

A DOMINICAN TRAGEDY

THAT the murderer of Henry III was Jacques Clément, a Jacobin friar, is certain, although soon after the event some were inclined to doubt whether the miscreant were a Jacobin or no in spite of his habit. The extraordinary story ran that Clément was put up for the night by the *Procureur Général* de la Guesle and there murdered in order to obtain his habit to disguise the real assassin, who was a soldier. It is not necessary to kill a man to obtain the habit of a religious and at that time the environs of Paris swarmed with every kind of Order. Again, why a Dominican? Was the *Procureur Général* especially anxious to make a case against that Order as well as to murder his King? In short the story is incredible in every way and could only have arisen owing to the fact that Clément was killed on the spot. De la Guesle called out that he was not to be injured, although he himself had knocked the assassin down, with a view, of course, for torture to discover who were behind him.

The facts are that Clément exhibited two passports, one of which was forged, when he came to St. Cloud saying that he was an escaped royalist with vital news for the King. Quite early in the morning the friar was introduced to Henry and dealt him a blow which proved fatal within twenty-four hours. By a strange fatality the King had only put on a chamois vest under the violet coat which he always wore, instead of the *cuirasse* which would be the usual dress during a campaign.

I think the whole imaginary story arose from a chance remark of P. Matthieu : ' J'ai oui dire à Henry le Grand que si Clément n'eût pas été reconnu pour un religieux par un archer de la porte nommé François Dumont, et par quelques autres il y en avoit qui vouloient faire croire que c'estoit un Huguenot déguisé.'

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The name Jacobin has been a pitfall to some English writers who have turned Clément into a Jesuit, because, I suppose, either word begins with a 'J.'

Every ruler, and not without reason, lived in fear of conspiracies and the law was slow to believe that any act might be that of an isolated fanatic. In this case it was justified, no doubt. The scheme with the genuine passport of Brienne, who was himself taken in, and the forged one of de Harlay, was all too well planned to have originated in the brain of a simple friar. Madame de Montpensier and d'Aumale were beyond dispute responsible.¹

What is most interesting to us is the sequel. In 1590 the R. P. Edmond Bourgoing, O.P., prior of the Jacobin convent in Paris, during a *sortie* was captured by the royalists and sent to Tours for trial. The royalist fraction of the *Parlement* of Paris and the rest of the administrative machinery sat there so long as Paris was held by the Leaguers. Bourgoing was only asked at first whether or no Clément was the murderer and if he came from his priory. He could not deny either fact. The argument of the *Procureur Général*, the same who was at St. Cloud, ran to the effect that a congregation was responsible, in its superior, for the acts of each and all of its members. De la Guesle's argument would not, of course, be law now and I doubt if it were then. All the same, the prior would have been condemned on the fact alone of his being taken in company of the King's enemies. Later, the prosecution insisted that he must himself have incited Clément to the crime, which in spite of repeated torture he stoutly denied and even deplored, whilst ad-

¹ d'Aumale was condemned by the *Parlement* of Paris in 1594 and executed in effigy. He was safe in the Spanish Low Countries, where he died. Madame de Montpensier showed the most frenzied delight at the news, and indeed she was in great danger, for the assault on Paris was to have taken place on the same day.

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mitting that he favoured the League, again a fact not to be denied. He was sentenced to the usual horrible penalty for *lèse-majesté*.

Now there is a piece usually held to be the work of a Jacobin in which all credit for the deed is claimed for Clément, with reflection of it on the whole Order, and honours exaggerated even for a saint were paid to the assassin in Paris. It has been asserted that this effusion was the work of Bourgoing. That is extremely unlikely; for the prosecution would never have missed such an opportunity during the prior's process at Tours. It is by no means certain that it was even the work of a Dominican, for it bears a very close resemblance to an exultant sonnet on the 'tyran occis par permission divine à St. Cloud par J. Clément de l'ordre des Jacobins,' and that is by H. Perraud. On the other hand passions ran high in those days, and if a religious could be found to commit murder there is no inherent objection to his *confrère* making a *discours* about it. We know the violence and bloodthirsty sentiments of many of the seculars within Paris. I believe the prior to have been wholly innocent of the charge of inciting Clément, but on the other counts he had no chance of escape. Accounts differ as to whether he was taken armed or unarmed. There again, we cannot say it was highly improbable for a friar to be armed, for we know that many of the Parisian *curés* habitually led their flocks in a soldier's uniform, a practice which drew a reproof on one of them from Colonel Aubrey.

