

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-55466-4 - Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II

Peter Coss

Excerpt

[More information](#)

POLITICAL SONGS.

KING JOHN. 1199—1216.

THE thirteenth century opens amid the violence of party feelings, and the few political songs which we find during the reign of King John are full of keenness. Early in his reign the English Monarch suffered himself to be robbed of his possessions in Normandy, and the poetry of the Troubadours contains many expressions of regret at their separation from England, and bitter reflections on the King's cowardice and weakness. The following song seems to have been written when Thouars was in danger, during Philippe Auguste's incursions into Poitou, in 1206. Savary of Mauleon is famous in contemporary history, and was himself a poet of no small renown. He was a firm adherent to the English party.

SONG ON THE SIEGE OF THOUARS.

[Royal Library at Paris, MS. du fonds de St. Germain, No. 1989, fol. 111, v°. 13th cent.]

MORS est li siècles briemant,
 Se li rois Touwairs sormonte ;
 De ceu li vait malement
 Ke li faillent li troi conte,

TRANSLATION.—The world will shortly come to nought,—if the king overcome Thouars.—On this account it fares ill with it,—that the three earls

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-55466-4 - Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II

Peter Coss

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

POLITICAL SONGS.

Et li vieillairs de Bouaing
I averait grant honte,
C'après la mort à vifconte
Morrait à si mauté.

Savaris de Maliéon,
Boens chiveliers à cintainne,
Se vos fals à ces besons,
Perdue avons nostre poinne;
Et vos, xanexals
Asi d'Anjou et dou Mainne,
Xanexal ont an Torainne
Atre ke vos mist.

Et vos, sire xanexals,
Vos et Dan Jehan dou Mainne,
Et Ugues, antre vos trois
Mandeis à roi d'Alemaigne,
Ke cist rois et cil François
C'ameir ne nos d[a]ignent,
Cant por .j. mulet d'Espaigne
Laxait Bordelois.

desert it,—and the old man of Bouaing—would have there great shame,—that after the death of the viscount—he should die in such evil case.

Savary of Mauleon,—a good knight at the quintain,—if you fail us in this need,—we have lost our labour;—and you, Seneschal,—both of Anjou and of Maine,—they have placed a seneschal in Touraine—other than you.

And you, Sir Seneschal,—you and Sir John of Maine,—and Hugh, between you three,—send word to the King of Almain,—that this king and him of France,—deign not to love us,—when for a mule of Spain—he left the Bordelois.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-55466-4 - Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II

Peter Coss

Excerpt

[More information](#)

REIGN OF KING JOHN.

3

Et vos, signors bacheleirs,
 Ki ameïs lois et proeses,
 Cant vos souliez garreir
 Touwairs iert vos fortteresce.
 Jà Deus ne vos doust porteir
 Ne mainche ne tresses,
 Se Touwairt au teil tristesc
 Laixiez oblieir.

And you, Sir bachelors,—who love praise and prowess,—when you were wont to war—Thouars was your fortress.—Now God hinder you from bearing—sleeves or tresses,—if Thouars in such distress—you allow to be forgotten.

John's own friends, disgusted with his weakness, began to desert him; and the following bitter song was addressed by the younger Bertrand de Born, to Savary de Mauleon, to persuade him to follow their example.

A SIRVENTE ON KING JOHN.

[Raynouard, Choix, tom. iv. p. 201.]

QUANT vei lo temps renovellar,
 E pareïs la fueill' e la flors,
 Mi dona ardimen amors
 E cor e saber de chantar;
 E doncs, pois res no m' en sofrainç,
 Farai un Sirvent escozen,
 Que trametrai lai par presen
 Al rei Joan que s' n'a vergoing.

TRANSLATION.—When I see the fair weather return,—and leaf and flower appear,—love gives me hardiesse—and heart and skill to sing;—then, since I do not want matter,—I will make a stinging sirvente,—which I will send yonder for a present,—to King John, to make him ashamed.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-55466-4 - Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II

Peter Coss

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

POLITICAL SONGS.

E deuria s' be'n vergoignar,
 Si l' membres de sos ancessors,
 Com laissa sai Peitieu e Tors
 Al rei Felip ses demandar ;
 Per que tota Guiana plaing
 Lo rei Richard, qu' en deffenden
 En mes mant aur e mant argen ;
 Mas aces no m' par 'n aia soing.

Mais ama l' bordir e l' cassar,
 E bracs e lebriers et austors,
 E sojorn ; per que il faill honors,
 E s' laissa vius deseretar ;
 Mal sembla d'ardimen Galvaing,
 Que sai lo viram plus soven ;
 E pois autre cosseil non pren,
 Lais sa terra al seignor del Groign.

