

Earl Harold and Bishop Giso.

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IN the History of the See of Wells, Bishop Giso must occupy a very conspicuous place. He was the first of the line of foreign prelates who ended in the Bishop-Abbot Savaric. He was the virtual founder of the Chapter. His own autobiography, singularly preserved to us, throws light not only on the peculiar history of his See, but on the general history of the Church of the Conquest.

Whatever interest however may belong to each of these aspects of Bishop Giso, his connexion with Earl Harold and the charges he brings against him are of far greater historical importance. Obscure as these charges are, and tedious as their minute examination may seem, no labour can be wasted which throws even the smallest light on the life of Harold. For there are few great Englishmen of whom we know so little, of whom the little that we seem to know is so darkened and perverted by the passions of the struggle in which he fell.

Not the least curious feature of these charges is their gradual growth from the days of Bishop Giso till their culmination in the pages of the County Historian. Giso (I shall presently give his story in extenso) states that on the death of his predecessor, Bishop Duduco, Harold seized

both the manors and moveables which he had bequeathed to his See. Throughout Eadward's reign he, Giso, kept thinking of excommunicating the Earl for this sacrilege, but more prudently confined himself to remonstrances which remained without effect till the death of the Confessor. Then, in the midst of his difficulties, Harold promised not only to restore what he had taken but to add yet ampler gifts to the See, a promise whose fulfilment was prevented by his death.

The next appearance of the story is in the History of the Bishops of Bath and Wells given in the *Anglia Sacra*; a work of the 14th century, and generally quoted as by "The Canon of Wells." On Giso's return from his consecration at Rome—says this author—he found the Canons reduced to mendicancy by the sacrilege of Harold, and begged for their sustenance Wedmore of the Confessor, and Mark of his queen. On his "invasion" of the Crown, however, Harold "at once confiscated the possessions of the said Giso and the Canons of Wells," which were only partly restored by the Conqueror.

The growth of Harold's one sacrilege into two, and the change of Giso's "promise of restitution" into the Canons' "immediate confiscation" seems bold enough, but it is eclipsed by Godwin. In *his* version, Giso complains of the sacrilege to the Confessor, but meets with "cold comfort," while on his death the Bishop is "faine to flye the land till such time as Harold the sacrilegious usurper being vanquished and slaine, William the Conqueror was a meane to restore not onely him to his place and country, but his church also to all that the other had violently taken from it."

A single "flight," however imaginary, could not satisfy the County Historian, Mr. Collinson; in *his* account Harold

is banished and his estates given to the See, then Harold returns and Giso goes into exile, then Harold becomes King, sentences the Bishop to perpetual banishment, resumes his property and holds it to his death!

Such statements, of course, need no refutation: their only interest lies in the striking parallel they afford to the gradual growth of monastic legends and historic "pretty stories." This is a case of mere transmission from one mouth to another, and like the game of "Russian Scandal," may show how without any deliberate untruthfulness, men simply copying the one from the other, may by gradual exaggeration not only distort but utterly reverse the account from which they started.

Turning, however, to the original charge against Harold, I feel that as the best witness against Bishop Giso is Bishop Giso himself, it is only fair to give his own words from the "Historiola de Primordiis Episcopatus Somersetensis," published in Mr. Hunter's "Ecclesiastical Documents," by the Camden Society. "Huic successit Duduco, natione Saxo . . . qui possessiones quas hæreditario jure a Rege ante episcopatum promeruerat, monasterium videlicet Sancti Petri in civitate Gloucestrensi situm cum omnibus ad se pertinentibus, et villam quæ Kungresbiria dicitur, atque aliam Banewelle nuncupatam, roboratas cyrographis regiæ autoritaris ac donationis Deo Sanctoque Andreæ tempore Edwardi piissimi regis obtulit: vestimenta quoque sacerdotalia, reliquias sanctorum, vasa altarea concupiscibilia, libros plurimos, et omnia quæ habere poterat, jam imminente die vocationis suæ adhibuit: et xx^{mum} vij^{um} ordinationis suæ agens annum menses quoque vij et dies vij obdormivit in domino Haroldus vero tunc temporis dux occidentalium Saxonum non solum terras invadere verum etiam episcopalem sedem omnibus hiis spoliare non timuit. Sed

et Stigandus archiepiscopus Cantuariorum præfatum monasterium injustâ ambitione a rege sibi dari petiit et impetratum ad horam obtinuit."

In this passage (which, simple as it is, becomes almost unintelligible in Mr. Hunter's translation) a distinction is clearly intended between two separate bequests made at two different times. The personalty, the vestments, relics, books, etc., were a death-bed* and apparently a verbal legacy, for Giso omits here all mention of the "cyrographs" which he is so careful to specify in the other case. The first bequest then is but an instance of the ever recurring question of death-bed legacies to the clergy, and Harold's assertion of his legal right as Earl to the personalty of the deceased proves only his disbelief of the story of the four or five Canons.

