III

THE MURDER OF HENRY CLEMENT AND THE PIRATES OF LUNDY ISLAND[1]

1. *The Murder of Henry Clement*

All that we know of Henry Clement is that he was a clerk and messenger of the justiciar of Ireland, Maurice fitzGerald, and that he was murdered in the spring of 1235 in Westminster. The crime caused a sensation. Better men of his time have left no memorial; Henry Clement has a certain fame because of the manner of his death.

A royal letter of 16 May 1235 tells the story. King Henry had arrived in Westminster on the previous Sunday, 13 May. On the same night Henry Clement was foully murdered in his lodging "before our gates, to our no small dishonour and the scandal of the realm". Several persons were suspected of the murder. Geoffrey de Marisco, a former justiciar of Ireland, fled to sanctuary in Clerkenwell. One important person, Maurice Comyn, was at once caught and imprisoned in the Tower of London. He lay in the Tower from Pentecost (27 May) till the feast of All Saints (1 November), when he was released after finding pledges for his appearance. He was delivered to Geoffrey de Marisco, in whose company he had apparently come to Westminster. The other persons accused of the murder scattered and fled. Some made their way to the west. The king had heard that their intention was to cross to Lundy Island. They were William de Marisco (or Marsh),

[1]Based upon a paper which first appeared in *History*, xxv (1941), 285-310. A revised edition, to which reference should be made for information about authorities, will be found in my work, *Henry III and The Lord Edward*, ii. 740-759.

Geoffrey's son, with his household, William of Pont de l'Arche, Philip of Dinant, Thomas de Erdinton and John Cabus. Three others, Walter Sandcinell, Eustace Comyn and Henry of Colombieres, were believed to have gone east, for the earl Warenne and the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk were warned and told to intercept them. Every other sheriff was warned to be on the watch for the malefactors; but, with the exception of William Marsh, they disappear from history. They did not come to stand their trial, and, accordingly, they were outlawed.

The official record of the judicial inquiry which followed the murder has fortunately survived. It was noticed by Maitland nearly half a century ago and edited by him in the *English Historical Review*[1]. It gives the evidence of many witnesses and enables us to reconstruct the details of the crime. Henry Clement was staying in a house opposite the main gate of the royal palace—that is to say, in a street or open place to the east of the abbey church and precincts. The cemetery lay to the left, the way to the town to the right, of the palace gates. The house in which Henry Clement lodged belonged to Master David the surgeon. Since a woman in the house, one of the witnesses, is described as the *hospita* of Master David, I imagine that David leased it from her, leaving her the use of part of it—there are examples of such leases—or that she leased it from him, giving him the right to occupy the main rooms when he was in residence. It was of the usual type—a hall, from which an inside stair led to an upper room (*solarium*), an adjacent lodging in which Alice the *hospita* lived, and a courtyard (*curia*), at the back in which there was a smaller house with a stable, probably a stable with a dwelling-room over it. Some men were sleeping in this stable. Opposite the house, on the other side of the paved street some

[1] *Eng. Hist. Rev.* x (1895) 294; F. W. Maitland, *Collected Papers*, III. 11-16.

of the king's servants were in tents set up before the gate of the palace. On the night of Sunday, 13 May 1235, Master David and his guest were sleeping in the solar. Early on the Monday morning—the evidence suggests that it was not long after midnight—a number of men rode up to the house. The men in tents heard the neighing of the horses and the clatter of their hooves in the roadway. One of these men said that he thought there were about sixteen horsemen, some of them armed. Half a dozen went to the house, leaving the rest to watch outside. They broke down the door of the hall, climbed the stair and broke down the door of the solar. One of them carried a blazing torch, which was extinguished when they saw that they had found their quarry. Master David was wounded. Henry Clement tried to escape by jumping out of a window, but, seeing the men outside, he drew back. He was killed. A king's messenger who was sleeping in the hall saw what happened, but was too frightened to do anything. His servant who was also in the hall, said that the house seemed full of men. He was so frightened that he covered up his head. He ventured out afterwards and followed the murderers towards the cemetery, where, so another witness said, they had left their horses. Not one of the numerous witnesses could identify any of the strangers, and Alice the *hospita* who cried out from a window could not awaken the men in the stable. The case against William de Marisco and his companions seems to have depended on what is called circumstantial evidence. The surgeon said, for example, that a boy in buttons[1], a messenger of William de Marisco, had called daily to ask where Henry Clement was and where he would lodge. Master David also reported a threatening demonstration against Henry, on the

