said Roger of Wendover; 'out of sight out of mind,' says the proverb. We must not think of Arthur as a popular hero, except in Brittany. He was just a baron of royal blood, a noble youth, a tool of Philip, an enemy, a nuisance. When John's crime was made a political question by Philip and Louis in 1216, the pope did not trouble himself to deny it. He made little of it. The chronicles, he said, tell us of the murder of innocent persons by many princes, the kings of France as well as others, but we do not read that the murderers were ever condemned to death. Arthur was no innocent victim; he was captured at Mirabel, a traitor to his lord, to whom he had done liege homage (*cui homagium et liganciam fecerat*), and he could rightly be condemned without a formal trial to die the most shameful of deaths.¹⁵

In the spring, then, of 1204 Philip was becoming convinced that Arthur was dead. If the Breton tradition be correct—and we have seen reason to believe that it is based on truth—he had long been urged to condemn John for the murder. If and when he condemned him is, so far as this body of evidence goes, uncertain. If he did, the natural date would be early in 1204, before the last campaign and the fall of Rouen. Those writers who state or imply that the condemnation took place in 1203 are either late, like the chronicle of Lanercost, or are joining several events together in the usual medieval way. Nothing is more common in the historical writing of all ages than to anticipate events for the sake of clearness or through the natural association of ideas, and in the medieval chronicles, with their short annalistic entries, events are often transferred to a wrong date for the same reason. There is an excellent illustration of this in a reference to Arthur which has been overlooked in this connexion. The chief of three small chronicles of Rouen, which were first thrown into one in 1546,

¹⁵ Matth. Paris. *Chron. Mai.* ii. 659 (from Wendover).

was the chronicle of St. Catherine. Part of this was, according to M. Chéruef, written in the first half of the thirteenth century. Its local character lends it value. Under the year 1201—an entirely wrong date—after referring to the death of Arthur, the chronicler says of John *super quo a baronibus apud regem Franciae, cuius vassallus erat, quum comparere nollet, post multas citationes per iudicium parium exhaeredatus est.*¹⁶

The authorities with which I have dealt hitherto may be regarded as contemporary, or as going back to a contemporary source. The Coggeshall chronicle was written up from time to time. The portion comprising the years 1202–1205 was composed before the death of Abbot Ralph in 1207 (p. 162) and forms a separate part. Rigord of St. Denis died about the same time. Neither of them knew of Arthur's real fate. The former gives valuable details showing that Philip's suspicions had become certainties by Easter 1204; the latter says nothing at all. The Breton tradition is largely borne out by Coggeshall and shows when suspicion was first aroused. The charters are of course contemporary. On the strength of this evidence I think we might assume that Philip had sufficient cause for calling his court together to condemn John, but we could not be certain whether he did so or not. And there we should have to leave the matter.

II.

Twelve years later the English barons urged Louis of France to come over and help them. King Philip had twice before been balked in an attempt to invade England, and he was not prepared to let this third chance slip. Both in France and at Rome the French case was justified—in France before the legate Gualo, in Rome before the pope himself. One argument upon which great stress was laid was thus expounded by Louis' proctor a fortnight after Easter at Laon, before king and legate and all the assembled barons and clergy: 'My lord king, it is well known (*res notissima*) to all that John, styled king of England, was condemned to death in your court by the judgment of his peers for his treachery to his nephew Arthur, whom he slew with his own hands, and that afterwards, because of his many crimes, he was repudiated by his barons in England,' &c.¹⁷ It is round this text that a famous literary

¹⁶ *Normaniae nova Chronica e tribus chronicis MSS. Sancti Laudi, Sanctae Catharinae, et Maioris Ecclesiae Rothomagensium collecta*, nunc primum edidit e ms. codice Bibliothecae publicae Rothomagensis A. Chéruef (*Mém. de la Société des Antiq. de Normandie* (1850), xviii. 156, separately paged, published under the final editorship of MM. Charma and Delisle).

