

A LETTER OF THE YOUNGER DESPENSER ON THE EVE OF THE  
BARONS' REBELLION, 21, MARCH 1321.

THE following letter is bound up with a miscellaneous collection of charters and papers in the Cottonian MS. Nero C. III., fo. 181. It is the original letter, for fragments of the wax of the seal still adhere to the back of the parchment.

The letter itself is of considerable interest, not only as showing the care that the younger Despenser devoted to his innumerable interests, but as being written just before the outbreak of the barons against him. Although the year is not given in the letter, any doubt as to the correctness of its ascription to 1321 will, I think, be removed by reference to the notes I have appended from the manuscript stores at the Public Record Office. Sir John Inge, to whom the letter is addressed, was named by the barons in August of this year as one of the ignorant judges who had abused the processes of the law in favour of the Despensers.<sup>1</sup> This letter shows that he was, like so many other ministers and officials, a creature and confidant of Despenser's. The favourite's expression of gratitude to Inge in this letter for his diligence in forwarding Herbert de Marisco's affairs in the matter of Lundy Island, which Despenser expresses his desire to purchase, tends to confirm the barons' condemnation of Inge, who was one of the three judges of assize at Exeter, although he did not preside at the taking of the assize in question. It is to be noted that the Exeter judgment was either reversed or ignored, for when the island was granted to Despenser in the following year it was described as forfeited by John de Wylyngton, the man from whom De Marisco recovered it.<sup>2</sup> Possibly the transactions regarding this island influenced Wylyngton in throwing in his lot with the other 'contrarians.'

Contemporary writers state that the outbreak of the barons was caused by the attempts of Despenser, who had received a third of the great earldom of Gloucester as his wife's purparty, to obtain possession of the portions of Hugh de Audley the younger and Roger d'Amory, the husbands of the other two heiresses.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, we have this upon much higher authority than that of any chronicler, for the barons made it a charge against Despenser in the process against him.<sup>4</sup> In the light of our public records it would be more correct to say that Despenser's efforts were restricted to the Welsh lands of the Gloucester inheritance. Partition of the inheritance after the death of the young earl at Bannockburn, on

<sup>1</sup> *Calendar of Close Rolls, Edward II*, iii. 493; Monk of Bridlington, in *Chron. of Edward I and II*, ii. 67.

<sup>2</sup> It was, no doubt, Despenser's ownership of this island that caused him to think of it as a refuge for himself and the fugitive king in 1326 (Geoffrey le Baker, p. 22).

<sup>3</sup> *Lanercost Chronicle*, p. 241; *Flores Historiarum*, iii. 194, 342.

<sup>4</sup> See the references in note 1.

24 June 1314, was delayed for some time, first in the expectation of the birth of an heir,<sup>5</sup> and secondly by desire of the parceners.<sup>6</sup> It was not until 15 Nov. 1317 that orders were issued for delivery of the portions of the inheritance, the parceners having handed into chancery a partition made by their assent.<sup>7</sup> Already we see in a provision inserted in the assignment, evidence of doubt as to the connexion of Glamorgan with the 'county' of Gwynnlywg, co. Monmouth, the former of which fell to Despenser, the latter to Audley.<sup>8</sup> It is evident that Despenser coveted the latter, for on 4 March 1318 the king issued orders to take into his hands the castle and town of Newport, the county of Gwynnlywg, and other lands (in co. Monmouth) that had been assigned to Audley and his wife, because Despenser had taken the fealty of certain of the knights and tenants for his own use before the escheator could deliver seisin thereof to Audley.<sup>9</sup> On this occasion Despenser had to withdraw his claim. The Tintern writer of the 'Flores,' whose evidence is of value from his local knowledge,<sup>10</sup> states that Despenser kept possession of Newport and Audley's part of the inheritance by force, and that he endeavoured to obtain D'Amory's part in the same way, but that the latter successfully resisted him.<sup>11</sup> As D'Amory was the patron of Tintern, the chronicler should be trustworthy regarding D'Amory's lands.

