

## Literature, &amp;c.

The British Magazines  
FOR MARCH.From Hogg's Instructor.  
SKETCHES OF MODERN HISTORY.  
BY M. FRASER TYTLER.

## JOHN—CROWNED 1199, DIED 1216.

'The character of this prince,' says Hume, 'is little more than a complication of vices, equally mean and odious, ruinous to himself and destructive to his people. Cowardice, inactivity, folly, ingratitude, treachery, tyranny, cruelty, all these qualities appear in the several instances of his life. It is hard to say whether his conduct to his father, brother, nephew or subjects, was the most culpable; or whether his crimes in these respects were not even exceeded by the baseness which appeared in his transactions with the King of France, the pope, and the barons.' The task of tracing his life through each of these, therefore, or of following the mazes of his dark and intricate character, is not an enviable one, but it must (and may) be done slightly, for the sake of that great grant of the Magna Charta, which signalized his reign, and to which he yielded with a bleeding heart and a flood of tears.

On the coronation of John it was affirmed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, that by all reason, divine and human, none ought to succeed to the kingdom but he, who for his virtue and worthiness, was, as in the case of John, unanimously chosen by the state—an assertion which in the minds of many, would have removed the little right by which that prince could have laid claim to the crown. On being afterwards reproached for insincerity, the archbishop excused himself by saying that he foresaw that John would obtain the throne, whatever blood and trouble it might cost him, and he wished to prevent confusion by making the king, rather than that he should make himself, since an elevation by the people would force a tax upon him to rule them well. 'Thus,' says Daniel, 'did John get the crown of England, which he governed with as much injustice as he got it, and involved the kingdom in those miseries and troubles which afterwards produced desperate effects.'

The first, if not the deepest stain resting upon the character of John, arises from his treatment of, and the unexplained disappearance of his nephew Arthur. That unfortunate prince, born to be crushed between two potent monarchs, first threw himself upon the protection of Philip, and then on that of his direct enemy, the usurper of his rights, the bloody minded and ambitious John, who had thus, as Echard says, 'unhappily an opportunity of wholly to loose himself and his reputation for ever; since, to prevent further disturbances, he removed the person of his nephew to a safe prison at Rouen, where in a short time he quite disappeared and was never seen after, but by what means there is still a great uncertainty, all supposing and believing it was by a violent death, though the king's friends reported that, endeavouring to make his escape out of prison, he was accidentally drowned in the river Seine, upon which the castle stood; but most writers press hard upon the memory of John, and say that by his orders his nephew was privately and basely murdered, and some more expressly tells us that he himself came secretly in a boat by night, and caused his nephew to be brought before him, when the young prince, now subdued with the continuance of misfortune, threw himself on his knees before his uncle, and begged for mercy; the barbarous tyrant making no reply, stabbed him with his own hand, and fastening a stone to the dead body, threw it into the Seine. But of this black and difficult affair we can say nothing positively.'

The ambitious spirit of Philip of France, had in the earlier years of his reign been mastered either by the policy of Henry II., or by the warlike genius of Richard, but the mean and despicable character of the present monarch seemed to offer an excuse, as well as a likelihood, of easily expelling him from his dominions. The detestation in which, ever since the assumption of the inhuman murder of his nephew, he had been looked upon by his subjects, as well as the precarious authority he held over the people and the barons, offered a fair opportunity for the designs of Philip; and John, by his non-appearance at the French court, whither he had been summoned to attend his trial, having been declared guilty of the blood of his nephew, was sentenced to forfeit to Philip, as his superior lord, all his seignories and fiefs in France. The general defection of his vassals made every enterprise against John easy and successful. One feeble effort he made at resistance, by laying siege to Alencon, but on the first approach of the French army, he fled in such haste as to abandon all his tents, magazines, and baggage to the enemy; and from this time, contenting himself with the empty boast that the French king might go on and conquer, since in one day he could take what it would cost him years to acquire, he remained at Rouen in total inactivity. Had the prince appeared to conduct them, the faithful Normans, who abhorred the French yoke, would have defended themselves to the utmost. Even the English barons, at such a time, would have supported his cause; but having deserted himself, none cared to befriend him, and one by one deserting his standard, they returned to their own country, leaving Philip unmolested to pursue that career of victory which obtained

for him such an accession of grandeur, as in the ordinary course of things it would have required ages to attain.