¹⁷ The documents of 1216 are preserved by the St. Albans chronicle of Roger of Wendover, and are best seen in Matthew Paris, *Chron. Mai.* ii. 647.

controversy has been fought. M. Bémont, arguing from the silence of most authorities, from the late date of others, and from the charters of Philip Augustus, declared that Philip and Louis told a bold lie in 1216, and that it was on the strength of this assertion, and not upon other evidence, that later chroniclers believed in the condemnation of John. Unless the proof were very positive this view is hard to maintain. It seems such a stupid lie, so easily refuted. Unless we put aside as fabrications all the documents preserved by Roger of Wendover which deal with the negotiations, it is clear that the pope and everybody else believed the story. Innocent's view was that the condemnation was not justified. The argument that these documents, somehow preserved at St. Albans, are the source of the other evidence upon the subject can only be considered when we have examined this evidence. The evidence is twofold—a marginal commentary in Matthew Paris (who follows Wendover for these years) and a rather long bit of narrative in the annals of Margam, a Cistercian abbey in Glamorganshire. Let us consider the latter first.

Like the Coggeshall chronicle, the chronicle of Margam is a brief record amplified by narrative passages. It exists in a manuscript of Trinity College, Cambridge (O. 2. 4. no. 1108). The chronicle ends abruptly and imperfectly in 1232; the manuscript belongs to about 1240. It does not seem to be the original,¹⁸ and there is little evidence as to the dates of the original composition, but the part with which we are concerned was put together after 1210.¹⁹ This is noteworthy, since it reminds us that the narrative of what happened in 1208 could be connected with later events. The monks of Margam had heard, circumstantially, how John had killed Arthur in a drunken fury, on a certain day, in a certain place, at a certain time (*in turre tandem Rothomagensi, feria quinta ante Pascha, post prandium, ebrius et daemónio pleuis, propria manu interfecit*). He had tied a stone to the body and thrown it into the Seine. It was discovered by a fisherman, recognised, and, for fear of John, buried secretly in Sainte-Marie-de-Pré, one of the priories of Bec. When Philip was convinced that Arthur was dead he summoned him to the French court to answer the charge of murder, for Arthur was a very important man. He never came, and was condemned *per iudicium curie regis et principum Francorum* to lose all the lands held of the French crown. And it was a righteous judgment.²⁰ There may be faults of chronology in the story, though it should be noted that

¹⁸ There is a similar MS. with the same diagram of parhelia, ending at the same date, in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. For the Cambridge MS. see M. R. James, *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge*, iii. 83-4.

¹⁹ Under the year 1199 reference is made to the exile and death of William of Briouze: *Ann. Monastici*, ed. Luard, i. 24.

²⁰ *Ann. Mon.* i. 27-8.

the interval between murder and trial is not stated. There is the erroneous implication that the king of France had not already got possession of John's territories—not so very erroneous, however, for Rouen held out till June 1204, and Chinon till the following year, and there was local fighting after that. It is all the same significant that, as a story, the narrative hangs together. It is just the kind of story that a man who knew the facts but had no particular interest in giving every detail correctly would tell to a curious listener. The chronicler is by no means interested only in the horror of the murder; that was dreadful, but after all murders are common. Arthur was a great man, the rightful heir of England, count of Brittany, brother-in-law of the French king. We should remember that we are on Celtic ground, though in an Anglo-Norman honour. A few years before the bones of King Arthur had been found at Glastonbury: the monks of Margam knew all about that.²¹ Modern scholars believe that Henry II was responsible for the semi-official reception of the Arthurian legend; it marked the fusion of Norman and Celtic. At one time Henry's grandson, the new Arthur, had been accepted by King Richard as his heir, and after Richard's return John had been disinherited by solemn decision of the royal council for his treachery. The Margam chronicler insisted on this also.²² And now the new Arthur was gone; and it was indeed a righteous judgment—*fixum et iustum iudicium hoc*—which the court of the French king had uttered.

This seems to be valuable testimony. But, in his essay, M. Bémont put it aside as valueless for three reasons. In the first place the chronicle was written after the expedition of 1216; secondly, the dates are wrong; thirdly, Margam was an obscure monastery in South Wales, and cannot have acquired information which was unknown to the other annalists of England and France.²³ The second of these reasons is of little or no value unless the others are made good. The first contention is that the chronicle was composed too late to have much authority, especially since Louis' invasion had presumably given currency to the story of John's second condemnation. In reply to this it may be urged that, unless we know how the annals were compiled, it is impossible to decide one way or the other. The chronicle was written up after 1210, and possibly after 1221.²⁴ But notes were always followed, and some parts were often written before others. It is true that the difference between this narrative and most of the chronicle is marked. M. Bémont is

²¹ *Ann. Mon.* i. 21, a. 1191.