This dispute, which only concerned Audley and Despenser, might have had no worse results than the creation of enmity between them. But the foolish favourite endeavoured to add to his Welsh possessions on the west as well as on the east, and the means that he employed to obtain his wishes caused all the powerful marchers to come to the support of Audley and

<sup>5</sup> *Flores*, iii. 342; John de Trokelowe, p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Calendar of Close Rolls*, ii. 414, 583. This is also stated in the writ for delivery of the purparties.

<sup>7</sup> The partition, probably owing to its great length, was not enrolled on the Close Rolls. It is preserved in separate rolls—Miscellaneous Rolls, &c., Chancery, bundle 3, nos. 7 (Audley), 8 (Despenser), 9, 10 (D'Amory).

<sup>8</sup> Roll 8: 'Memorandum, quod iuxta istas particiones comitatus de Glamorgan isti parti assignatur, ita quod de cetero comitatus ille seu homines terre aut tenementa infra eundem comitatum existencia sint omnino separata (*sic*) a comitatu de Wenthlok, et quod eidem comitatui de Wenthlok in nullo subiaceant seu intendant, set solomodo corone Anglie imperpetuum.'

<sup>9</sup> *Cal. Close Rolls*, ii. 531.

<sup>10</sup> Like most chroniclers, however, he cannot be implicitly relied upon. See p. 758 *infra*.

<sup>11</sup> *Flores*, iii. 342. Cf. Monk of Malmesbury, p. 284. The latter mentions a *castrum detentum*—no doubt Newport—as the cause of Audley's enmity to Despenser. After Despenser's exile Audley refused to surrender Newport, Gwynnlywg, &c., alleging that he held them as his wife's inheritance (*Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 408). Yet the Patent Roll 13 Edw. II, mem. 20, contains a licence, dated 10 Jan. 1320, for Audley and his wife to assign these lands to Despenser, and on 13 May (mem. 8) a licence for Despenser to receive the lands, and for him to convey to them lands in England in exchange.

D'Amory. The lordship of Gower became the bone of contention. William de Brewose, its spendthrift lord, negotiated at different times for its sale to his son-in-law John de Mowbray,<sup>12</sup> to the earl of Hereford for the benefit of the latter's son,<sup>13</sup> to the two Mortimers,<sup>14</sup> and, if we may trust Trokelowe, to Despenser.<sup>15</sup> As early as 8 Aug. 1318 disputes had arisen between Brewose's men and Despenser's, and the king had to enjoin Despenser to keep the peace.<sup>16</sup> Despenser is said to have thwarted all Brewose's arrangements for the sale of Gower,<sup>17</sup> being eager to obtain the lordship himself.<sup>18</sup> Whilst the great marcher lords mentioned above were smarting with indignation, Despenser in 1319 caused the king to make use of a weapon in his favour that united all the marchers against him in defence of their rights. This was the novel claim that lands in the marches held in chief could not be alienated without the king's licence, or, in other words, that they were subject to the same laws as prevailed in England. On 28 July in this year John Inge, Richard de Rodney, and Robert de Malleye were appointed to inquire what lands William de Brewose and his ancestors had alienated without royal licence, and an attempt was made to throw the blame for such unlicensed alienations upon the escheators.<sup>19</sup> The inquisition, which was taken at Crymlyn, near Swansea, on 6 Oct., specifies some scores of alienations dating from the time of Henry III.<sup>20</sup> In 1320 Brewose died,<sup>21</sup> and Mowbray entered upon the lordship of Gower. Despenser then caused it to be taken into the king's hands, on the ground that Mowbray had entered it without the king's licence.<sup>22</sup> The order was issued on 26 Oct.,<sup>23</sup> the day following the rising of the parliament, but the escheator was prevented from executing it by a force of Welshmen, who met him at the chapel of St. Thomas in Kilvey, without Swansea.<sup>24</sup> The order was renewed on 13 Nov.<sup>25</sup> On 18 Dec. the older Despenser, Badlesmere, John de Stonore, and Robert de Malberthorp were appointed to inquire concerning lands alienated by Brewose without royal licence, and to take such lands into the king's hands;<sup>26</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Annales Paulini*, p. 292. Dugdale (*Baronage*, i. 420 b) saw the original grant of the reversion to Mowbray.