[1] *Quidam parvus nuntius Willelmi de Marisco* (*ms.* reads in error *Willelmi Marescalli*) *cum minutis butonibus*. Maitland asks, "Can this be an early appearance of the boy in buttons?"

bridge at Rochester, by Henry Pont de l'Arche and others. Two knights from Ireland said that, when the king was at Windsor [10–16 April], William de Marisco had accused Henry Clement of putting obstacles in the way of his affairs at court and using his influence to avert the royal favour. Brian, another messenger from the justiciar of Ireland, who had been sleeping in the house in the courtyard, said that some of William's men had threatened Henry for the same reason. Alice testified that on that very Sunday in Westminster, Henry Clement had said, in her hearing, that he feared for his life and wished he were in Ireland rather than in England.

Who were these people, and why did they kill Henry Clement?

2. *Geoffrey de Marisco and Richard the Marshal*

Matthew Paris, the St. Albans chronicler, gives us one reason:

> A certain clerk, Henry Clement, a messenger of the ruling men in Ireland, foolishly boasting that he had been the cause of the death of Earl Richard the Marshal, and calling him a traitor and a cruel enemy of the king and kingdom, was killed in London, while the king was there. Gilbert Marshal, taxed by the king himself and by others with the crime, cleared himself after a long process (*plurimis argumentis*).

I am not sure whether the vague words mean that Earl Gilbert—the brother and successor of Earl Richard the Marshal—was formally indicted before his peers, but that his name and reputation were involved is shown by a solemn promise which he made to the king three weeks after Easter in the following year (1236). He made oath on the gospels to observe his promise, in the presence of the king, the archbishop of Canterbury and the chief men of the kingdom, and he attached his seal to the writing which recorded it. His undertaking comprised many points, and the first was that he

would not receive nor allow to be received in any of his lands William de Marisco and the other men, whose names we already know, outlawed for the death of Henry Clement. The assassins had obviously been connected with him in some way, and he had been suspected of harbouring them.

Henry Clement, then, was murdered by men in the Marshal's circle. According to Matthew Paris, he had gloried in Earl Richard's death, and boasted that he had had a hand in getting rid of a man who was a traitor.

The deed was an aftermath of a great political crisis and of a tragic event which had stirred passion and bred a crop of rumours. Its origin, like that of so many crimes of the kind, is to be found in Ireland; not, however, among the native Irish, but in the circle of a great Anglo-Norman lord, Richard Marshal, earl of Pembroke, and lord of Leinster. Earl Richard was the second son of the famous William the Marshal who at one time had governed England as *rector regni* (1216–19). He had been forced into a war against his lord, King Henry. He had carried the war from the Marches of Wales into Ireland, where he had gone in February 1234. He had doubtless heard that, in his absence, his interests in Leinster were threatened by the justiciar and barons and servants of the crown. King Henry, of course, was perfectly justified in striking a blow at the Marshal in Ireland, while the Marshal, with the aid of Llywelyn of Wales, was successfully defying him in the Marches; but, in fact, the circumstances of the Marshal's return to Ireland were not quite so simple as this. At the very time when Earl Richard was trying to recover some of his lost castles in Leinster, the king in England was negotiating for peace with him and Llywelyn. Henry had found that he could not win, and he had been persuaded by the English bishops to accept terms which would give the Marshal just what he had been fighting for—the dismissal of his present advisers,

and the renewal of co-operation with his barons on the basis of the Great Charter. The object of the negotiations was peace, not to separate the earl from his allies in Wales, and then to continue the war against him. Hence, one would expect to hear that the justiciar and barons in Ireland had made a truce with him. They did offer to negotiate for a truce, so that they could await instructions from England, but when the parties met on the well-known plain in Kildare county, known as the Curragh, they refused to restore, as a preliminary to a truce, the castles which they still held. Moreover, they proceeded to attack the Marshal in superior force (1 April 1234). The Marshal was badly wounded in the fight, was captured, and died on 16 April. By this time his cause in England was already won.