The real matter at issue however is the Earl's seizure of the Manors of Congresbury and Banwell, and it is therefore of great importance to note the true character of this estate. It had never formed any part of the property of the See or of the Canons. It had been granted by Cnut to Duduco "ante episcopatum," while he was but a royal clerk. He retained it as Bishop, but this in nowise affected its private character. From Giso's tale one would infer that Harold's seizure of it reduced the Canons to poverty; whatever their poverty may have been it cannot have resulted from a loss of what they never had. The manors belonged to Duduco in allodial tenure, "hereditario jure," and might pass to the Church by his will, supposing the will did not violate the original conditions of the grant. In case of such violation, or of the execution of no will at

* "Imminente die vocationis sucœ," translated by Hunter in defiance of the whole drift of the story "just before he became Bishop." So, too, he muddles the two bequests into one.

all, the granted lands would of course revert to the Crown. If they reverted to the Crown they would probably be at once granted away to the Royal favourites, and nothing would be more natural than to find them, as we do find them, in the hands of Harold and Stigand.

Now, that the grant did in some way revert thus seems almost certain from the very words used by Giso in his charge against the Archbishop, "præfatum monasterium injusta ambitione a Rege sibi dari petiit, et impetratum ad horam obtinuit." Harold's share of the estate would naturally be obtained in the same way as Stigand's, and the "injustice," if there were any in the matter, would rest rather with the Crown than with the Earl.

But was there any injustice? According to Giso's statement, Duduco had provided against the reversion of the grant, by its bequest to the See of Wells, a bequest confirmed by Royal charters, to which however no date is assigned but the very indefinite one of "the time of King Eadward." No trace of these is to be found now among Eadward's numerous Charters, and it must not be forgotten that Giso is not speaking here from his own personal knowledge, but solely from the information of the four or five mendicant Canons of Wells. Very serious difficulties indeed present themselves if we accept the story of the Canons as Giso reports it.

1.—It was a time when the very multiplicity of charters prove the force which they were supposed to possess; Eadward was superstitious in his regard for the rights of the Church; Giso was one of his own clerks, his own nominee to the bishopric, and supported by him in his subsequent efforts for its restoration and enrichment. In the teeth of these facts we must suppose that the very instant Duduco dies the King suffers his solemn charters to be

torn to rags, the Church to be shamelessly plundered, the Canons to be reduced to beggary, his favourite to be thwarted and left without redress.

2.—What redress however did Giso seek? The natural course was that of an appeal to the King, and this Godwin asserts him to have made and to have received but “cold comfort.” But Godwin’s “cold comfort” is not only unsupported by, but wholly contradictory to the Bishop’s own words. The King, he says, “honourably received” him on his return from Rome. “Tunc ecclesiam sedis meæ perspicuens esse mediocrem, clericos quoque quattuor vel quinque absque claustro et refectorio esse ibidem, voluntarium me ad eorum astruxi adinstauratorem. Igitur pietate nulli secundo cum hujusmodi indigentiam intimarem, possessionem quæ Wedmor dicitur pro remuneratione æternæ recompensationis in augmentum et sustentationem fratrum ibidem Deo servientium ab eo impetravi.” And he specifies Queen Eadgyth, that is Harold’s sister, as she “cujus adminiculo et suggestione hoc ad effectum venit.” Another similar depredator, Alsie who had appropriated Wynesham Giso brings before the County Court and obtains judgment against him. But during the six years of Eadward’s reign he appeals neither to King nor courts against Harold.*

* I merely notice the charter assigned to Eadward at this period (Codex Diplomaticus, 816), lest I should be charged with overlooking it. It is a gross forgery. It is dated May 20, 1065, yet “ante hoc biennium Romæ direxi,” says Eadward of Giso. Giso is himself the scribe and can hardly have so soon forgotten that his visit had taken place not two years before, but four, in 1061. Among the manors of the See we find “Mercern” or Mark, which was not given by Eadgyth till after the Confessor’s death. But the crowning blunder is in the crediting of the See in 1065 with Banwell and Congresbury by the very Giso who himself complains that they were then in Earl Harold’s possession. Kemble marks the charter as spurious.

3.—The evidence of the Charters which survive relative to the subject may indeed be made to tell either way. On the one hand they are uniformly addressed to Harold while apparently assuming that Giso enjoyed the same endowments as his predecessor Duduco; on the other there are allusions to restitution which might be adduced in proof of the occurrence of some sacrilege or other. That announcing the grant of the bishopric begins (Codex Diplom, 835) “King Eadward greets Earl Harold and Abbot Aylnoth and Shire-reeve Godwin and all my thegns in Somerset friendly; and I have you to know that I have given Giso my priest this bishopric here with you and all its belongings as full and as freely as Duduco or any bishop before him had in all things. And if there be any land taken out of that bishopric I will that it come in again,” Another charter (838) repeats the grant of the Episcopal property “as fully and as freely as any bishop before him had in all things,” and ends “and if anything be unlawfully taken out of that bishopric whether it be in land or in any other thing, aid him for love of me that it come in again so that he have right.” 834 is a mere epitome of these, “King Eadward greets Earl Harold and Abbot Egelnoth and Shirereeve Godwin and all my thegns in Somerset friendly, and I have you to know how that I will that Bishop Giso possess his lands now as his predecessors afore him did and I will not that any man do him any wrong.” Both the “as fully and as freely” and the restitution clause in these charters may be mere copies of the usual diplomatic formulæ; if indeed the latter be more and refer to Harold’s sacrilege, it is hardly conceivable that they should be addressed to Harold himself, and should call on him “for my love” to *aid the Bishop* in procuring restitution.