The base and despicable transaction of the English king in connection with the pope are classed second in list of crimes enumerated by the English historian, and they are not of a nature to be passed over. The lofty and enterprising spirit of Innocent met with an easy prey in the mean and despicable character of the English; yet the controversy that followed the death of Hubert, Archbishop of Canterbury, and the election of his successor, afforded an opportunity for so flagrant an act of usurpation, as roused even the sluggish spirit of John. Not only did Innocent claim the right of filling vacant benefices, but he declared by the plenitude of his apostolic power, he could supply all defects of title in the person on whom he bestowed preferment. The selection of cardinal Langton to fill the bishopric of Canterbury, although at the time very distasteful to the English nation, may be considered rather as an interposition of Providence for that unhappy country, than any desire of Innocent for other interests than his own; whilst his rejection by John, who, although violently protesting against so palpable an usurpation on the part of the sovereign pontiff, dared not, from the terms on which he stood with the nobility, entreat their aid, appeared to hurry England to the climax of misfortune. The sentence of interdiction, which had for some time been suspended, was pronounced by the pope—a sentence which at that time was, to the ruin of millions, not only in their earthly possessions but in their spiritual and eternal welfare, the great instrument of vengeance and policy employed by the church of Rome. Of a sudden the nation was deprived of all exterior exercise of religion. The altars were despoiled of their ornaments; the crosses, the relics, the images, the statues of the saints were laid on the ground; and as if the air itself was profaned, and might pollute them by its contact, the priests carefully covered them up even from their own approach and veneration. The use of bells entirely ceased in all the churches, the laity partook of no religious rite except baptism to new born infants and the administration of the Eucharist to the dying persons; so that the bodies of the dead were carried out of cities and towns, and without ceremony, like those of beasts, were cast into pits and ditches.

The earnest supplications of the Archbishop Langton, with the bishops of London and Ely, that the pope Innocent would vouchsafe, out of his pious compassion, to support the English church, then at the point of ruin, afforded pretence for still further humbling the English king; for, by the advice of his cardinals and others, he now resolved to display his utmost power, and by a solemn sentence it was decreed that king John, being entirely deposed from his kingdom, his holiness should prefer a more worthy person to succeed him. Accordingly, he wrote to Philip king of France, requiring him to put this sentence into execution, and promising to grant him remission of all his sins, together with the kingdom of England in perpetual right, whenever he had dethroned the present possessor.

It was found, however, to be more for the interest of the papacy to retain on the English throne a prince abject both in character and fortune, than to form a new alliance with a victorious monarch, whose mighty acquisitions would in all probability render him too haughty to be bound by spiritual chains; and Innocent accordingly dispatched to England his chosen legate, Pandolf, with secret instructions, that if John could still be brought to such conditions as were proposed, he could be absolved and restored. Such promises to a prince surrounded by enemies, regarded with a just horror by his own people, and already on the verge of utter ruin, were not without effect. Cowardly and incapable, instead of braving the storm, John bartered his kingdom for his personal safety, and no form of submission was now too abject for the humbled monarch. Laying down his sceptre, mantle, sword, and ring, the badges of his royal dignity, at the feet of Pandolf, he delivered up to him the kingdom of England, thereby submitting himself to the judgment and mercy of the church, and promising implicit obedience to the commands of the pope, which having done, he soon found with a more afflicting dejection of mind what these commands were—for, says Rapine, 'his crimes were accounted so great against God and the church, that there could be no expiation without a resignation of the crown.' To this ignominious ceremony John not only submitted, but professed to have done so, 'neither out of fear or restraint, but of his own free will; to so low a pitch had ambition sunk in the mind of the despised monarch.'

The restoration of the crown and sceptre which after the space of five days took place on the part of Innocent, could not wipe away the disgrace of the transaction, or the memory of the humiliating ceremonies that had accompanied it. Coming disguised into the presence of Pandolf, who, as the representative of his master, was seated on a throne, John had flung himself upon his knees, and with uplifted and joined hands, he with all the submissive rites then required by the feudal law, had done homage to him as his liege lord and superior.

The abject condition of the monarch, now more than ever rendering him the object of the nation's contempt, was the means of paving the way to that grand renewal of rights and liberties that has ever since been regarded as the great bulwark of British freedom, and to attain which the dissatisfied barons had bound themselves to contend even to death itself.