It is a mysterious story. If the justiciar, as may well have been the case, was ignorant that negotiations were proceeding on the borders of Wales, we cannot blame him for refusing to surrender the castles as a condition of a truce. News sometimes took two or three weeks to pass from England to Ireland, or Ireland to England. King Henry, for example, did not hear of the Marshal's death until the beginning of May. Yet, one feels, the movements of events in the two countries, in a matter of such importance, might have been kept in better step with each other. In any case, the Marshal thought that he had been trapped, and very ugly rumours were spread after his death that the justiciar and barons in Ireland had been instructed to pursue the earl to the death. The Curragh was a field, not of negotiations which broke down, but of black treachery. We need not argue whether the scandal was justified or not, though it was certainly false in some of its careful detail; the important point is that it was believed. Any man who, like Henry Clement, gloried in his own share of responsibility, was asking for trouble.

The new earl, Gilbert the Marshal, kept his thoughts to himself. It was his business to get his inheritance and to join in the general reconciliation which the archbishop of Canterbury and his colleagues brought about in England. As we have seen, he could not avoid suspicion after Henry Clement was killed, but he had far too much at stake to allow himself to be mixed up in affairs of this kind. He was a very great man in baronial society and he had his own life to live. Others were not so happily placed. And here we come back to William de Marisco and his father Geoffrey.

William de Marisco was a prominent member of a very important Anglo-Norman family. His father, Geoffrey, had been active in the service of King John and King Henry and had three times been justiciar of Ireland. Geoffrey, whose appearance in Ireland was probably due to his uncle, the archbishop of Dublin, John Comyn[1], was a native of north Somerset, where his nephew Jordan lived[2]. Geoffrey's success was due, not to birth, but to his own energetic ability to seize the opportunities which a career in Ireland gave. When he came to Ireland, the drive westwards, in Munster and southern Connaught, was beginning, and it continued after he became justiciar in 1215. In addition to lands in Leinster,

[1]This relationship explains the fact that Geoffrey de Marisco had a Maurice Comyn and a Eustace Comyn in his company. When Maurice was released on bail from the Tower, he was handed over to Geoffrey. The relationship of these Irish Comyns to the English and Scottish Comyns is unknown. Just as Archbishop John of Dublin brought Comyns to Ireland, so William Comyn, chancellor of King David, brought them to Scotland, where they became lords of Badenoch (see J. H. Round, "The Origin of the Comyns," in *The Ancestor*, x. 104-19, July 1904). The only indication that Geoffrey de Marisco may have been connected with the Scottish family is Matthew Paris's statement that at one time he was protected by the great Walter Comyn.

[2]The problem of Geoffrey's origins and numerous connections has been cleared up by Eric St. John Brooks in his papers on the family of Marisco, published in *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* for 1931 and 1932.

he had castles and tenements in Limerick county, in Thomond (co. Clare) and along the upper shore of Dingle Bay in Desmond (co. Kerry), where he fought and bargained and settled, now in partnership, now in rivalry, with the house of fitzGerald. He was connected with many of the families which then and later rose to local greatness in south-western Ireland. Through his second wife, Eva de Bermingham, he got a leading position in Ossory, in northern Leinster, not far from Dublin. As justiciar, he was at one time accused of using his authority to feather his own nest, and to divert revenues which ought to have gone to the royal exchequer. He built castles and founded abbeys. He had a large family of sons and daughters, one or two of whom, notably his son Robert, escaped the misfortunes which beset the rest and became firmly rooted in Ireland. His son, William, with whom we are mainly concerned, seemed destined to an equally prosperous career. In 1224 William was taken into the king's service, as a member of the household. He married Matilda, the niece of the archbishop of Dublin, Henry, who in his way was almost as great a man as Archbishop John Comyn had been before him; and who gave a handsome marriage portion to his niece. The murderers of Henry Clement are obscure enough to us, but they were probably well known in Ireland, as knights or men at arms, who held lands of the ex-justiciar and his son, and who had fought with them in the army of the Marshal. For some reason, Geoffrey and William had come to Westminster in the spring of 1235, on business at the royal court, and these men were with them. A fatal impulse led William to the act which ruined his life: he slew a man who was on a mission from the justiciar of Ireland and under royal protection, and he slew him in a place, within the verge of the palace, where the king's peace was especially sacred.