<sup>13</sup> *Annales Paulini*, p. 292. Cf. Monk of Malmesbury, p. 255.

<sup>14</sup> Trokelowe, p. 107; Walsingham, p. 252.

<sup>15</sup> P. 107. If there were any negotiations with Despenser, nothing can have been concluded. See below, note 81.

<sup>16</sup> *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 96. <sup>17</sup> *Annales Paulini*, p. 292. <sup>18</sup> *Flores*, iii. 344.

<sup>19</sup> *Fine Roll*, 13 Edw. II, mem. 12. The words are 'de quibus etiam escheatores ultra Trentam, qui pro tempore fuerunt, alienaciones huiusmodi dissimulantes, remedium aliquod, prout ad officium suum pertinuit, in hac parte nullatenus appoquerunt.'

<sup>20</sup> *Inquisitiones post mortem*, 13 Edw. II, no. 82.

<sup>21</sup> *Flores*, iii. 344.

<sup>22</sup> Monk of Malmesbury, p. 254; *Flores*, iii. 344.

<sup>23</sup> *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 268.

<sup>24</sup> *Fine Roll*, 14 Edw. II, mem. 11. Cf. *Flores*, iii. 344.

<sup>25</sup> *Fine Roll*, *ut supra*.

<sup>26</sup> *Fine Roll*, 14 Edw. II, mem. 10.

and a similar commission was issued on 20 Jan. 1321 to William Martin, John de Beauchamp, John Inge, and John de Fosse.<sup>27</sup> On the same day Martin and his companions were appointed to inquire concerning disturbances in Gower.<sup>28</sup> In the process of exile against Despenser it was stated that he prevented the king from taking fines for entries upon lands without royal licence, in order to cause the lands to be forfeited, and Mowbray's land in Gower was cited as a case in point.<sup>29</sup> Certainly, if one may judge from the evidence of the chancery rolls, the refusal to accept such a fine was a very unusual act of the crown, for it was not at all an uncommon proceeding to enter lands before obtaining the licence. There was a general impression that Despenser's conduct was dictated by a desire to secure Gower for himself, and the Tintern writer of the 'Flores' even goes so far as to state that Despenser obtained a grant of this lordship immediately after it was taken into the king's hands.<sup>30</sup> We have here a good instance of the way in which chroniclers confuse the chronological order of events, for it was not until 9 July 1322 that Despenser, then in the heyday of his power, became lord of Gower.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile the marchers, who maintained that royal licence to alienate was not needed in the marches,<sup>32</sup> were concerting measures for the defence of their rights. On 30 Jan. 1321 the king forbade the earl of Hereford and other barons to make assemblies to treat of the affairs of the realm.<sup>33</sup> That the earl of Lancaster, who had been ill about this time,<sup>34</sup> was implicated in these proceedings, as the chroniclers allege,<sup>35</sup> admits of little doubt. So serious was the position in the marches that the king decided in January to go to the west; but it was not until March that he commenced his journey.<sup>36</sup> On 6 March he wrote from Windsor

<sup>27</sup> Fine Roll, 14 Edw. II, mem. 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II. ii. 155.

<sup>29</sup> *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 494; Monk of Bridlington, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> P. 344.

<sup>31</sup> Charter Roll, 16 Edw. II, mem. 7. The grant describes the lordship as in the king's hands by Mowbray's forfeiture, a tacit acknowledgment of his right. Cf. also *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 464. There is no pretence of any grant from Brewose to Despenser.

<sup>32</sup> Monk of Malmesbury, p. 255.

<sup>33</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II. ii. 155; *Foedera*, ii. 442; *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 355.

<sup>34</sup> On 6 Jan. the king ordered letters excusing his obeying the common summons of the eyre [at the Tower of London], because he had not sufficiently recovered from his illness to travel (Privy Seals, 14 Edw. II, no. 5551).

