

NOTES AND STUDIES

ON THE IDENTITY OF BERNARD OF CLUNY.

THE identity of Bernard of Cluny, author of the mediaeval poem *De contemptu mundi* (Wright *Satirical Poets of the Twelfth Century* vol. ii pp. 1-102 (Rolls Series)), is shrouded in obscurity. He is so unimportant a figure in history that historians have not noticed him. He is of interest only to hymnologists. These writers, misled by the geographic term *Morlanensis* appended to his name in its Latin form, have assumed that he was a native of Morlaix in Brittany. Indeed, it is astonishing to what conjectures this false analogy has led some writers. Now the mediaeval Latin form of Morlaix is *Mons relix* or *Mons relaxatus* (Lalanne *Dictionnaire historique de la France*, in loco), from which it is impossible to derive the form *Morlanensis* by any process known to the Latin language. Professor Jackson in a prefatory note to Mr Henry Preble's English prose translation of Bernard's poem conjectures that he may have hailed from Morlas, near Pau, the capital of the old province of Béarn (*American Journal of Theology*, January, 1906, p. 72). This seems possible. The form *Morlanensis* is the natural adjective derived from Morlas. I hope to shew, however, that it is more probable that Bernard of Cluny came from *Murles*¹; that he belonged to the house of the seigneurs of Montpellier and was, therefore, of noble birth; that he became a monk first in the monastery of St Sauveur d'Aniane, whence he passed to the abbey of Cluny, probably during the rule of the abbot Pons (1109-1122).

The evidence for this opinion, it is admitted, is not absolute, but constructive and inferential. Yet in the entire absence of any positive information as to Bernard's place of birth its use may be permitted.²

¹ The difference between *Morlas* and *Murles* is immaterial. Spelling was not uniform in the Middle Ages. In Teulet *Layettes du Trésor* no. 166 a charter of Louis VII, dated June, 1161, is witnessed by one Guellelmus de *Murles*. Two hundred years later the Avignonese pope, Clement VI, established the college of St Martial, in connexion with the University of Montpellier, in a house acquired from Guillaume Pons de *Morlanes* (*Hist. du Lang.* ix 639), in Bas-Languedoc, in the diocese of Maguelonne-Montpellier.

² There is but one historical allusion to Bernard of Cluny known. From Martène's *Thes. Nov. Anecd.* v 1585 note it appears that some of his sermons survived him, and that he sought the criticism of abbot Peter the Venerable regarding them. Cf. Bourgain *La chaire française du XII^e siècle* pp. 77 and 194.

The beginnings of the house of Montpellier are very obscure. The founder of it, so far as we have knowledge, was a certain seigneur named William, who in 975 acquired the town of Montpellier, which he held in fief from the bishop of Maguelonne (*Hist. du Lang.* iv 180). The house rose to prominence in the third generation, when William V went upon the first crusade in 1099, whence he returned in 1103 (his exploits are narrated in *Hist. du Lang.* iii 482, 491, 499, 503, 512, 515, 522, 540). Two years later, in 1105, he again took the road of the cross (*ibid.* 577). After his return from this expedition, still pining for adventure, in company with the viscount of Narbonne, he organized a successful expedition in 1116 against the Saracens in the island of Minorca (*ibid.* 620-622). In January, 1121, in anticipation of his decease, William V made his will. He had three sons, of whom the eldest was not yet twenty-five, namely, William VI, who succeeded him as seigneur of Montpellier and count of Melgueil (†1162); another William, in whose favour he disposed of the châteaux of Omelas (Omelas or Olmet was a *maisonfort* in the diocese of Lodève—cf. Luchaire *Cat. des actes de Louis VII* no. 461), Popian, and Pouget in the diocese of Beziers, with other fiefs in the viscounties of Beziers and Narbonne; Bernard, the third son—the object of this sketch—and three daughters, Guillemette, Ermengarde, and Adelaide. To Bernard the father left the five châteaux of Villeneuve, Frontignan, Montbazen, Cournon-Sec, and Pignan, in the diocese of Maguelonne. The two younger daughters were provided for in money. As to Guillemette, the eldest, she had made a notable marriage and carried with her as dowry to her husband five fiefs and half of her father's moveables. Guillemette's husband was Bernard IV, count of Melgueil, son of count Raymond-Béranger II (†circa 1120), who was own brother of Pons, abbot of Cluny from 1109 to 1122, a fact not without significance (*Hist. du Lang.* iv 178, where the genealogy of the house is given; cf. *ibid.* iii 644 and iv note xxxvi § 7 no. ccclxxxv). Among the fiefs which constituted the dowry was the château de *Marles*, which I believe to have been her brother Bernard of Cluny's birthplace (see the details of William V's testament in *Hist. du Lang.* iii 644-645; the text of the will is in vol. v p. 92 ff). Our interest is centred upon this marriage of Bernard's sister, for the events following soon after it seem to have been the turning-point in his career.