William's loss of self-control was, I am sure, due to feelings more personal than anger against a scurrilous civil servant, and devotion to the memory of Earl Richard the Marshal. Henry Clement—who, we must remember, would not be an insignificant person, and for all we know may have been an influential man, with a fine future before him—was, I fancy, an old and hateful acquaintance, and the last man whom William de Marisco wished to see in England. And I think that the quarrel which led to his death must have been connected in some way with the fact that Geoffrey de Marisco and his family had been singled out for peculiar obloquy in the stories which were circulating about the death of Earl Richard and the treachery at the Curragh. For Geoffrey de Marisco is the scoundrel of the piece, as it is told in the pages of Roger of Wendover. According to the chronicler, he had joined the Marshal with the deliberate intention of leading him on with treacherous advice until he was in the net cast for him by the justiciar, Maurice fitzGerald. All the available evidence goes to show that this was untrue, for nobody suffered more promptly by the Marshal's defeat than Geoffrey and his relatives; but suppose that there had been traffic between the ex-justiciar and the leaders of the king's government and army in Ireland—not necessarily treacherous, but sufficiently close to arouse suspicion in the light of later events? Geoffrey would naturally take a leading part in the negotiations which followed the Marshal's return to Leinster. He was one of the big men in Ireland. Had some assurances been given, some plan been discussed? Had Henry Clement had a part in them? And had Geoffrey been double-crossed and left to bear the full force of the king's wrath for his presence in the earl's forces and his share in the fight? This is all surmise. We do not, and cannot, know. But if something like this happened, it would help to explain what has hitherto

been a puzzle—the discrepancy between the action of Geoffrey de Marisco and the scandal which ever after was attached to his name; and it would account for the act of his son William.

Neither Geoffrey nor his son had had a pleasant time since the fight on the Curragh. King Henry was able to make a distinction between the war in England and the war in Ireland. In each case it had been a straight war, not a rebellion, for Earl Richard had been formally repudiated in a legal act of *diffidatio*, or renunciation of the lord's responsibility to him as a vassal, just as some of his supporters in England had renounced their homage, and achieved the same result in another way; but defeat none the less meant the loss of lands and rights, and in Ireland the earl and his followers had been defeated and captured. For a time the king had tried, contrary to the spirit of the negotiations in England, to deprive the Marshal's heir, Earl Gilbert, of some of his lands and rights. He failed in this, but he had no intention of including the other companions of the Marshal in Ireland in the English settlement. The Irish Pipe Roll for 19 Henry III —that is to say, for the year ending at Michaelmas 1235— contains a list of thirty-three names of landholders in the country of Limerick alone who had been fined for being against the king in the war with Richard the Marshal. Geoffrey de Marisco and his son William were each fined 3000 marks or £2000, and three of Geoffrey's nephews, William the son of Jordan de Marisco, John Travers and Richard de Marisco, had to pay, the first two £200, the last £100. These sums were the ransoms of men captured in battle. All five men were still in prison on 23 May 1234. Geoffrey and William were still there on 23 September 1234. Other barons and knights who had fought with the Marshal were free, some even pardoned and released from their fines,

but Geoffrey and William were obviously considered to be in a separate category. There is evidence of negotiations which, if we knew more about them, would help us to understand the position.[1]

They seem to have been released in October or November, but they were still suspect, for on 27 November 1234 we learn that two of Geoffrey's castles, Killorglin in Desmond and Holywood (*de Sancto Bosco*), probably Hollywood in co. Dublin, and one of William's castles, Coonagh in co. Limerick, had been retained by the king *in tenanciam* for the faithful service of the said Geoffrey and William. In Shakespeare's words, they were enfranchised with a fetter and set at liberty with a clog. This seems to have been their position at the time of the murder of Henry Clement in the following May, and we may suppose, without over-indulgence in fancy, that their presence at Westminster was due to their desire to come to some permanent understanding with King Henry. If this were so, the evidence given by some of the witnesses in the judicial inquiry is intelligible enough: Henry Clement, William de Marisco was convinced, was doing his best to put difficulties in his way.

Geoffrey de Marisco fled for sanctuary to the Knights of the Hospital of St. John in Clerkenwell. Here I will leave him for a time, while I follow the story of his son William, who was regarded as the chief murderer.