²² *Ibid.* i. 24; Rog. Hoveden, iii. 241-2; Miss Norgate, ii. 329.

²³ *Revue Historique*, xxxii. 59.

²⁴ M. Bémont lays stress on the fact that, under the year 1200, Hugh of Lincoln is described as St. Hugh, although he was not canonised till 1221. But any copyist writing after 1221 would insert the word 'sanctus' before the words 'Hugo Lincolniae episcopus' as a matter of course.

obliged to suppose that the compiler used two different sources ; but with the example of Coggeshall before us we need only see the usual dry record of a scriptorium with the addition of a few vivid stories, like the story told by the chaplain Anselm to the abbot of Coggeshall. Now, if this story in the Margam annals came from a definite source it has great value. It is just a story of this kind upon which we rely when we accept the Coggeshall account of John's first condemnation. But might it not have come by way of Louis in 1216 ? In making this suggestion M. Bémont has failed to observe that there is not a single reference to Louis in the chronicle. His invasion is ignored ; we are told simply that John died and Henry succeeded him and was crowned by the legate Gualo. There is therefore no evidence at all for this view.

It is erroneous, in reply to the third objection against the chronicle, to suggest that the abbey of Margam was too obscure to be well informed. Just as Coggeshall was in a land of royal forest and manors, near London, just as St. Albans was on one of the great roads, so Margam had special advantages for hearing strange information. Gerald of Wales speaks of its importance, its hospitality, its connexion, when scarcity of corn made connexion useful, with Bristol.²⁵ When we turn to the Margam records we find no ignorant and secluded community, but a powerful house, favoured and harassed alternately by great neighbours who were some of the greatest barons in England and the Marches,²⁶ an abbey which lay on the road from England to Ireland, and was twice visited by King John himself²⁷—at one time under the king's special protection, favoured almost as much as his peculiar foundation, the Cistercian house of Beaulieu.²⁸ The delightful studies of M. Bédier have shown us that the information and influence of a monastery depended not so much upon its general position as upon the road on which it lay, or upon what friends the abbot had. He has demonstrated that the isolated and obscure house of Saint-Guilhem-du-Désert could mould the history of a great epic cycle, because it was visited by pilgrims on their way to Compostella.²⁹ Conversely special information could make a chronicle of the most meagre and unpretentious range a very valuable authority. The monks of Coggeshall knew a great deal more about Richard's captivity than did many great abbeys, because Anselm, the king's chaplain, 'told us all these things as he saw and heard them.' Now is it possible

²⁵ *Opera* (Rolls Series), vi. 67-68.

²⁶ G. T. Clark, *Cartae et alia Munimenta quae ad Dominium de Glamorgan pertinent*, especially vol. iii. *passim* (Cardiff, 1891).

²⁷ *Rot. de Liberate*, &c., pp. 172, 229 ; *Annales Monastici*, i. 30. In his *History of Margam* (London, 1877) Mr. W. de Gray Birch suggested that there was some connexion between John's presence at and favours to the abbey, and its chronicler's knowledge of Arthur's death (pp. 176-180).

²⁸ *Ann. Mon.*, i. 30.

²⁹ *Les Légendes Épiques*, vol. i. (Paris, 1908).

to suggest the chief channel of communication open to the monks of Margam ?

In reading the chronicle one or two suggestions occur to mind which must be put aside. It might be observed that the compiler seems to have been interested in Bec. He knows that Sainte-Marie-de-Pré is a priory of Bec ; he notes that Hugh of Nonant, bishop of Coventry, died at Bec in 1158. Again, it is worthy of mention that in November 1203 Margam had an agent at Rome, who was engaged in securing lengthy privileges and confirmations from Pope Innocent III.³⁰ On his journey to and from Rome the person entrusted with the business of the abbey, whether a monk or not, could acquire information which might interest his employers. But it is not very likely that this would be of unique importance. Let us approach the problem from the other direction and ask who was likely to know what happened before and after the murder of Arthur. Ralph of Coggeshall says that Arthur was entrusted to the care of Robert of Vieuxpont at Rouen ; but Robert was a north-country magnate, nor does he appear in the story of the murder. He was a busy official who probably did not live constantly at Rouen.³¹ Two of John's companions and counsellors however were very conspicuous in Glamorgan, and both of them probably knew a good deal more than they cared to say. William the Marshall, earl of Pembroke, and William of Briouze (de Braosa) granted privileges to or attested the charters of Margam more than once. The Marshall kept absolute silence. It is difficult to say to what extent he knew how Arthur died. He was certainly acquainted with the course of the negotiations which followed the murder during 1204-1205, since he was one of the embassy. I think that his biographer knew a good deal, and hints at Arthur's fate, but there is not a word of explicit reference to the matter in the poem which tells us so many new things.³² Nor were the Marshall's lands in South Wales near the abbey of Margam. But William of Briouze was in a very different position. The story of his life would, if it were thoroughly known, be the most important record we could have of the personal history of John and his baronage during the first part of the reign. He was the king's constant companion during the Norman campaigns. It is well known that the official records reveal the presence of

