

*Henry of Blois and Brian Fitz-Count.*

THE Anglo-Norman baron was not infrequently a patron of literary men ; and to this circumstance we are indebted for what we know of his attitude towards the great questions of his age. Within certain limits this information is of value. No doubt we receive from William of Malmesbury—to take a favourable example—such a version of events as Earl Robert of Gloucester desired to set before posterity. But no professional advocate, however skilful in his exposition, can tell us what, as historians, we most desire to know. It is not merely or chiefly that he suppresses the facts which incriminate his clients. These we may easily enough obtain from the writers of the other faction. The more serious shortcoming of such an advocate is that, even where he states fairly enough the principles which were held to justify a given course of action, he gives them the colour of his own idiosyncrasy. He has his own way of marshalling the arguments ; and he often adduces arguments which would scarcely have occurred to the men for whom he speaks. But the historian is as much concerned with men as with principles ; the temperament of the politician is to him no less interesting and important than the idea which the politician represents. Even if the historian believes that the mainspring of feudal policy was a naive and brutal egotism, he cannot believe that feudal politicians were fully alive to the sordid character of their own motive. There is evidence enough that even Geoffrey de Mandeville had followers to whom he appeared in the light of a respectable and injured man. It is only reasonable to suppose that he and his like deceived themselves before they were able to deceive others. Self-knowledge is rare in any age—rarest of all in an age so unintellectual, so strenuous, and so eventful as the twelfth century. Now the truth about men is only one part of history ; the myths which they make about themselves, and which they succeed in circulating, are also to be carefully considered. For it is in these myths that the ideals of any age are most infallibly revealed ; not indeed the ideals of the best minds, but the ideals of the market-place, the conventional standards of morality.

We can never understand feudalism as a factor in history until we correct our conception of feudalism in the abstract by studying the mental processes of the individual feudatory. He was not to himself or to the majority of those who came in contact with him the mere incarnation of a centrifugal and disruptive individualism. He looked at political questions through a haze of sentiment and of tradition. So much we can imagine without the help of documents. But to estimate what sentiments and what traditions blurred his vision at a particular moment is less easy. And we are seldom supplied with the evidence that we require for arriving at an estimate.

No doubt confidential letters were exchanged, and manifestos were dispersed, whenever a crisis was at hand. Few however of these documents have come down to us from the age when feudalism was still robust and unsophisticated. Therefore we have in general to be content with secondary sources of information. We know how the baron of the Anglo-Norman epoch appeared to the minstrel, the monk and the esurient scholar. We know what was thought of his aims and his manœuvres by kings and lawyers and highly placed ecclesiastics. But it is a rare piece of good fortune when he speaks in his own person. He may not be telling the truth; even so, we are glad to know the lines on which he thought it desirable to lie, the excuses which he thought would vindicate his conduct in the eyes of honourable men.

These considerations may serve to explain why we call attention to the following correspondence. One of the writers is a bishop, but a bishop of the political kind; the other is one of those barons who fill the background of twelfth-century history—a man of reputation in his time, but now a lay figure associated with a few notable events. The tone of the correspondence is controversial. It suggests that the writers are less anxious to convert each other than to win public sympathy for their wrongs and the causes which they represent. The style is rhetorical and epigrammatic, but not so good as to suggest the assistance of expert secretaries.<sup>1</sup>

Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester, the author of our first letter, is sufficiently well known to make description superfluous. We may remark that the letter confirms the traditional estimate of his character. He was a man who swung rapidly round from one position to another, as the interests of his class or feelings of wounded vanity suggested. He had a remarkable gift of discovering that duty pointed in the same direction as expediency, and of crediting his opponents with the worst designs and motives. It is characteristic that he should appear in this letter as the dignified censor of one whose main offence consisted in refusing to change sides as often as himself.

The subject of his reproof is Brian of Wallingford—the son of a Breton count, Alan Fergant, who had won the favour of Henry I by faithful service at Tinchebrai and elsewhere. Brian had been educated at the English court. To judge from the frequency with which he attests the charters of Henry I he must afterwards have held some office in the royal household. In or before 1127 he became *firmarius* of Wallingford; and the importance of this stronghold

<sup>1</sup> Our text is taken from a volume of Dodsworth's transcripts, no. 88, f. 76 (Bodleian library). He does not state the source from which he obtained the letters, of which he appears to have seen the originals. But the volume in which his copies occur is largely made up of extracts made in northern libraries and archives. The letters refer to an earlier correspondence between the writers, but this is not given by Dodsworth.