It will be remembered that the king, only three days after the murder, had reason to believe that William de Marisco and his companions were making for Lundy Island. The

[1]Maurice fitzGerald, the justiciar, was personally interested in preventing the release and return to royal favour of Geoffrey de Marisco and his son. He was still afraid of the Marshal's party in England, and so wanted to have a safe-conduct from its leader, Archbishop Edmund. This was in the autumn of 1234, before he came to England. After his return he sent Henry Clement to England on Irish business, and no doubt instructed him to prevent, if he could, the efforts of Geoffrey and William to come to terms with the king.

reason must have been a good one, for the statement is so explicit. Persons who fly from justice might, after much wandering, find their way to a remote place like Lundy Island; but if they go straight for it, like an arrow to its mark, they must have some close association with it. Why was this conspicuous person supposed to be seeking a refuge on a rocky island in the Bristol Channel?

3. *William, Son of Jordan de Marisco and Lundy Island*

Lundy Island is part of Devonshire. Its situation is succinctly described in a charter of King Richard I as "in the sea in the mouth of the river Severn between Tenby and Barnstaple". This is roughly correct, though the island is a good deal nearer to the Devon than to the Pembroke coast. It was granted to the Templars by King Richard, whose charter I have cited. King John confirmed the grant; but when, in February 1227, in one of his first charters, Henry III confirmed the grants of his father to this military order, he omitted the grant of Lundy Island. The chancery and exchequer records enable us to understand what happened; but first let us look at a letter sent soon after Henry Clement's murder:

> Grant to William son of Jordan de Mariscis that he may safely come out of his island of Lunday with his men, come to England and stay there and retire from there; grant to him also that merchants may safely go to and from his said island as they used to do; and mandate accordingly to all bailiffs.

The date is Windsor, 9 June 1235, only three weeks or so after the letters announcing the flight of William de Marisco. On the very same day Geoffrey de Marisco was allowed to leave the Hospital of St. John at Clerkenwell in safety, with his men, except those who were charged with the death of Henry

Clement. William son of Jordan was Geoffrey's nephew, and it is obvious that he and his uncle had been busy clearing themselves of any suspicion of complicity in the murder. And William son of Jordan had been conducting his share in the negotiations from his island of Lundy. Lundy was *his* island. We can now understand why William son of Geoffrey was believed to have made for Lundy Island, and perhaps we can understand why its lord, William son of Jordan, was anxious to be allowed to leave it. He had no wish to be confounded in the royal mind with his cousin and his band of suspects.

Lundy Island had, in fact, been held by the family of Marsh in the later twelfth century. When King John came to the throne, an earlier William de Marisco, who had lands in Huntspill in Somerset, near the Bristol Channel, and other lands in the same shire, had maintained his right to it. He had resisted the new rights of the Templars and held the island against them and the king. He had in short, rebelled and had been outlawed. He was restored to favour in Feburary 1204, and was put in charge of some of the royal galleys. The Templars were compensated for the loss of Lundy. This explains the omission of the island from the charter of 1227. Before he died, sometime after September 1225, William had been in trouble again. He was a naval administrator in King John's service, and he had joined the rebels who had supported Louis of France during the civil war of 1215–17. He had put his wife, sons and daughters on Lundy Island and gone to sea against his king. The island was captured but restored to him, with his family, in November 1217. This William—obviously an important man in his way among the knights of Somerset —was the brother of Geoffrey, the justiciar of Ireland, and the father of Jordan, who was his successor at Huntspill. Jordan had been with his uncle Geoffrey in Ireland before he succeeded to the lands in Somerset and to Lundy Island, and his

son William who succeeded him in his turn in 1234 had done the same. When William, son of Jordan, is described as a *nepos* of Geoffrey de Marisco, the word here means grand-nephew. What happened is quite clear. Jordan de Marisco had important holdings in Ireland, where, like his uncle Geoffrey, he was closely connected with Richard the Marshal. When war broke out in England, his sympathies naturally led him to join the Marshal in the Southern Marches of Wales, not very far from Huntspill on the other side of the Bristol Channel. His son William, who was in Ireland, joined his uncle Geoffrey and was with him at the fight on the Curragh. It is not surprising that, when Jordan died, William, who had until recently been a prisoner of war and owed the king a ransom of 300 marks (£200), found much greater difficulty in getting possession of his Irish lands than he had had in England. In fact, his kinship with his great-uncle Geoffrey and his cousin William kept him out of his castles and lands in Ireland until October 1237. His position in Huntspill was more secure, but here also William son of Geoffrey's unwelcome attentions to his island of Lundy brought him under suspicion, and, as we shall see, he was forced in 1243 to surrender the island to the king. For some time, owing to his cousin's use of it as a base for robbery on land and piracy at sea, his rights there had been only nominal. He recovered the island in 1281, three years before he died.