³⁰ Clark, *op. cit.* iii. 225-234.

³¹ Coggeshall, p. 143. He was bailiff of Caen and the Roumois in 1203, and is identified by Stapleton with the Robert of Vieuxpont who was lord of Cumberland, and clung to John in 1216, while his brother joined the rebels (Stapleton, *Rotuli Scaccarii Normannie*, ii. cclxiv-cclxvii ; cf. Farrer, *Lancashire Pipe Rolls*, p. 258). After the loss of Normandy, Robert got some of Ralph Taisson's lands in Kent (*Rot. Norm.* p. 140).

³² There are possible hints in ii. 81, 145. For the Marshall's embassies see vol. iii. pp. 176-178, with Meyer's notes.

John near Rouen just about the time when, according to the Margam annals, the murder was committed.³³ William of Briouze was with him at the time. About 1207 he lost the king's favour, and in 1210 John tried to exterminate him and his family. His wife, Matilda, is said to have refused to hand over her children as hostages to the murderer of Arthur, and John pursued her thereafter with a ferocity unusual even in him. The grisly story of her and her son's death by starvation in Windsor is the most awful of many awful tales.³⁴ It is impossible to believe that the debts of William of Briouze were, as John said in the official account, the cause of this persecution.³⁵ The natural supposition is that this chosen companion knew too much to be allowed to live after he and so many others had quarrelled with the king. In 1210 he managed to escape to France; in 1211 he died and was buried at Corbeil on the eve of St. Lawrence.³⁶ All this we know apart from the evidence of Margam.

Now by far the most conspicuous person in the annals of Margam, and one of the most important figures in its records, is this William of Briouze. He was lord of Brecon, Radnor, and Gower. Between 1202 and 1207 he was responsible for the administration of Glamorgan, in which Margam lay.³⁷ He attests the charters of local benefactors to the abbey.³⁸ In the annals we are told how William of Briouze was chiefly responsible for John's accession to the throne in spite of his previous condemnation. Except the great semi-official chronicler, Roger of Howden, the Margam annalist is the only writer to mention this condemnation of John at the court of King Richard.³⁹ He is interested in William's life and alone tells us that after his death in France he was buried by the exile Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury. Finally, the relations of John and William were a theme of popular tradition in South Wales nearly eighty years after the death of Arthur. On 23 February 1203 John had granted the land of Gower to William. In 1279 the earl of Warwick contested the right of

³³ See the itinerary appended to Sir T. D. Hardy's introd. to *Rot. Litt. Patent.* (1835); cf. Miss Norgate, ii. 430. That William of Briouze was present is clear from the attestations; e.g. *Rot. Norm.* p. 86.

³⁴ See Meyer's long note in *Hist. de Guill. le Maréchal*, iii. 156; *Dict. of Nat. Biogr.* s.v. 'Braose,' for authorities; e.g. Rog. Wendover, ii. 49 (Rolls Series).

³⁵ *Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland*, i. no. 408.

³⁶ Rog. Wendover, ii. 69; Matthew Paris, *Chron. Mai.* ii. 532; *Annales Monastici*, v. 40, and index.

³⁷ See John's charter of 3 June 1200 in Clark (iii. 177), and the extent of 1235 (iii. 381); also *Rot. Litt. Pat.* p. 19 (23 October 1202) and p. 68 b (1207).

³⁸ Clark, iii. 144, 217. In 1193 William attested a charter of John, then earl of Mortain, at Cardiff (i. 33). An interesting charter of Robert, son of Wian, granted to the abbey a lease of land for six years from Michaelmas 1197, 'que videlicet festivitatis Sancti Michaelis tercia secuta est captionem castelli de Sancto Claro factam per Willelmum de Brausa' (iii. 169).

