
The History of the Life of King Henry the Second

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THE
H I S T O R Y
OF THE LIFE OF
KING HENRY THE SECOND,
AND OF THE AGE IN WHICH HE LIVED,
IN FIVE BOOKS:

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,
A History of the Revolutions of England
From the Death of EDWARD the Confessor
To the Birth of HENRY the Second:
BY GEORGE LORD LYTTELTON.
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THE
H I S T O R Y
OF THE
L I F E
OF
King HENRY the Second.

B O O K III.

THERE is a passage well deserving the BOOK III.
attention of those who read this book V. Appendix.
in a late famous remonstrance of the
parliament of Paris; where, complaining of the
abuses of the ecclesiastical power in the king-
dom of France, they say to their king, “ that
“ the clergy of that realm are now busily using
“ their utmost endeavours to support and con-
“ firm a system of independence, the founda-
“ tions of which have been laid near a thou-
“ sand years ago; the principles of which have
“ been connected, developed, and followed,
“ from age to age, in the conduct of several
“ ministers of the church; and the inevitable
“ effects of which, if not stopt by the vigilance
VOL. IV. B “ and

HISTORY OF THE LIFE

BOOK III. “and firmness of the magistrates, would be
 “the most enormous abuse of the royal autho-
 “rity, as well as of religion; the destruction
 “of good order and public tranquillity, of all
 “the regular jurisdictions, of the laws, of the
 “king’s sovereignty itself; and, by conse-
 “quence, of the whole state.”

These are the words of that very respectable body: and whoever reflects upon them will have good reason to think, that, where the popish religion remains established, the principles of Becket will also remain; and, notwithstanding the apparent absurdity of them, will perpetually disturb, and sometimes overpower, the civil authority, even in countries the most enlightened by learning and philosophy, or affecting the greatest latitude and freedom of thought. How great is therefore the happiness this nation enjoys in the reformation of religion, by which those principles, so repugnant to true Christianity, have been rooted out from our church; and which alone can secure us from a return of those evils, the malignity whereof will be shewn, in it’s utmost extent, by examples more convincing than any arguments on the subject, in that very instructive part of the history of this kingdom, which I am about to relate!

A. D. 1163. The reader has seen what large advances the clergy of England, abetted and supported by the power of the papacy then almost at it’s height, had made, in Stephen’s reign, towards
 a total

a total independence upon all civil government. BOOK III.

The pernicious consequences of this were felt A. D. 1163.

by his successor; and though the insolence of the hierarchy was in some measure awed under the reign of this prince, yet he had been hitherto obliged to tolerate many abuses, which the name of religion had sanctified, and which could not be reformed without the aid and concurrence of more favorable circumstances than had offered themselves to him before this time. The worst of these was the exemption from all secular justice, which was claimed as a fundamental and inviolable part of the liberty of the church. "The bishops (says one of the best Gul. Neabrigens. P. 394.

"contemporary historians) being much more intent on maintaining the privileges or dignities of their clergy than correcting their vices, imagine that they do their duty to God, and the church, by protecting those criminals against civil discipline, whom they refuse or neglect to restrain, as the duty of their office requires, by a proper severity of canonical censures." He adds, "that, for this reason, the clergy having a licence to do what they would with certain impunity, were in no awe of God, or man." It is remarkable that this testimony is given by a churchman. And, indeed, the whole publick was now become as sensible as Henry himself, how monstrous a thing it was, that one part of his subjects should thus be suffered to withdraw themselves from his justice, and, wherever they were concerned, to put the others also out of

BOOK III.
A. D. 1163.