4. *William Son of Geoffrey de Marisco turns Pirate.*

William de Marisco managed, somehow or other, to hold out in Lundy Island and elsewhere until 1242. For seven years he lived desperately, a doomed man, as a pirate. Most outlaws just disappeared from history. They fled abroad, or skulked about in hiding, and were lost to view. William de Marisco was a man of a different kind, quite as respectable in his way

as the famous men who swept the seas from the same parts of England in the sixteenth century. He had no Spaniards to prey upon, as Drake and Grenville had, no distant seas to roam. He stayed in home waters, and ranged from the coasts of Galloway and Ireland to the Bristol Channel. His memories were incredibly bitter. He was consumed by a sense, not of wrong inflicted by himself, but of wrongs suffered. He nursed feelings of peculiar hatred against King Henry. To the end he denied that he had killed Henry Clement; but his refusal to stand to justice, his flight and his later deeds of violence made all denials futile.

As an outlaw William lost his Irish lands. His wife Matilda suffered with him. The king kept Matilda's cantred and castle of Coonagh in his hands for a year and a day, according to the law in cases of forfeiture, and then, regarding them as an escheat of the see of Dublin, handed them over to the existing archbishop, Luke. This was in August 1236. Whether his wife joined William or not, we do not know. His depredations began to cause anxiety in the early summer of 1237. Although we may assume that Lundy Island was always one one of his places of refuge, the records are silent about his control of the island until 1241. It is quite possible that William used several bases during the five or six years of his maritime activities. At first, the evidence suggests, he worked from Scotland, probably from Galloway.

In 1237 William de Marisco was again on the fringe of great events. Until outstanding disputes were settled in a general agreement of peace between the two kings, Alexander II of Scotland seemed in this year to be heading for war against his brother-in-law, King Henry. Why this was so, and what Alexander wanted, are not our concern; but it is clear that he hoped much from his friends and relatives in England, and that some business of a subterranean kind went on

between parties in the two countries. William de Marisco played an obscure part in the movement. On 18 June the barons of the various Cinque Ports were ordered to equip the king's galleys and a good ship from Winchelsea and to send them to Portsmouth to await orders. The reason given for this order was that certain evildoers, to wit, William de Marisco, his brother Robert[1], and their accomplices of the land of the King of Scotland had put to sea with galleys and were preying upon the merchants and others crossing from Ireland to England. They had attacked and taken merchants of Bristol, Dublin and Drogheda, killing some, wounding others and holding others to grievous ransom. A few days earlier the bailiffs of Bristol had been authorized to sell the merchandise on board the ships which had been attacked, up to the amount of the ransoms, so that the hostages could be saved. Later letters sent to the bailiffs of Bristol give the names of merchants, including a Norman, who had suffered from the marauders. A prison, in which the captives or their hostages were detained, is mentioned, and one thinks of Lundy Island. When such incidents as these occurred, it was the duty of the bailiffs in the ports to take possession of the ships attacked, and of any merchandise which might be recovered, until the rightful owners could appear and prove their ownership. The pirates wanted ransoms, not ships and goods. Also, ships could be held on suspicion after a robbery at sea. The bailiffs of Bristol, the justiciar of Ireland, the earl of Ulster, the mayors and good men of Dublin and Drogheda had detained ships and merchandise. The authorities in Ireland were ordered to restore ships and goods, "arrested on account of a robbery lately committed at sea by William de Marisco". It is significant that this order was made in letters sent from York

[1]Probably an error for Reginald de Marisco. There is no other indication that the reputable Robert was an associate of William.

on 28 September, when the treaty with the king of Scots was announced. In their zeal the king's ministers in Ireland had also seized the lands of another William de Marisco, confounding him perhaps with his kinsman, and the unhappy man had to seek redress from the king. I suppose that in him we may see the son of Jordan.