³⁹ *Ann. Monast.* i. 24.

William's descendant to this honour, and especially to the castle of Swansea, on several grounds, including the significant plea that William had extorted the original charter from John when the king was in a panic and feared that his companion was going to leave him.⁴⁰ In short, the man who was most in John's confidence was William of Briouze, and if any chronicler was likely to hear about the death of Arthur and its consequences it was the chronicler of Margam.

There is another significant fact which, so far as I know, has never been noticed, but which adds an element of certainty to this view. It has often been observed that the Margam story only reappears in one place—and there with some variation—in the epic, *Philippid*, of King Philip's chaplain William the Breton. The variations are not great, and show that the chaplain was giving the same story independently. Now it is very curious that he singles out William of Briouze, who is not mentioned elsewhere in the poem, as the spokesman of those barons who were with John near Rouen at the time of Arthur's death. John brought Arthur to Rouen (I summarise the flowery verses) and aroused the suspicions of the barons. William of Briouze declared that he would be responsible for him no longer, and that he handed him over safe and sound. After a moody seclusion at the royal manor of Moulineux, John did away with his nephew at Rouen by night.⁴¹ This comes in book vi., which with the beginning of book vii. has been shown with some probability to have been composed before 1214.⁴² As William the Breton wrote his poem in three years, this part could not have been composed much earlier than 1214, in any case after the flight of William of Briouze to France. He was in almost constant attendance upon Philip, and likely to hear what was going on. He would be interested in the famous fugitive who had experienced such a turn of fortune and fled like a beggar from the English coast. Is it not possible that at last the full story of the murder was known at the French court, and that in the *Philippid* we get the tale—naturally favourable to William of Briouze—which is found elsewhere only in the chronicle of a Welsh abbey? This would partly account for the terror and atrocities of John during these years, for the alliance between Philip and the English barons, and for the projected invasion. It would be tempting to suggest that it was then that Philip summoned John to appear for his crime; but this is impossible.

⁴⁰ P.R.O., K.R. Miscell. Books, vol. i. p. 478 b, 8 Edw. I.; printed in Clark, iii. 532.

⁴¹ *Philippid*, vi. 470-564.

⁴² Delaborde, *Notice sur Rigord et Guillaume le Breton* (prefixed to his edition) pp. lxx seqq. The references to Arthur's death in William's Continuation of Rigord are less elaborate, but equally decisive (cf. *Historiens de France*, xvii. 89).

This analysis has, I think, enabled us to form a juster idea of the value of the Margam chronicle, and to trace to some extent the origin of the most detailed account which has come down to us of Arthur's death. I have maintained that the Margam narrative is to be regarded as a whole, and therefore, unless very serious evidence were brought against it, we are forced to the belief that Philip's court probably did condemn John a second time. Louis' proctor in 1216 said he was condemned to death; the Margam chronicle and later tradition are content to say that he was sentenced to lose all his continental possessions. It is quite possible that, after the revelations and awful crimes of 1210, when John was excommunicated, and Philip had been urged by the pope to deprive him entirely, Philip's court had proceeded to a sentence of death. The language used in 1216 suggests that the repudiation of allegiance by the English barons followed the French judgment after no very long interval. Still, this is only possible. What seems impossible is that Louis told a lie in 1216 and that the annals of Margam, the tradition in Brittany, and the independent testimony of Matthew Paris are at fault. With the argument that the condemnation must have taken place in 1203 I have dealt already; it depends on the partly erroneous belief of our authorities that it caused the loss of Normandy. Yet everybody would agree that the death of Arthur gave strength to the French king, and if so a formal sentence of confiscation, as soon as he was sure of Arthur's death, would strengthen him much more. The other arguments against the condemnation are negative—the late and unsatisfactory nature of the authorities and the silence of the chief records and chronicles. But we have seen that the annals of Margam are not so very unsatisfactory after all. There is very late testimony to the condemnation, which has been rejected by M. Petit-Dutaillis with some contumely.⁴³ This is the marginal note inserted by Matthew Paris in the documents preserved by Roger of Wendover. Matthew breaks in to tell the true story. What really happened, he says, was this: King John sent the bishop of Ely and Hubert de Burgh to Philip to say that he was ready to stand a trial, but Philip insisted on his presence without a safe-conduct. The embassy replied that, even if the duke of Normandy could attend, the king of England could hardly do so without a guarantee of safety. And so the *magnates Francie* proceeded to condemn him unjustly in his absence. It is probable that this late story is not quite true. Eustace of Ely was certainly one of the embassy of 1204, and may have been sent on a special errand as well. That Hubert de Burgh went is not so likely.⁴⁴ But the story is not to be dismissed

⁴³ *Rev. Historique*, lxxi. (1899), p. 35.