gave him considerable prominence in the civil war between Stephen and the empress. From 1139 to the close of the war he held Wallingford in the Angevin interest. It was the most easterly outpost of his party in the Thames valley; his communications with the West were precarious; and we can easily believe his own statement that he could only provide for his garrison by plundering non-combatants. This was the common practice of the more disreputable leaders on his side; but he could raise the plea of necessity with more show of reason than a Robert fitz Hubert or a Philip Gay. With such adventurers he had little in common. They fought for their own hands; they took pleasure in destruction and in deeds of cruelty. Brian fitz Count was already a man of assured wealth and position before he joined the empress. He risked much, he lost everything; and we do not hear that he asked for any of the rewards which were heaped upon less deserving adherents of his party. If he made war in grim earnest, it was because he stood with his back to the wall, disinherited and desperate. Reading between the lines of the letter we can see that he was sensitive to the ignominy of his position, and anxious to vindicate his conduct. The imputation of robbing the Church stings him to the quick. He boasts that he makes war according to the rules of war. His apology, though not unimpeachable in the point of Latinity, bears out his reputation as a man of some learning and acute intelligence. He rings the changes on sarcasm and argument with good effect. Evidently he possessed a fair share of the perfervid Celtic temper. Whatever part self-interest had played in determining his policy, he speaks as one consumed with honest indignation, a Cavalier of the twelfth century who has staked his all in obedience to the dictates of personal loyalty. Come what may, he is not minded to forsake the daughter of the king whose bread he has eaten in better days. We are irresistibly reminded of the profession of faith made under analogous circumstances by Sir Edmund Verney, the stout-hearted standard-bearer of King Charles I.

But the Angevin party were in one respect less fortunate than the royalists of Stuart times. The English clergy, after declaring for Matilda with no uncertain voice, went back to the allegiance of her rival within the space of a few months. It is doubtful whether men of Brian's stamp had been much influenced by zeal for clerical privilege at the time when they joined the empress. But they were naturally exasperated to find themselves deserted and denounced by those who had instigated rebellion in the name of religion. This is the reason of the contempt which Brian professes for his correspondent. They exchanged their letters at a time when the secession of Bishop Henry from the side of the empress was still a recent occurrence; when he still had hopes of bringing back to Stephen's side some of the men with whom he had compassed Stephen's

temporary overthrow. It is not so much the bishop's complaint of the wrong done to his men, as his inopportune attempts to convert Brian to his own way of thinking that provoke the hot-tempered Breton to close his letter with a formal challenge. Who is the bishop that he should talk of faith or honour? Respect may be due to his office; none is due to the man. It is Brian who has obeyed the mandate of the Church, who has gone out to battle in the spirit of the first Crusaders, who has sacrificed his last acre of land, not for fee or reward, but for the sake of honour. And this he stands prepared to prove against the bishop by battle or by ordeal.

The date of the correspondence can be determined within narrow limits. The letters were written after the siege of Winchester (September 1141), when Bishop Henry had recovered quiet possession of his cathedral city. Indeed the earliest occasion on which the fair of St. Giles, mentioned in the bishop's letter, can have been held is September 1142. On the other hand, the bishop's letter was written while he still held the title of legate. This expired, on the death of Innocent II, in September 1143. Some little time might elapse before the death of Innocent was known in England. But Brian's letter cites Miles of Gloucester among the witnesses who can prove the truth of his statements. Miles died in the last days of 1143. We have therefore good reason for dating these letters September 1142–January 1144. Brian cites other witnesses, including the citizens of Winchester and London. A comparison of his list with Matilda's charters shows that he mentions all the prominent individuals who are known to have been with her at Winchester and London in 1141, when the bishop was exercising his oratorical powers on her behalf. If the list is intended as an enumeration of Matilda's supporters at that date, it has the interest of being longer and more imposing than we should gather from the attestations of charters. It names William de Mohun, who was certainly at London in June 1141; but apparently he had deserted the empress by the time when Brian wrote his letter. This is the natural conclusion to be drawn from the contemptuous way in which he is contrasted with the Crusaders of the heroic period; *isti comites non fuerunt similes Comiti de Moyon*. In like manner the primate, Theobald, is denoted as 'the so-called archbishop' because he had returned to the allegiance of Stephen immediately after Bishop Henry had set the example.

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I.

*Carta Henrici Episcopi Wintonie.*

Henricus dei gratia Wintonie episcopus et sedis apostolice legatus Brientio filio Comitis, memorem esse uxoris Loth que respiciens in statuum

salis conversa est. Dum semper ad ea que retro sunt respicitis, offendiculum quod pre oculis habetis minus cauetis, eoque cicius corruere potestis. Cum in literis quas nouissime uobis direxi firmam pacem omnibus ad feriam meam uenientibus a uobis et uestris dari quesierim, nec in litteris a uobis mihi directis illa negaretur, res autem mee interim a uestris capte sint et terre et homines et camini mei inquietati; uidetur mihi de uobis et uestris minus confidendum esse, et uos, quod tamen mihi confiteri graue est nec cordi meo sedet, nisi correxeritis, inter infideles Anglie connumerabo quem usque modo semper de eorum genere esse nes[ci]ui. Sig<sup>o</sup> . . . e . . . dicte . . . at fideli de hiis que . . . rescribam. Sin autem aliter u . . . l.<sup>2</sup>