5. *The Attempt to Murder King Henry at Woodstock, the Assault on Lundy Island and the Execution of William Son of Geoffrey de Marisco.*

William de Marisco came safely out of this adventure. The ransoms of the merchants amounted to £120. William was in funds, for £120 sterling was a large sum in those days. A really good pirate story would tell us how exactly the money was paid over to him and how the hostages were released; but we hear nothing about this, nor about the king's galleys at Portsmouth which ought to have been looking for him. Perhaps the merchants had found the king's bailiffs too attentive, and were glad to get away again with their ships and goods and to say no more about their experience. At any rate, William turned in the following year to a much more dangerous and dreadful crime. He was believed to have contrived a plot to murder the king. Henceforward, he was worse than an outlaw. He was a traitor, *proditor regis*.

The story is told by Matthew Paris in his best manner:

> On the morrow of the nativity of the Blessed Mary [9 Sept. 1238], a certain man at arms, a man of some education (*armiger literatus*) came to the king's court at Woodstock. Pretending to be mad, he said to the king: "Resign to me the kingdom which you have unjustly usurped and long detained." And he added that he had the mark of royalty on his shoulder. When the king's servants ran upon him, intending to beat him and drive him away from the king's presence

> the king checked them, saying " Let him alone in his folly." But in the middle of the night, the madman climbed into the king's sleeping chamber by the window, a naked knife in his hand, and came to the king's bed. He did not find him, and was perplexed. He looked for him in various parts of the chamber. By the providence of God the king was with the queen. One of the queen's damsels, Margaret Biset, happened to be on duty. She was reciting her psalter by the light of a candle, for she was devout. When she saw the madman searching every corner so that he could kill the king, shouting wildly, she was astounded and began to scream. The servants were awakened and came running in haste. They broke down the door which the burglar had barred, overbore his resistance, seized him, bound him with chains and put him to the torture. At length he confessed that he had been sent by William, son of Geoffrey de Marisco, to slay the king in the manner of the Assassins. He asserted that others also were concerned in the crime.[1]

Matthew goes on to describe in gruesome detail the execution of the would-be assassin at Coventry.

His story, in its main lines, is confirmed by the records. The king *was* at Woodstock on 9 September 1238, and on 20 September, when he was at Bridgenorth, he sent letters to the bailiffs of various ports, between Dover and Chester, ordering them to be on the look-out for William de Marisco and his accomplices, and if possible to catch them. He told how William had recently plotted his death, "as we know for certain through a certain ribald whom he sent to kill us and our queen". On the same day another letter was sent to the sheriff of Kent, for the king had learned on the best evidence

[1] *Chronica majora*, iii. 497-8. The phrase *more Assassinorum* is used elsewhere by Matthew Paris in reference to emissaries of murder (*e.g.*, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. Madden, iii. 21). The reference, of course, is to the Ismailians of the Lebanon, ruled by the Old Man of the Mountain. The St. Albans chronicler, Roger Wendover, had incorporated a long account of their alleged customs from William of Tyre, and this was well known to Matthew Paris (Roger of Wendover, ed. Coxe, ii. 245-7). For the Ismailians see R. Grousset, *Histoire des croisades*, iii (1936), in the index, pp. 813-4.

that William was in that part of England. William, then, was in England. He was not captured, and somehow or other managed to survive until 1242, when at last a definite and successful attempt was made to dislodge him from Lundy Island. By this time his marauding exploits on sea and land were notorious. Something had to be done about them.[1] According to Matthew Paris, certain nobles who had passed near the island on their way from Ireland and had made inquiries, reported to the king how he could best capture him and his men. They had learned that guile was necessary. Direct assault would be of no use. However this may be, Henry took measures. In December 1241 the sheriff of Devon captured three men of William's "society" and by the king's orders sent them to the sheriff of Hampshire, who put them in the prison at Winchester. Early in January the men of Bristol handed over William's wife to the constable of Gloucester castle. In the meantime the men of Devon were ordered to take counsel how best to guard their coast against incursions from the king's enemies on Lundy Island. If they failed to take effective action, Henry Tracy and three other local landholders had power to devise plans at the cost of the shire. This last order was made on 7 February. Finally, when the spring had come, an assault was made on the island. The operations were under the control of William Bardolf, a Norfolk baron, who was sent down to Devonshire by the government[2]. A certain Richard de Chilham was sent to Bardolf's assistance with two knights and a dozen men-at-

[1]The abbot of Margam in Glamorgan aroused the king's indignation against him, because on one occasion, probably early in 1242, he "received" William and his men.