Shortly after this time the ambition of the house of Toulouse, which already dominated lower Languedoc, brought the two rival houses of southern France, Toulouse and Provence, into collision. Alphonse-Jourdain, count of Toulouse, had been born in Syria, and succeeded his elder brother Bertrand in the title in 1122. He was a fierce and ambitious noble who coveted the lands of all his neighbours, even those of the powerful lords of Barcelona and Poitou. Alphonse-Jourdain

coveted the overlordship of Montpellier, although the seigneurs of Montpellier were ancient vassals of the count of Provence (*Hist. du Lang.* iii 458-459), and seems to have found a pretext in the marriage of Bernard IV of Melgueil into the house of Montpellier to make war upon it, claiming to be its suzerain. This pretention seems soon to have led to war with the count of Provence in the hope of gaining a foothold on the Rhone (*ibid.* iii 685-687). The details of this war are not known. The most important event seems to have been the siege of Orange, then a feudal dependancy of Provence, during the course of which the cathedral of the city was utterly destroyed. For this offence Alphonse-Jourdain was excommunicated and compelled to go to the Holy Land as a penance (*ibid.* 654-655). Henceforth the count of Toulouse claimed the title of count of Provence also, although the claim was far from having been made entirely good (*ibid.* 664-665). But the power of the seigneurs of Montpellier was broken in this war. Most of the inheritance of William V was swallowed up by the counts of Toulouse. Henceforward their history is bound up chiefly with the house of Orange through the marriage of William V's second son, William d'Omélas, to Tiburge, countess of Orange (*ibid.* 797 ff). William VI, as representative of the house of Montpellier, was compelled to permit the ferocious Alphonse-Jourdain to dispose of his lands and direct his policy. (*ibid.* 684 ff). Even his own city of Montpellier once drove him out (*ibid.* 720-727). For a time he sought an elusive renown in warring against the Saracens in Spain. But finally William VI renounced the world in despair. He entered the Cistercian monastery of Grandselve in 1149, and died there in 1169 (*ibid.* iii 737, 741, 819).¹ Of the younger daughters of William VI nothing is known, and the same is true of Bernard, the third son, unless the conjecture of this article be correct, that witnessing the dispossession of his house and the strife of the world, Bernard found asylum in the abbey of Cluny.

In order to sustain this thesis farther, we must have recourse to another sort of inferential evidence. It is necessary to understand something of the influence of Cluny in the valley of the Rhone. Perhaps when this is done, from these two sorts of evidence, a conclusion may be justifiably drawn that the author of 'Jerusalem the Golden' was Bernard of the house of Montpellier, whose birthplace was the château de Murles.

The abbey of Cluny was founded upon high ideals in 910 by William, duke of Aquitaine, as a protest against the secular spirit then prevailing

¹ Grandselve was taken under the protection of the crown by Philip III in 1279, Langlois *Le règne de Philippe le Hardi* p. 179; it was ruined during the Hundred Years' War, Denifle *La désolation des monastères* p. 82.

among the clergy of Gaul. Fifty years after its foundation the influence of Cluny extended over every country of Christendom. 'At the end of two centuries,' in the words of M. Luchaire, 'it was the capital of the vastest monastic empire Christianity had ever known.'¹ The pages of Raoul Glaber, a Cluniac monk of the eleventh century, while often grossly inaccurate in point of detail, and laden with credulous stories, nevertheless testify to the great influence Cluny enjoyed in the Rhone valley. One of the three places in southern France particularly mentioned by Raoul is Uzège (p. 97). Now the counties (*pagi*) of Uceticus, Substantionis, and Magalonensis were three adjacent fiefs (Longnon *Atlas Historique* iii 157), and the last two in the eleventh century were in the possession of the house of Melgueil (*Magalonensis*) into which the house of Montpellier, as we have seen, had married.