Forty-five years later, in an interesting book by the Dominican Malpaeus, 'Palma fidei S Ordinis Praedicatorum descriptore Petro Malpaeo ejusdem ordinis quondam priore Bruxell. Antwerpiae Joannis Cnobbari typographia MDCXXXV,' Bourgoing is described as a 'martyr.'

'Anno MDXC Turonis in Francia tam innocenter quam constanter diram oppetiit mortem P. Edmond

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Bourgoing natione Francus e Campania in conventu Rotomagensi ordinis nostrae sacris initiatus, ex facultate Parisiana S.T.M., nec non coenobii S. Jacobi Parisiis prior vir summae pietatis in dicendo facundus et in docendo mirabilis. Hunc quod adversus Franciae reges Henricum III et IV, e suggestu declamasset, et J. Clément qui Henricum III necavit, licentiam ad sua redeundi, cum facultate quosdam ex amicis invisendi, juxta consuetam et receptam scribendi formam, justis de causis sibi notis, dedisset. Parlamenti proceres infandam regis caedem subdito suo consuluisse suspicati; nonnullis regiae parti studiosis et P. Bourgoing infestis, suspicionem sic augmentibus firmantibusque, ut in fidem verterint; Turonis ubi tunc erat Parlamentum Parisiense torturis inauditis premunt nec tamen aliud ab ipso exprimere potuere praeterquam regiae parti, cum aliis eum fuisse infensum. Edmondum licet constantissime semper protestatum de Clementis facinore nihil unquam se scrivisse tandem in publicam commissae caedis noxam, quasi ordinis hostiam, quatuor equis in diversa concitatis discernendum statuerunt. Dum agitentur equi assidue in ore erat: Domine auge poenam sed da patientiam. Jamque discerptus ultimis verbis quae innocentiae Deum testem appellavit. Passus est aetatis suae anno circiter XLIII.¹

In this very interesting book are the records of martyrs in the mission field and elsewhere, but from an ordinary standpoint we should hardly agree with the Belgian Dominican including Bourgoing in this category.² He was a very brave and doubtless pious man and on that particular count was probably innocent,

² He was, of course, never officially a *venerabilis* or *beatus*; but others besides him and even, as we have seen, the assassin himself, obtained a short-lived *cultus* in extreme quarters—a most unfortunate thing for the Church, as such wild conduct increased the hostility of Protestant and neutral circles.

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but on two other counts clearly guilty of high treason, and in no country of Europe would he have escaped. The case is similar to that of our John Felton. His act was a brave one, but a like fate would have befallen anyone who pasted up an excommunication of the King of France. In the case of Bourgoing there was, moreover, no suspicion of *hatred to the Faith*. every one of the *conseillers* of the *parlement* were Catholics.

There exists another violent partisan *discours*³ where the Prior is called the 'martyr' of the *Procureur Général*, who was always *tenant le party contraire aux Catholiques*; that only means he was anti-leaguer. We know all about de la Guesle, he was one of the *United Catholics*. The only Huguenot in the whole story is Henry IV himself, who though curiously devoid of any vindictive spirit let the sentence stand; but the saintly Queen Louise was the real cause of the ferocious sentence being carried out.

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³ Amongst other things it gives the name of the *exempt* who ran Clément through as Mont-Ferrier. It is a rare tract only printed in Vol. iv, First Series, or Vol. xii uniform edition, Cimber & Danjon, Paris, 1836.