<sup>35</sup> Monk of Malmesbury, p. 255; Geoffrey le Baker, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> On 1 Mar. he writes under his secret seal from Westminster to William de Ayremynne, who was in the north to treat with the Scots, for which he was appointed an envoy on 19 Jan. (*Foedera*, ii. 441), thanking him for his diligence in the Scotch affairs. He then proceeds, 'Et si par case diverse nouvelle vous veigne de ce que nous nous treoms vers les parties de Gloucestre, ne la chargez, car nous ne savons nouvelle de celes parties ne de aillours devers nous si bone noun, Dieux mercy, mes alons laundroites pur veer le pays et chivaucer nostre terre, sicome feust acordez avunt vostre departir de nous' (Privy Seals, 14 Edw. II, no. 5599). Ayremynne must

to the chancellor and treasurer, sending to them the copy of a letter from the ambassadors to Scotland, whereby it appeared that his affairs of Wales 'ought to be hastened,' and he also sent to them a scroll relating to the safety of Wales and his castles there, upon all of which he desired their counsel, and telling them not to be surprised if they hear that he is taking with him more men than usually accompanied him.<sup>37</sup> The king's progress can be traced by his attestations of letters enrolled in the rolls of chancery. He was at Brimpsfield on 20 and 21 March, at Churchdown, near Gloucester, on 22 and 26, and at Gloucester from the latter day until 2 April. It was during this visit that the present letter was written. From it we learn that Inge had caused Despenser's lands to be guarded day and night on the side of Brecknock, where attack from the warlike earl of Hereford was expected. This brave, stupid nobleman was, we are told, much more thoughtful and gloomy than was his wont, no doubt in consideration of the serious step he was about to take. The letter is as sanguine and confident as we should expect from Despenser, but he soon found that his confidence was ill-grounded. On 27 March the king forbade D'Amory, Despenser, Hereford, John de Hastings, Mortimer of Wigmore, and John de Charlton to make assemblies of armed men in the Welsh marches.<sup>38</sup> The following day Hastings, Despenser, Hereford, the two Mortimers, John Giffard, Thomas and Maurice de Berkeley were summoned to appear before the king at Gloucester on 5 April, to treat concerning the musters of armed men in the Welsh marches.<sup>39</sup> Hereford and Mortimer of Wigmore replied by demanding that Despenser should be committed to the custody of Lancaster until parliament should meet.<sup>40</sup> Sentence of forfeiture was pronounced against Audley on 8 April by the earl of Norfolk and Spigurnel,<sup>41</sup> so that Despenser's remark in this letter that Audley must not trust much in the aid of Spigurnel was well justified. On 13 April Hereford and others were forbidden to make assemblies in the Welsh marches, the king being informed that the men of Brecknock were making assemblies of armed men.<sup>42</sup> Despenser and the king, finding themselves unable to resist the marchers, returned to London.<sup>43</sup> The king,

have started for the north soon after the date of the commission, for letters were sent to the envoys in the north on 19 and 26 Feb. (nos. 5581, 5589).

<sup>37</sup> *Privy Seals*, nos. 5602, 5603. <sup>38</sup> *Foedera*, ii. 445; *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 363.

<sup>39</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II, i. 231; *Foedera*, ii. 445; *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 364.

<sup>40</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II, i. 231; *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 367; cf. Monk of Malmesbury, p. 256.

<sup>41</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II, ii. 158.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* II, ii. 159; *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 366.