But it is possible to be more definite on this point. It is a matter of demonstration that the influence of Cluny was directly and powerfully at work in Provence and Languedoc in the immediate environment of Montpellier at this time. The abbey of St Sauveur d'Aniane, made for ever famous by the life and work of Benedict of Aniane, was situated in a narrow valley in the diocese of Maguelonne, not far from Montpellier (*Hist. du Lang.* iv 447). Nearer still was the monastery of St Pierre de Sauzat, a Cluniac foundation (*ibid.* iii 826). It has already been observed that Bernard's eldest brother, William VI of Montpellier, became a Cistercian monk in 1149. It is more to the point that seventeen years earlier Bernard IV of Melgueil, whose marriage with Guillemette of Montpellier had been followed by the war so disastrous for the house of Montpellier, had abandoned the world (1132) and entered the abbey of St Chaffre-en-Velai (*ibid.* 684). These instances may be said to illustrate the leaning of the house of Melgueil (into which it must be remembered that the house of Montpellier was married) towards monasticism. But the most striking example of this monastic leaning has yet to be noticed. The uncle of Bernard IV of Melgueil was no less a person than Pons, seventh abbot of Cluny (*Hist. du Lang.* iii 583-584, iv 179, Lorain 77). Pons was a godson of Paschal II and was one of the arbitrators of the conflict between that pope and the emperor, Henry V. He was consecrated to the abbot's office by the archbishop of Vienne, the future pope Calixtus II (Lorain 77-78). It was Pons who so ably argued for the privileges of the abbey at the council of Rheims in 1119 (see the discourse in *Ord. Vit.* iv 376-378). This was the year also in which the king of France, Louis VI, took the

¹ See the admirable account of the growth of Cluny in Lavissee *Histoire de France* vol. ii pt. ii pp. 123-132. The history of its growth has been many times recorded; cf. Lorain *Hist. de l'abbaye de Cluny* cc. 1-7; Cucherat *Cluny au XI^{me} siècle*, and, above all, Sackur *Die Cluniacenser*.

great abbey of Cluny, together with its priories, under the royal protection, pronouncing it to be 'a notable member of his kingdom' (*nobilius membrum regni nostri*, Luchaire *Cat. des actes de Louis VI* no. 276).

Pons was at the height of his power as abbot of Cluny when the crash of war came between the counts of Toulouse and Provence, which so diminished the power of the seigneurs of Montpellier. May we not believe that he offered Cluny as a place of retreat to that member of his nephew's family whose nature, perhaps, was not rugged enough to struggle with the world in this age of blood and iron? We know that this was one of the missions and functions of the monastery in the Middle Ages. What a picture is that Sabatier has drawn: 'Let us picture to ourselves the Italy of the beginning of the thirteenth century (we may with justice substitute the name of France and the twelfth century) with its divisions, its perpetual warfare, its depopulated country districts . . . sieges terminated by unspeakable atrocities, and after all this famine, speedily followed by pestilence to complete its devastation. Then let us picture to ourselves the rich Benedictine abbeys, veritable fortresses set upon the hilltops whence they seemed to command all the surrounding plains. There was nothing surprising in their prosperity. Shielded by their inviolability, they were in these disordered times the only refuge of peaceful souls and timid hearts. The monks were in great majority deserters from life, who from motives entirely aside from religion had taken refuge behind the only walls which at this period were secure' (Sabatier *Life of St Francis of Assisi* p. xix. In a note the author adds that down to the year 1000 A.D. 1108 monasteries had been founded in France. The eleventh century saw the birth of 326, and the twelfth of 702).