## II.

*Carta Brientii filii Comitis.*

Henrico nepoti Henrici Regis Brientius filius Comitis salutem. Miror multum, et admirandum est, et de hoc unde uos alloquor, uidelicet de hiis que uidi et audiui et in meo tempore fuere postquam etatem habui. Mentionem facitis de primo homine qui peccauit eo quod obedientiam non tenuit. De hoc respondi uobis.<sup>3</sup> Modo iterum de Loth et uxore sua mecum agitis. Quos nunquam uidi neque noui nec ciuitatem eorum, nec in uno tempore fuimus. Audiui tamen dicere quod Angelus precepit eis egredi ciuitatem qua manserant ne respicerent, et quia mulier respexit in statuam salis mutata fuit. Michi autem nunquam preceptum fuit quod [non] respicerem. Debeoque bene respicere ad precepta Sancte Ecclesie ut, recordando ea que michi sunt precepta, euitem contraria. Nam et uosmet, qui estis prelati Sancte Ecclesie, precepistis mihi filie Regis Henrici auunculi uestri adherere et eam auxiliari rectum suum acquirere, quod ui aufertur ei, et hoc quod modo habet retinere. Nec solum ad preceptum uestrum respicio sed antecessorum nostrorum illustrium dignos actus ad exemplum etiam mihi sumo. Cum enim Papa Vrbanus uenisset Turonum cum clero citroalpino concilio et precepto Dei populum affatus est de ciuitate Ierusalem, quam allophili possidebant; ad cuius ianuas Christianos peregrinos latenter aduenientes uerberabant, dispoliabant, occidebant. Ad quod deliberandum quicumque mouissent, et ex quo mouissent, ueniam et absolucionem omnium criminum suorum, sicut pape licet, eis spondebat. Multi igitur nobiles et strenui uiri edicto Apostolico commoti sunt, castraque sua et ciuitates et uxores et liberos et magnos honores peregrinatione [commu<sup>4</sup>]tauerunt. Sicut Stephanus comes, pater uester, Comes Robertus Normannie, Comes Sancti Egidii Remmundus, Boamundus, Robertus Comes Flandrie, Comes Eustachius Boleniensis, Dux Godefridus, et plures alii optimi milites et diuites. Et sciatis quod isti comites non fuerunt similes Comiti de Moyon. Dum enim ad tales et tantos uiros respicio, qui preceptum Pape fecerunt, qui sua tot et tanta reliquerunt, qui etiam Ierosolimam armis et assultu sicut boni milites conquisierunt, regemque bonum et legalem, nomine Godefridum, ibidem statuerunt; dumque ad preceptum uestrum respicio

<sup>2</sup> The original was evidently mutilated.

<sup>3</sup> We have here a reference to an earlier correspondence, of which there is no trace in the Dodsworth volumes.

<sup>4</sup> Blank in transcript.

filiam Henrici regis ad posse meum auxiliando ; non illic timeo offendiculum ubi me sustinet Sancte Ecclesie mandatum.

Rex Henricus dedit mihi terram. Sed ipsa mihi et hominibus meis sic auferitur pro uestro precepto, quod facio, quod in hoc extremo angusto non colligo unam acram bladi de terra quam dedit mihi ; et ideo non est mirum si capio ex alieno ad uitam meam et meorum hominum sustentandam. Et ad hoc agendum, quod mihi precepistis, nec de alieno quicquam cepissem si mea mihi relinquerentur. Sciat is quod nec ego nec homines hoc facimus pro pecunia uel feudo uel terra promissis nobis uel datis, sed tantum pro uestro precepto meaque legalitate et meorum hominum. Et de hoc precepto quod dico uos precepisse mihi traho testem : Teodbaldum quem uocant Archiepiscopum Cantuarie, Bernardum episcopum Sancti Dauid, Robertum episcopum Herefordie, Simonem episcopum Wigornie, episcopum Batoniensem (nescio nomen suum), Robertum episcopum Exonie, Saifridum episcopum Cicestrie, Rogerum episcopum Cestrie, Adelolfum episcopum Calleonensem, Alexandrum episcopum Lincolnie, Nigellum episcopum Heliensem, Euerardum episcopum Norwicensem, Robertum episcopum Londonensem, Hyllarium decanum de Christeschire [sic], David Regem Scottie, Robertum Comitem Gloecestrie, Milonem Gloecestrie, Radulfum Paganellum, Comitem Randulfum Cestrie, Willelmum Peuerel de Nottingham, Willelmum de Rusmare, Comitem Hugonem Northfolc, Albricum de Uer, Henricum de Essex, Rogerum de Ualumnes, Gillebertum filium Gilleberti, Gaufridum de Mandavilla, Osbertum Octo Denarios et omnes Londonienses, Willelmum de Pontearchie et omnes Wintonienses, Robertum de Lincoln, Robertum de Arundel, Baldewinum de Rieduers, Rogerum de Nunan, Reginaldum filium Auunculi uestri, Willelmum de Moyon, Willelmum de Curceio, Walterum de Chandos, Walterum de Pincheneia, Heliam Giffardum, Baderum, Gillebertum de Laceio, Robertum de Euias, Willelmum de Belcampo, Milonem de Belcampo, Iohannem de Bidun, Robertum de Albeni, Willelmum Peuerellum de Doura, Willelmum de Sai, Willelmum filium [Ric<sup>o</sup>]ardi, Rogerum de Warewic, Gaufridum de Clintone, Willelmum filium Alani. Isti sunt qui audierunt, etc.