<sup>43</sup> Monk of Malmesbury, p. 256; *Flores*, iii. 196. The latter is obviously wrong in describing the king's hurried flight with Despenser to London by night, for the king, who left Gloucester on 16 April, stayed at Bristol until the 23rd, and did not reach Westminster until 5 May.

on 1 May, prohibited Hereford and Mortimer from attacking Despenser's lands in the marches.<sup>44</sup> But it was in vain. On 4 May the 'pursuers' of the Despensers marched into Glamorgan with a large force, and captured Newport and Despenser's lands.<sup>45</sup> So commenced the warlike proceedings that, in the words of a contemporary, were fated to lead to the destruction of the barons, the deposition of the king, and almost to the disinheritation of the royal blood.<sup>46</sup>

W. H. STEVENSON.

Hugh' le Despenser, le fuiz, a nostre cher et bien amé bach[elier], Monser Johan Inge, nostre visc[onte] de Glamorg[an], saluz.

Nous resceumes voz lettres a Cyrenc[estre] le xx. jour de Marz, les queles nous avoms bien entendues en touz poinz. Mult nous plait que l'enquete est passée a Excestre pur Monser Herbert du Marays endroit de l'Ile,<sup>47</sup> et coe pur le droit que nous entendoms qu'il avoit, et pur l'esperance que nous avons de purchacier meisme l'yle.<sup>48</sup> Nostre seigneur le Roy ad maundé querre par ses lettres le dit Monser Herbert, et Sir Johan de Cogham,<sup>49</sup> son menor,<sup>50</sup> q'eux vignent a luy a Glouc[estre] le plus en haste q'eux purront. Nous sumes en bon espoir que nous y atteindrions bien, et a ce faire, le Roy y mettra tut son poer. Nous vous savons mult grant gre de la diligence que vous avez mys que les besoignes le dit Monser Herbert alassent bien. Moult nous plait de ce que noz gentz sont en bone quiete par tute nostre seigneurie, et du grondilement<sup>51</sup> de Breghenok nous ne donoms force, par issint que nous gentz facent tute[s] voirs (*sic*) lur devoir devers nous; a quele chose faire, vous mandons que vous mettez tute vostre peine. Des xxiiii de nos Galeys que vous avez esluz des pluz grant de nostre terre pur nous enveir et (*sic*) demorer ove nous un temps, nous plait bien, mes nous ne voloms avoir nul a chival en nule manere, einz voloms qu'eux soient touz a pie, et touz as ouelles gages, et en ceste fourme les nous envoieiz, et des gages come eux sont acoustumez de prendre nous les feronz servir prestement pur tant come eux demoront. De ce que vous nous mandez que Davyd ap Grono<sup>52</sup> est et touz jours ad esté mult propis en noz besoignes, nous ne creumes unques aultre, ne creere ne poroms qu'il se vosdreit mesfaire devers nous al sent et l'avise-

<sup>44</sup> *Parl. Writs*, II, ii. 161; *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 371.

<sup>45</sup> *Cal. Close Rolls*, iii. 541; *Flores*, iii. 344; Monk of Malmesbury, p. 256; Lanercost Chronicle, p. 241; Murimuth, p. 32; Trokelowe, p. 108.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey le Baker, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Lundy Isle. An assize recognised at Exeter, on 6 Mar. 1321, that John de Wylinton and others had unjustly disseised Herbert de Marisco of the island of 'Lunday,' and judgment was given for De Marisco; Assize Roll, no. 1382, ro. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Despenser obtained his wish. The island of 'Lunday,' which had belonged to John de Wylington, a late enemy and rebel, was granted to Hugh and his wife by the king on 16 June 1322 (Charter Roll, 15 Edw. II, mem. 4).

<sup>49</sup> Cogan held two knights' fees in Cogan, in Glamorgan, of Despenser, according to the partition of the earl of Gloucester's lands. He was appointed treasurer of Ireland on 8 Aug. of this year (Fine Roll, 15 Edw. II, mem. 25).

<sup>50</sup> 'Conductor.'

<sup>51</sup> 'Disturbance,' 'tumult.'