his royal protection. The necessity of correcting the notorious iniquities and relaxation of discipline in the spiritual courts, as well as of stopping their encroachments in point of jurisdiction, was, likewise, generally acknowledged. Another evil, which began to be grievously felt, and which many of the clergy themselves desired that the crown should restrain, was the frequent practice of appeals to Rome in ecclesiastical causes. This was attended with great vexation and expence to the suitors: the exportation of it's treasure was a loss to the nation; but it suffered much more by the admission of a foreign jurisdiction over the subjects of England, which violated the dignity and freedom of the state. The voice of the people calling loudly for a redress of these grievances, the royal authority being settled upon the firmest foundations, the Roman pontificate being weakened by a schism, and the pope whom Henry had acknowledged owing more to his friendship than to that of any other monarch, the time appeared very favorable for this great undertaking, which, if the king had succeeded in it, would have compleated his glory, as the *deliverer* and *restorer* of England. But he met with an obstacle which broke all his measures, and put him under many difficulties, that he had not foreseen. The confident and the partner of his most secret counsels, the man whom he loved and trusted above all others, that very Becket whom he had made archbishop of Canterbury, chiefly with a view of being assisted

assisted by him in this design, set himself to oppose it with invincible obstinacy, and seemed all at once to be possessed by the spirit of Gregory the Seventh.

BOOK III.
A. D. 1163.

No change was ever so sudden and violent, as that which appeared in the new prelate immediately upon his election. He affected to be now entirely given up to his spiritual duties: to the reading of the scriptures, to prayers, and to preaching. Whenever he received the communion in publick he shed abundance of tears; he sighed; he groaned; *pouring forth his whole soul* (says a writer of his life) *in devotion and contrition, as if he had touched the wounds of Christ.* There was at all times in his conversation, and even in his aspect, a grave and religious severity. Under his canonical habit he wore the frock of a monk, and under that a rugged haircloth, next to his skin. Archbishop Theobald had doubled the sum which his predecessor appropriated to charitable uses; and Becket doubled that which had been given by him, bestowing a full tenth of the revenues of his see in constant and stated alms. But he was not satisfied with relieving the wants of the poor: he waited on them at table, he washed their feet with his own hands. We are told, indeed, that these acts of pious humility were done by him in private: but as he usually repeated them every night, they could not long remain unknown; and the fame of them was increased by the affectation of secrecy. The hospitality

V Stephani-
dem in vita
S. Theobaldi
Quadrilog. et
Vit. Thom.
præfixæ epi-
scopis.
Ger. Chron.

BOOK III. of the favorite was kept up by the primate ;
 A. D. 1153. but the mode of it was changed. He dined in
 publick every day with profusion and splendour ; but any nobles or gentlemen, who came
 to dine with him, were placed at another table ;

V. Quadri- none being admitted to eat at his, except the
 log. l. i. c. 15. monks of the convent of Canterbury, and a
 17. & h. iv. select sett of clergymen, both English and
 c. 12. foreigners, who were eminent for their learn-
 Vit. St. Tho- ing, and whom he had particularly attached to
 ma præfix. e- his person. Instead of the usual entertainment
 pist. p. 20. of musick, some Latin book was read to him
 24. 156, 157

during the whole time of dinner : after which
 he retired to a more private apartment with
 those learned friends, whose society seems to
 have been his chief delight. When he was
 visited by any of the regular clergy, he re-
 ceived them with such reverence, that (to use
 the words of John of Salisbury) "*he seemed to*
 V. Johan. in "*worship the divine presence or angels in their*
 Quadrilogo, "*persons.*" But against any who were ac-
 l. i. c. 15. counted schismaticks or hereticks his zeal was
 Vit. S. Thom. flaming : he refused all communion with them ;
 præfix. epist. and professed, that he held them as his worst
 p. 23. enemies. Nor did he spare to blame the faults
 of men in power very freely, *knowing* (says the
 historian I have cited above) *that where the*
spirit of God is, there consequently is liberty.
 Thus he quickly obtained a reputation of
 sanctity, especially with the monks, to whom he
 chiefly made court, and who talked of his con-
 version, as a most evident miracle of divine
 Grace, poured out upon him at his consecration.

But