4.—On Eadward's death, however, Giso represents himself as remonstrating, and his remonstrances as attended with complete success. "Haroldum etiam ducem qui ecclesiam nuhi commissam' [spoliaverat, inserted by Mr. Hunter] 'nunc secreto nunc palam correctum pari sententiâ cogitabam ferire," i.e. of excommunication. "Sed defuncto Rege Edwardo . . . cum ille regni gubernacula suscepisset, non solum ea quæ tulerat se redditurum, verum etiam ampliora spondit daturum. Præoccupante autem illum judicio divinæ ultionis," etc. If the absence of extant charters prevents our testing Giso's account of the bequest of Bishop Duduco, we can at any rate test his accuracy here. Harold's charter as King may be found in the *Codex Diplomaticus* (976), and far from containing any acknowledgment of wrong is the strongest proof of Harold's unconsciousness of having done any wrong at all. It runs indeed in a strangely friendly fashion. "Harold King greets Ailnoth Abbot and Tovid and all my thanes in Somerset friendly; and I have you to know that I will that Bishop Giso have sac and soc over his land and over his men, and toll and teme and infangtheof in borough and out as fully and freely as he had aforetime in King Eadward's days in all things." They are to support him whenever he needs "and I will that no man do him any wrong (unlag) in anything." If Harold were the wrong doer the clause is the language of sarcasm rather than of restitution. But there is no question either of the one or the other. The words are those of one who is on good terms with Giso, and who has not the slightest suspicion of a wish on the Bishop's part for more than he possessed in King Edward's days.

5.—Harold fell, whether by "the judgment of a Divine vengeance" is another question, and William was not likely

to refuse to listen to a charge of sacrilege against his rival. And Giso is prompt with complaints—but of Ailsie and Stigand, not of Harold. “*Dux vero victoriâ potitus, cum regni gubernacula post eum suscepisset et a me de injuriâ mihi allatâ querimoniam audisset, Wynesham ecclesive resignavit et monasterium Oswaldi se additurum cum citius posset spondit.*” Godwin indeed says “Giso was faine to fly the land till such time as Harold the sacrilegious usurper being vanquished and slaine William the Conqueror was a meane to restore not onely him to his place and country, but his Church also to all that the other had violently taken from it except some small parcels that (I know not by what meanes) had been conveighed unto the monastery of Gloucester;” but his authority is merely the Canon of Wells, and the Canon’s account while it shews an utter ignorance of the matter is really more accurate than is meant to be. Soon after William’s coronation “*cito postea fere omnes possessiones ab Ecclesia Wellensi per Haroldum ablatas Gisoni restituit, exceptis quibusdam ad monasterium S. Petri Glocestricæ applicatis et exceptis Congresburye, Banewell, et Kilmington et plurimis aliis.*” The writer never suspected that his exceptions embraced the whole of Bishop Duduco’s legacy, the whole of Earl Harold’s plunder. So far indeed was the Conquest from enriching the See that it seems to have impoverished it. Milverton, a gift of Eadgyths in King Eadward’s time, (Cod. Dip. 917.) had ere Domesday survey passed to the Crown: Ash Priors, which had been held by the Bishop was then held by Roger de Arundel “*de rege injuste.*” Banwell indeed had been granted by William to the Bishopric in his 11th year (according to the Canon of Wells); but Congresbury remained in the hands of the Crown till the reign of King John.

This grant of Banwell to the See, late as it was, seems to me the only circumstance which at all tends to confirm the story of Giso. Of the actual facts he is no witness, for they took place during his absence at Rome, and they really rest on the tittle-tattle of the four "mendicant Canons." We may note too that on all questions connected with his See before his own accession, Giso shows the natural ignorance of a foreigner ; he places Duduco's accession in 1030, instead of 1033 ; he blends together Duduco's two predecessors, Merewit and Brightwin, into a "*Brytheri episcopus Wellie ecclesie Merechyt cognominatus.*" His account is inconsistent both with itself and the outer facts ; take it away, and the matter becomes at once intelligible. Thus much at any rate is clear, that the disputed manors were during Duduco's life his own private fief and nowise the property of the See ; that they would on his death in due course revert to the Crown ; that they did so revert and were re-granted to Stigand and Harold ; that no legal claim to them seems to have been made by the Bishop in Eadward's days ; that Harold when King seems by his charter to have been utterly unconscious of such a claim ; that no such claim was among those laid before—or at least admitted by—William on his accession ; that the tone of Harold in his only extant charter is that of a friend of the See, rather than a plunderer ; that his sister Eadgith was a steady benefactor of the See during both her reign and her widowhood. Facts such as these point, I think, to a verdict somewhat different from the common verdict of "sacrilege."