<sup>52</sup> From the partition we learn that 'David ap Gronogh' held certain lands of Despenser at Lanvedu, in Sengh[enyth]—that is, the hamlet of Llanvedw, co. Glamorgan, but in the parish of Michaelston-y-Vedw, co. Monmouth.



ment que nous entendoms en luy. De ce que vous avez entendu que le counte de Herford est mornes et pensifs plus qu'il ne soleit, n'est mye merveille s'il est, qar il ne ad si portez en contenance devers son lige seignour, q[ui] mult de biens et de honurs luy ad fait, qu'il en doit bien avoir grant pensée. Endroit de ce que Ser Hughe d'Audley mannes de grever les bones gentz q[ui] nous ont tenuz lieu en poiz de Thornbury,<sup>53</sup> ne doutez que lui ne nul de ces aliés ne averont in le poer de grever nul des noz, qar nous les defendrons bien a l'aide de Dieu; ne ja ne covient q'il se accuse trop en l'aide Ser Henry le Espigurnel,<sup>54</sup> qar nous ne porions creire que le dit Ser Henry voudreit estre encontre nous ne contre nul de nos amys, et sur ce luy avons maundé nos lettres mult espéciales. De ce que vous avez eu devant vous les plus avoués de nos Galles d'enquerre lur volenté si nous potoms assier en eux ou nous, ot de enquerre si nostre seignurie fust assez fort de contre ester la malice de ceux de Breghenok et de Contrebaghan,<sup>55</sup> nous plait mult, et lur responns auxint. Et quant a ce qu'eux doutent charge de gentz d'armes, ne covient in do[n]ter, par issint que nous en feussons garniz en temps, qar nous avons gentz d'armes et averions assez pur nous garder de nos nusours du dit counte et d'autres. De ce que vous avez ordiné de faire gaiter noz villes et chastiaux de noyt et de jour, est bien fait, et de caddem<sup>56</sup> q[ui] sont ordinez a garder nostre marche par entre nous et Breghenok, est bien ordéné, par issint que noz gentz ne comencent nule riote de duy<sup>57</sup> eux en nule maniere, quele chose nous despleroit mult, come avant vous avons maundé, et pur aucunes raisons que nous vous dirons plus pleinement de bouche. Quant a ce que vous nous avez maundé qu'il vous semble pur le meillour qe bon seroit qe nous vous envoiassons xii. homes d'armes et (sic) demorer une piece en nostre seignurie, cachez qe auxi tost qe nos voudrions a Glouc[estre] nous nous en aviserons, et en serons colons ce q'il nous semblera qe sera pur le meillour. Nous voudrions moult vostre venue a nous apres vostre tourn<sup>58</sup> tenuz, si sanz damage et peril de nos aultres becoignes le pavez faire. A Dieu, qe vous gard! Escrypt' a Cirencestre, le xxj. jour de Marz.

[Endorsed:] Pur la venue le visconte a Glouc[estre].

<sup>53</sup> Thornbury, co. Gloucester, was assigned to Audley in the partition. The reference here is obscure. *Tenir lieu* usually means 'to assist, benefit.' It was a Thornbury that the abbot summoned Audley to appear before the king at Gloucester in April (*Parl. Writs*, II, ii. 188). It does not seem probable that Audley's threats were against the two Thornbury men who acted as summoners. The assize roll (no. 290, fo. 8 d) contains an indictment of William de Berle and his son for breaking the park of Hugh le Despencer (Audley?), the younger at Thornbury, but no other references to disturbances there.

<sup>54</sup> Henry le Espigurnel was at this time acting as a justice of oyer and terminer (or of trailbaston) at Gloucester (Assize Roll, no. 290). As Espigurnel pronounced sentence of forfeiture against Audley about the same time, it was natural that the Tintern writor of the *Flores*, iii. 846, should think that he did so in his capacity as justice of trailbaston. There is no record on the Assize Roll of any such sentence of outlawry.

<sup>55</sup> Cantref Bychan, co. Carmarthen, which belonged to John Giffard (*Cal. Glouc. Rolls*, ii. 588).

<sup>56</sup> In this a derivative of the Welsh *cadw*, 'to guard,' or is it connected with the *chadras*, pl. of *chadol*, 'chickadee,' of Bonet?

<sup>57</sup> 'Againt.'

<sup>58</sup> *Elio terna ad abbatem.*