Miels saup Lozoics desliurar
 Guillelme, e l' fes ric secors
 Ad Aurenga, quan l'Almassors
 A Tibaut l'ac fait asetjar :

And well he ought to be ashamed,—if he remember his ancestors,—how he has left here Poitou and Touraine—to King Philip, without asking for them.—Wherefore all Guienne laments—King Richard, who in its defence—would have laid out much gold and much silver ;—but this man does not appear to me to care much for it.

He loves better fishing and hunting,—pointers, greyhounds, and hawks,—and repose, wherefore he loses his property,—and his fief escapes out of his hands ;—Galvaing seems ill-furnished with courage,—so that we beat him here most frequently ;—and since he takes no other counsel,—let him leave his land to the lord of the Groing.

Louis knew better how to deliver—William, and gives him rich succour—at Orange, when the Almassor—had caused Tiebald to besiege him ;—glory and

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-55466-4 - Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II

Peter Coss

Excerpt

[More information](#)

REIGN OF KING JOHN.

5

Pretz et honor 'n ac ab gazaing ;
 Jeu o dic per chastiamen
 Al rei Joan que pert sa gen,
 Que non lor secor pres ni loing.

Baron, sai vir mon chastiar
 A vos, cui blasme las follors
 Que us vei far, e pren m'en dolors,
 Car m'aven de vos a parlar,
 Que pretz avetz tombat e' l' faing,
 Et avetz apres un fol sen,
 Que non doptas chastiamen,
 Mas qui us ditz mal, aquel vos oing.

Domna, cui dezir e tenc car
 E dopt e blan part las meillors,
 Tant es vera vostra lauzors
 Qu'ieu non la sai dir ni comtar ;
 C'aissi com aurs val mais d'estaing,
 Valetz mais part las meillors cen,
 Et ez plus leials vas joven
 Non son a Dieu cill de Cadoing.

honour he had with profit ;—I say it for a lesson—to King John who loses his people,—because he succours them not near or far off.

Barons, on this side my lesson of correction aims—at you, whose delinquencies it blames—that I have seen you do, and I am grieved thereat,—for it falls to me to speak of you,—who have let your credit fall into the mud,—and afterwards have a foolish sentiment,—that you do not fear correction,—but he who told you ill, it is he who disgraces you.

Lady, whom I desire and hold dear,—and fear and flatter above the best,—so true is your praise,—that I know not how to say it or to relate it ;—that, as gold is more worth than tin,—you are worth more than the best hundred,—and you are better worth to a young man,—than are they (the monks) of Caen to God.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-55466-4 - Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II

Peter Coss

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

POLITICAL SONGS.

Savarics, reis cui cors sofraing
 Greu fara bon envasimen,
 E pois a flac cor recrezen,
 Jamais nuls hom en el non poing.

Savary, a king without a heart,—will hardly make a successful invasion,—
 and since he has a heart soft and cowardly,—let no man put his trust in him.

The dishonours which John suffered abroad, were, however, soon forgotten in the troubles which broke out at home. The following virulent libel on the three bishops of Norwich, Bath, and Winchester, who adhered to the King in his quarrel with the Pope about the presentation to the see of Canterbury, was no doubt the work of one of his ecclesiastical opponents.

SONG ON THE BISHOPS.

[Flacius Illyricus, p. 161.]

Planctus super Episcopis.

COMPLANGE tui, Anglia,
 Melos suspendens organi;
 Et maxime tu, Cantia,
 De mora tui Stephani.
 Thomam habes sed alterum,
 Secundum habes iterum

TRANSLATION.—Complain, O England! and suspend the melody of thine organ, and more especially thou, Kent, for the delay of thy Stephen. But thou hast another Thomas; thou hast again a second Stephen, who putting

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-55466-4 - Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II

Peter Coss

Excerpt

[More information](#)

REIGN OF KING JOHN.

7

Stephanum, qui trans hominem
 Induens fortitudinem
 Signa facit in populo.
 Dolos dolens metropolis
 Quos subdoli parturiunt,
 Orbata tuis incolis,
 Dolose quos ejiciunt,
 Largos emittis gemitus,
 Patre privata penitus.
 Sed cum habebis Stephanum,
 Assumes tibi tympanum,
 Chelym tangens sub modulo.

Ubi es, quæso, Moyses,
 Per quem cedat confractio ?
 Ubi legem zelans Phinees,
 Per quem cesset quassatio ?
 Quis natum David arguens ?
 Quis Thaü signum statuens
 In limine et postibus,
 Ut sic confusis hostibus
 Liberetur Israel ?

on a fortitude beyond that of man, performs signs among the people. O metropolis ! who grievest over the plots which the cunning people bring forth, bereaved of thine inhabitants, whom they treacherously have ejected, thou givest vent to heavy groans, being utterly deprived of thy father. But when thou shalt have Stephen, thou wilt take up the timbrel, and touch the harp to measure.