It is well known that the already imperfect liberties enjoyed by the Anglo-Saxons in their ancient government had, on the introduction of the feudal law by William the conqueror, reduced the people almost to a state of slavery. The power of the crown once raised to so high a pitch was not easily reduced, and during a period of a hundred and fifty years, the nation had groined under a species of tyranny hitherto unknown. Henry I., in his desire to exclude on any terms his elder brother Robert from the kingdom, had granted the people a charter favourable to their liberties. Stephen had renewed that grant, and Henry II. had confirmed it; but notwithstanding this, the same unlimited authority, both by these princes and their successors, continued to be exercised over the people, until a combination of the whole country against the reigning monarch appeared the only mode of obtaining redress. The mean and contemptible character of John was well suited to forward rather than restraint such a movement; and the barons, writhing under the insolence of the tyrant, inflamed by a sense of the wrong inflicted by him, and resolved on a restoration of their privileges, solemnly took an oath before the high altar that they would adhere to each other, and insist on their demands, or make endless war on the king till he should submit to grant them. From this time their purpose was immovable. The thunder of Rome (for the pope was now again ready to favour the pretensions of the tyrant) was threatened in vain; seized with the national passion for laws and liberty, superstition itself lost its power over them. The frenzy of John when, upon hearing what their demands were, he furiously swore never to grant such liberties as would make himself a slave, was equally uncareful for. They received his answer, and forthwith appointed Robert Fitzwalter their leader, under the title of Marshal of the army of God and of the holy church, they proceeded to levy war upon the king. Their numbers rapidly increased, for all who had hitherto worn the semblance of loyalty and adherence to the monarch now cast the mask aside, and openly joined a cause they had always secretly favoured, John found himself totally deserted. By various expedients he attempted to elude the blow that hung over him, and proposed referring all differences to the pope, or to eight barons, four of whom should be chosen by himself, and four by the confederates. But he was at length obliged to submit, and with a facility which did not pass without suspicion on the part of the barons, he signed and sealed the Great Charter.

Had the articles drawn out by the barons themselves also been instituted in this great grant, the concessions, by serving only to increase the power of a body of men already too powerful, and whose yoke would shortly have become more heavy than even that of an absolute monarch, would have added but little to the happiness and liberty of the nation at large. But to gain the necessary concurrence of the people, they were obliged to insert other clauses; and by these it was ordained that all these privileges and immunities demanded of the king by the barons, should in their turn be extended by them to their inferior vassals, and thus the great chart of freedom was perfected. If some of those articles enforced in the charter appear exorbitant, the faithless and tyrannical character of the king making him so likely to revoke his own concessions, may plead an excuse, while the prudence and moderation exercised by the barons, enraged as they were by injuries, inflamed by opposition, and elated by a total victory over their sovereign, demand respect, since even with the power in their own hands they generously omitted some of those articles in Henry the first's charter, and carefully avoided of diminishing too far the power and revenue of the crown. The deep and sullen revenge which, from the first appearance of revolt in his subjects, had been smouldering in the heart of the tyrant, required but this last stroke to fan it into flame. The injuries and indignities formerly showered upon him by the pope, or the king of France, as they came from equals and superiors, seemed to have made but little impression upon him, but the sense of perpetual and total subjection under his own rebellious vassals, sunk deep on his mind; and the mercenary soldiery by which he was surrounded desiring war more than peace, and continually representing to him that by this grant to his subjects, he had made himself a king without a kingdom, a lord without dominions, and a subject to his subjects, he resolved at all hazards to free himself from so ignominious a slavery. Recalling therefore, the liberties he had granted, John, with his force of foreign mercenaries, threw himself upon his barons; and they having, unfortunately, since the signing of the great charter, been lulled into a fatal security, were unprepared for an attack, horror followed upon horror; the miserable state of the country surpassed even its former wretchedness. In the words of Echard, 'all things were in a deplorable state and in the greatest confusion. Fathers set against their sons; brothers against brothers; kinsmen and allies against their nearest friend; attacking, surprising, pursuing, ravaging, tormenting; and murdering—all the kingdom by the combination of so universal a war, becoming like a general shambles, or a place of infernal desolation.'