Domine mee . . .<sup>o</sup> quod precepit ei obedienciaui et auxiliaui. Ideo debeo enumerari inter fideles Anglie, quia facio preceptum uestrum, testimonio supradictorum, in placito nec ante iusticiam. Hoc enim audiui in curia Regis Henrici, Auunculi uestri, quando aliquis aliquem esse calumpniabatur, qui accusatus erat, si non respondebat, ille erat forisfactus. Ideo quando mihi mandastis de feria uestra obseruanda, et non respondi uobis, scire potuistis quod nolui eam obseruare. Et tamen pro honore uestri et utilitate uestre ferie, si mandauissetis mihi qui meorum hominum cepissent res uestrorum feriantium, et quid ego, dirigi fecissem pro honore uostro et proficuo uestre ferie. De hoc autem quod me hucusque de grege infidelium negauistis multas uobis grates [ago], erga quem multum amorem in uera re habere desidero, et obedire per omnia ubi ferre potero. Sciat isque quod non merear amodo, pro posse meo et intelligentia, ut inter infideles enumerari debeam. Miseremini tandem pauperum et calamitatis eorum quibus iam ecclesia uix est refugium, et que cito in ipsis moritur si pax moratur.

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In litteris  
rubris  
conscripfit.

Sciant igitur omnes fideles Sancte Ecclesie quod ego Brientius filius  
Comitis, quem bonus rex Henricus nutriuit, et cui arma dedit  
et honorem, ea que in hoc scripto assero contra Henricum  
nepotem Regis Henrici, episcopum Wintonie et Apostolice sedis  
legatum, presto sum probare uel bello uel iudicio per unum clericum uel  
per unum laicum.

*Marie de France.*

THE known facts about Marie de France are related by Miss Rickert in the introduction to her edition of Marie's *Lays*<sup>1</sup>: 'I will tell my name that I may be remembered: I am called Marie and I am of France.' This is one of the few definite statements that the most famous writer of mediæval lays makes about herself. She says further that she has collected and translated her *Lays* in honour of an unnamed 'noble king' to whom she intends to present them; that she has translated her *Fables* 'which folk call Esope,' from English, for love of a certain 'Count William,' and that she has turned the *Purgatory of St. Patrick* into Romanz 'for God' and 'for the convenience of lay folk.' Denis Pyramus, a contemporary, refers to her as 'Dame Marie.' Upon these facts and upon other evidence taken from Marie's works, Miss Rickert proceeds to the following conclusions, partly founding them upon the authority of Dr. Warnke, the latest editor of the *Lays* and *Fables*.

Marie belongs to the second half of the twelfth century. The 'noble king' is Henry II. 'Count William' is William Longespée, Earl of Salisbury (1150-1226), a natural son of Henry II. The following are the approximate dates of Marie's works: (1) *The Lays*, 1160-1170; (2) *The Fables*, 1170-1180; (3) *The Purgatory*, after 1190. It is generally agreed that she did much or all of her literary work in England. The title 'Dame' bestowed upon her by Denis Pyramus indicates that she was a lady of rank. This is confirmed by her attainments—she knew French, Latin, and English; by the tone of her dedications taken in connexion with the rank of the persons to whom they were addressed; by the refinement of her work, and especially by her representation of *l'amour courtois*, an artificial love-code formulated in the twelfth century under the direction of Marie de Champagne, stepdaughter of Henry II. But Marie's conception of *l'amour courtois* is not altogether orthodox; usually she favours the lover as against the husband. The atmosphere which Marie unconsciously reveals in her work is the very

<sup>1</sup> *Marie de France, Seven of her Lays* (1901). For a bibliography, see *The Cambridge History of English Literature* i. 469; and see Dr. Karl Warnke's latest editions of the *Lays* and the *Fables* (1900) and H. L. D. Ward's *Catalogue of Romances*, i. (1883), 407-415, and ii. (1893) 291-307.