Is it any wonder that the soul of such a man, saved out of such an environment of blood and dust and fire within the peaceful cloisters of Cluny, and there nurtured by so powerful a personality, spiritual and intellectual, as Peter the Venerable, broke into song? That the combat between the world-present and the world-ideal of the Middle Ages, heightened and coloured by a monastically-trained imagination—and that in the greatest cloister of Christendom—enabled him to see the Holy City, the Jerusalem on high, with the vision of a poet? I believe that Bernard of Cluny's immortal poem is not merely the rhapsody of a spiritual enthusiast, but the partial reflexion of his own life; that by reading between the lines we may see not only Bernard of Cluny, but Bernard of Montpellier also, who with the humility of monastic self-renunciation and perhaps with a certain scorn of the domains his house had lost, preferred to be known not by his ancestral title, but by the name of the place where he was born, his father's château Murles, and so wrote himself Bernardus *Morlanensis*. If this theory be true, and

the evidence of this article be not regarded as too intangible, there is a personal positive significance to be attached to such lines as these :—

O home of fadeless splendour,
Of flowers that bear no thorn ;
Where they shall dwell *as children*
Who here as exiles mourn.

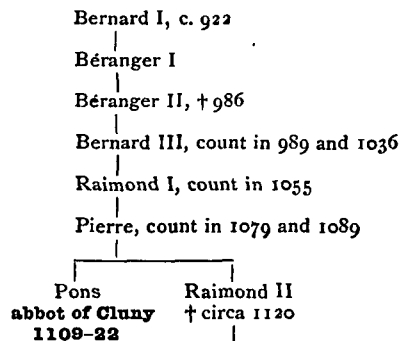
Bernard must have been a boy when calamity overtook his family, for he was the third son, and perhaps even a later child than that ; his eldest brother was not yet twenty-five at the time their father died. There may be a real historic background, in Bernard's own experience of his childhood and exile from home, for these lines.

There are a few other particles of evidence which may be added in order to conclude this demonstration of the identity of Bernard of Cluny. When William V, Bernard's father, died in 1121, his wife was pregnant. In his will he expressed the wish that his unborn child, if a son, should become a monk in the abbey of St Sauveur d'Aniane ; if a daughter, that she should embrace conventual life in the same foundation (*Hist. du Lang.* v 892). Nothing is known as to the birth of this child ; it may not have lived. Is it not possible that the father's dying wish that one of his offspring might become a monk had some influence in inducing Bernard to renounce the world ? This supposition is borne out by the only known historical allusion to Bernard after his father's death. In 1156, when the eldest brother, William VI, was living the life of a religious recluse at Grandselve, he alluded in his will to the fact that his brother Bernard had left the honour of Flexus to Aniane (*Hist. du Lang.* v 1177 'Salvo eidem monasterio (Anianensi) honorem de Flexo, . . . quem honorem frater meus Bernardus reliquerat quondam Anianinsi monasterio').

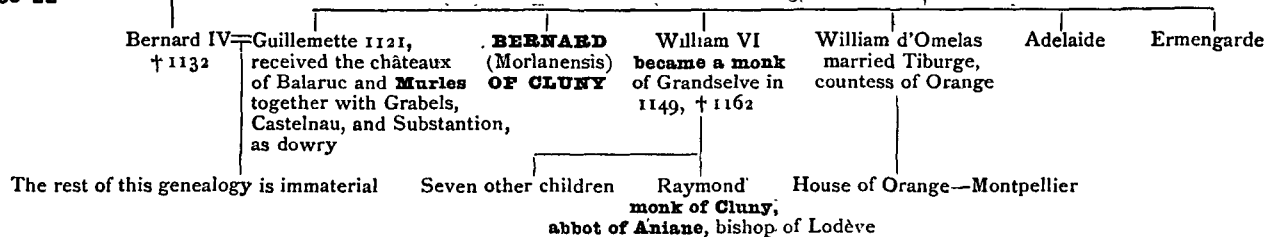
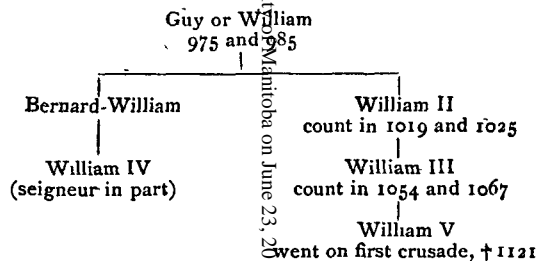
JAMES WESTFALL THOMPSON.

Genealogical Table to illustrate the Ancestry of Bernard of Cluny.

COUNTS OF SUBSTANTION AND MELGUEIL.



SEIGNEURS DE MONTPELLIER.



From *Hist. du Lang.* iv 179 and 184.]