⁴⁴ *Chron. Mai.* ii. 658. For Eustace, bishop of Ely, see Coggeshall (p. 144), whose narrative is not at all a bad parallel to Matthew Paris. Hubert de Burgh was

summarily simply because Matthew Paris sometimes makes a blunder; for it clearly represents an independent tradition—independent, that is, of the document of 1216—and therefore corroborates, so far as it is worth anything, the Margam annals.

III.

I should say a word about the last important argument used by M. Bémont and his followers, the argument from silence. It may be admitted that this is invalid so far as the chroniclers are concerned. If the murder passed unrecorded, the condemnation obviously would also. But what about the French registers and the papal registers; and why did not William the Breton, who says so much about Arthur, enlarge upon the condemnation? But the French registers were not kept systematically like the English records, and there is no mention of *any* condemnation upon them or in Philip's charters. Philip wrote about the first trial to the pope, but our only authority is the pope's answer; no official record would tell us anything. The French court of 'peers' was like the English *curia regis*—in its broadest sense—in this, that its proceedings could pass unnoticed by the ordinary man if they were not recorded. John's trial after Richard's return passed almost unnoticed in England. Everything was very informal, and the trial of John is really of importance to the French historian and jurist because it seems to suggest the beginnings of something a little more formal.⁴⁵ I have purposely avoided all the juridical arguments of M. Guilhiermoz; if the historical evidence is lacking, the judicial can hardly be adduced; but although I think the historical evidence is sufficient to allow us to believe in the condemnation, I would also urge that these semi-legal, semi-political, proceedings would easily escape the attention of contemporaries. They hardly form a theme for the chaplain's epic. He was content to say that Philip hastened to take vengeance, that *Iohanni retribui possit pro morte nepotis*, and this is not altogether unjuridical.⁴⁶ Since John did not appear, the trial would be short, and all the more easily disregarded.

Great stress, again, has been laid on the silence of the papal letters of 1203. If the trial took place later this is not surprising. And after all, it is not hard to see why Innocent should refrain from mentioning the subject. The point is that he does not mention

at this time custodian of Chinon, but it is quite possible that he was engaged in another capacity in the early months of 1204. Note how studiously vague the Marshall's biographer is about the proposals of peace (iii. 176).

⁴⁵ How relatively unimportant the undeniable (first) trial was is seen from any consecutive account of the French court, e.g. Viollet, *Hist. des Institutions Politiques*, iii. 301-2.

⁴⁶ v. 16 (ed. Delaborde, ii. 177).

the disappearance of Arthur, of which he must have heard. It is certain that Arthur disappeared, yet there is no allusion to him; surely then it is rather illogical to say that John was not tried for the death of Arthur, because the pope does not refer to the trial. At this time Innocent was anxious to bring about peace between Philip and John in the interests of the king of the Romans, Otto. He was also in the midst of his efforts to rescue the unfortunate wife of Philip, Ingeborg, from her imprisonment. So far as he took sides he was certainly supporting John rather than Philip.⁴⁷ The documents of 1216 show that he had heard about Arthur, and professed to think that his death was justified; in 1205 he simply refused to advise the Norman clergy. After his quarrel with John, a few years later, he doubtless would make much of the death of Arthur; but here a significant fact appears to show us how vain is this argument from silence. On 31 October 1213 he wrote to Nicholas, bishop of Tusculum, his legate in France, ordering him to collect and destroy by fire every letter which he had written against John to the English bishops, whether before or after the interdict of March 1208, and especially one letter which had been distributed through France, England, Scotland, Ireland, and in the bishoprics of Liège and Utrecht.⁴⁸ Surely we can no longer wonder that Innocent's letters tell us nothing of the fate of Arthur. It is a curious and noteworthy fact that the chancery rolls for the very years when John was busiest in his furious attacks on the clergy and barons have also been destroyed.

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⁴⁷ Scheffer-Boichorst in *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte*, viii. (1868), 511-6.

⁴⁸ See *Epist.* xvi. 133, in Migne, *Patrol. Lat.* cxxvi. 926.