Where art thou, I ask, O Moses ! through whom may the rupture cease ? Where Phineas, zealous for the law, through whom the scourging may have an end ? Who is there to accuse the son of David ? Who is there that may set the sign of Thau on the threshold and the door-posts, that thus, her enemies being confused, Israel may be liberated ? Abraham, father of many people, arise,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-55466-4 - Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II

Peter Coss

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Abraham, pater gentium
 Multarum, surge, domine,
 Agar expelle filium,
 Saræ ancillæ dominæ ;
 Nam post subducet aliam.
 Jam adversus ecclesiam
 Prævalent portæ Tartari :
 Jam ludo ludunt impari
 Isaac et Ismael.

Balthasar bibit iterum
 De vasis templi Domini :
 Vasa rapit vas scelerum
 Dei dicata nomini.
 Scribentem cerno digitum,
 Et literis implicitum
 Scriptis, “ Mane, Tecchel, Phares ;”
 Quid sibi velit ea res,
 Rei probabit exitus.
 Jam patet in prætorio,
 Et infimis et arduis,
 Quod regni jam divisio
 Et finis est in januis.

lord, expel the son of Agar, the waiting-maid of her mistress Sarah ; for after she shall deceive the other. Now the gates of Tartarus prevail against the Church : now Isaac and Ismael play at an unequal game.

Balthasar drinks again out of the vessels of the Lord's temple : the vessel of iniquities carries away the vessels dedicated to God's name. I perceive the hand, writing, and involved in the written letters, “ Mane, Techel, Phares ;” what this thing may mean, the event of the thing will prove. Now it appears in the court, both to the low and the high, that at present the division and end

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-55466-4 - Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II

Peter Coss

Excerpt

[More information](#)

REIGN OF KING JOHN.

9

Crescit malorum cumulus,
 Est sacerdos ut populus,
 Currunt ad illicitum,
 Uterque juxta libitum
 Audax et imperterritus.

Plebs in Ægypti cophino
 Servit, et sudat anxia
 Sub Pharaone domino :
 Edicta currunt varia :
 Exactor opus exigit,
 Israel lutum colligit.
 Non est qui eum eruat,
 Vel Pharaonis subruat
 Equos cum ascensoribus.
 Spargit Assur ac dejicit
 Lapides Sanctuarii.
 Quare? quia non objicit
 Se lapis adjutorii.
 Imo qui se objicere
 Deberent, et effundere
 Sanguinem pro justitia,
 Tractant de avaritia,
 Quos his noto apicibus.

of the kingdom is at the gate. The mass of evils increases; the priest is as the people; they, bold and fearless, hasten to that which is unlawful, each according to his will.

The people serves in the coffer of Egypt, and anxiously sweats under the rule of Pharaoh: various edicts fly about: the collector exacts the work, Israel collects clay. There is no one who may rescue him, or who may overwhelm the horses of Pharaoh with their riders. Assur scatters and overthrows the stones of the Sanctuary. Why? because the Stone of Help does not oppose itself. Nay, they who ought to oppose, and to shed their blood for justice's sake, are occupied with avarice, whom I signalise by these marks.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-55466-4 - Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to that of Edward II

Peter Coss

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Si præsuli Bathoniæ
 Fiat quandoque quæstio,
 Quot marcæ bursæ regiæ
 Accedant in scaccario :
 Respondet voce libera,
 Mille, centum, et cætera,
 Ad bursam regis colligo,
 Doctus in hoc decalogo,
 Cæcus in forma canonis.
 Tu, Norwicensis bestia,
 Audi quid dicat veritas :
 Qui non intrat per ostia
 Fur est. An de hoc dubitas ?
 Heu ! cecidisti gravius
 Quam Cato quondam tertius :
 Cum præsumpta electio
 Justo ruat iudicio,
 Empta per dolum Simonis.

 Wintoniensis armiger
 Præsidet ad Scaccarium,
 Ad computandum impiger,
 Piger ad Evangelium,
 Regis revolvens rotulum ;

If the question were perchance asked of the bishop of Bath, "How many marks come in to the King's purse in the Exchequer?" he would answer readily, "A thousand, a hundred, and so on, I collect into the King's purse," learned as he is in this decalogue, blind in the form of the canon. Thou, beast of Norwich! hear what the Truth saith: "He who enters not by the door is a thief." Dost thou doubt of this? Alas! thou hast fallen more heavily than once the third Cato, since thy presumed election falls by just judgment, having been bought by the craft of Simon.

The arm-bearer of Winchester presides at the Exchequer, diligent in computing, sluggish at the Gospel, turning over the King's roll; thus lucre over-