The mercenary troops who had sold their services to the English monarch, incited by him, and let loose upon the estates and manors of the barons, spread devastation over the face of the kingdom. Nothing was seen on every side but the flames of villages and castles,

while the consternation and misery of the wretched inhabitants reduced the barons to so desperate an extremity, that, menaced with a total loss of their liberty, they employed a remedy no less desperate; for making application to the court of France, they offered to acknowledge Louis, the eldest son of Philip, for their sovereign, on condition that he would afford them protection from the violence of their enraged prince. This fatal step ensured apparently their own ruin with that of the kingdom. But John had now drunk long draughts of vengeance, glutting himself in the people, and they, in their turn, burned to purchase revenge at the price of their own destruction. Philip was not likely to be solicited in vain. Large forces were again in readiness for the invasion of England; and John, who was unable to offer resistance, and who feared that his army, consisting entirely of foreigners, would with one accord desert to the French prince, withdrew his forces from Dover, so as to leave an uncontested passage to the invader, and thus, by his cowardice and incapability, resigning to the last stage of ruin his unhappy country.

With all outward demonstrations of joy and triumph, Louis, on entering London, received the homage of the people, and, in his turn, swore upon the holy Evangelists to restore to them all good laws, and their lost inheritance. But so ill-advised a union was of short duration. Dover with a few other castles, had alone stood out, still continuing faithful to the English king; and while Louis laid furious and ineffectual sieges to these, King John with his mighty army, breaking forth with a sudden violence like a furious tempest, overran many counties, to the ruin and destruction of the castles, houses, lands, and possessions of his nobility in all parts. 'The barons,' says Echard, 'were now under great troubles and afflictions to see their native country, by their own willfulness, thus horribly ravaged, and their goods and estates plundered by the king's forces. And what added to their grief was finding that their faithful services, in this their faithless adherence, was not so respected by Louis as he and their own vain hopes had promised them.'

Many authors have, apparently on good authority, narrated the fact of the English barons being put on their guard as to the future faith of the dauphin, by the Viscount de Melun, who being in his last sickness in London, and 'finding,' we are told by Rapine, 'his conscience barthened with the sense of a mighty secret, generously declared to those barons who were his friends, that he was grieved for the impending ruin that was falling upon them, of which they had no knowledge, since Prince Louis, with sixteen barons and earls of France, had sworn that when he had conquered England and was crowned he would for ever banish and destroy the posterity of those who had fought with him against King John.' That no doubt might exist of the truth of his assertion, the Count de Melun affirmed it upon the word of a dying man, and as he hoped for salvation. He was, he said, one of those who had taken the oath, and shortly before he expired he again desired them to be secret, but to provide for their safety as well as they could.

Whether true or false, this story, being circulated, greatly prejudiced the cause of Louis; and so many of the English noblemen deserted again to John's party, that the French prince had good reason to dread a sudden reverse of fortune. 'But all the mischief,' says Daniel, 'that had been so long gathering over the devoted kingdom, came to an end about the latter end of October, 1216, for a burning fever seized upon the fiery king, of which he died. Two most unkindly and unwelcome causes have been assigned as the immediate means of John's death. First, extreme sorrow for the destruction of his waggons, carts, sumpter-horses, treasure, precious vessels, sacred relics, and regalia—all of which were lost by the flowing in of the tide, on his passage from Lynne to Lincolnshire; and secondly, by a surfeit of peaches and new ale, gotten at the Abbey of Swinhead.' So died, in the fifty-first year of his age, and the sixtieth of his miserable reign, the usurper and the tyrant John.

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## JACQUES LAFITTE.

'If men make their boast of the honorable name, the rank in life, which they inherit from their fathers, why should it not be a much nobler boast to owe only to myself, to my own talent, my genius, my industry, name and fortune, and position in society—to make them all, in short, for myself?'

Such were the reflections of a youth who, one morning in the year 1737, was hurrying, in much apparent agitation, along the street of the Chaussée d'Antin, and who now stopped, as if undecided what to do, before one of the handsomest hotels in Paris, which had long been the abode of a great banker.

No sooner had he passed through the gate, than a very natural feeling of timidity made the youth draw back a few steps, while his mild and pleasing countenance seemed to assume a still more pensive expression as his eye for a moment fell upon his plain coarse garb. The courage which had led him on so far had suddenly abandoned him, and he would have gone away as he came, if the concierge, or house porter, who had been for some moments watching and smiling at his embarrassment, had not advanced towards him and inquired what he wanted.

'I wish to see Monsieur Parregaux,' replied he, encouraged by something in the look of the man.