[2]The king sailed on his Gascon expedition in May 1242, and the council left in England was really responsible for putting an end to William de Marisco. William Bardolf, heir to the honour of Wormegay, was Hubert de Burgh's step-son, being the son of Hubert's second wife, Beatrice de Warenne, by her first husband.

arms in the end of May. They succeeded in capturing the outlaws. In a later copy of his chronicle Matthew Paris added a story that William was betrayed by one of his men, whom he had detained on the island against his will. The rocks protecting the place could only be scaled at one point, and William imprudently set this man to guard the weak spot. It was a misty day, and William was sitting at meat when the king's men came. William and his band were taken to Bristol, where he and his more powerful men were put in the safest and strongest part of the main tower of the castle, and the rest in the town. Burgesses were appointed to join with the constable of the castle in keeping guard over them. A day or two later arrangements were made for the transference of the outlaws to London (16 June 1242). William Bardolf was to hand over William de Marisco and four or five of the more important prisoners whom he had captured to the constable of the Tower. Of the others as many as could be safely guarded there were to be put into Newgate prison, the rest in the Fleet. The constable and wardens of these prisons were straitly ordered to put their dangerous charges in irons and in strong places. The treasurer was asked to provide as many suitable men to guard them as were required to prevent any possible risk of escape.

On 14 July the constable of the Tower, Richard de Bovill, delivered William de Marisco, Aimeri de Beaufeu, Reginald de Marisco, Robert de Montibus and William's chamberlain Richard, for trial. Others were tried with them, for Matthew Paris describes the execution of William with sixteen companions on 25 July. The murderers of Henry Clement, it will be noticed, had disappeared by 1242. These are new companions. They were taken from Westminster to the Tower, and thence dragged by horses to the "penal machine, vulgarly known as the gibbet", on which they were hanged.

The manuscript of the chronicle contains at this point a lively drawing of William being dragged to execution. The unhappy knight lies on the ground. Ropes are attached by one end to his feet, by the other to the horse's collar. A young man sitting on the horse looks back at him with curiosity[1]. Before his execution William made his confession to the famous Dominican, John of St. Giles, a beloved friend of the bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste.

6. *The Relatives of William de Marisco. The Episode of the Abbess of Shaftesbury.*

The names of two or three relatives of William, who were apparently his companions, are known. Two of them, Richard de Marisco and Geoffrey de Marisco, parson of Bathymegait, were clerks. Their tonsure saved them, and they were taken from the Tower to the castle of Devizes. In 1244 Bishop Grosseteste demanded benefit of clergy on behalf of an Adam de Marisco, a clerk of his diocese, who was in prison at York on a charge of robbing foreign merchants at Stamford and Grantham. Adam was handed over to the bishop on the condition that he entered a religious order and left the kingdom. Unless a family failing, the robbery of merchants, connects them, I have no evidence that Adam and William were related or had worked together. Five men who were captured on the island of Lundy, but presumably were not members of the society, were taken to Exeter. At the end of the year they were allowed bail to await the arrival of the justices.

Matilda, the wife of William de Marisco, must have had friends at court and in Ireland. She was kept at Gloucester until the summer of 1243, when the king, in letters sent from

[1]The drawing is reproduced by M. R. James in "The drawings of Matthew Paris" (*Walpole Society*, xiv. 1926, Plate XVI).

Bordeaux on 20 June, ordered her release. The council executed this order early in July, and a month later gave Matilda letters which authorized the mayor and bailiffs of Bristol to deliver to her the chattels—about four pounds in money, a silver drinking-cup and a kerchief valued at ten shilling—taken from her when she was arrested. Two of her servants were not set free till the end of the following year (November 1244) after judicial inquiry had elicited nothing against them except that they had been with her. These unhappy men had been in gaol at Gloucester for two and a half years. Matilda in the meantime had been trying to get back her castles and lands in Ireland. This was a very slow business, for, as we have seen, her marriage portion, given to her by her uncle Henry, archbishop of Dublin, many years before, had escheated to the archbishopric of Dublin, and Matilda had to show that the reigning archbishop, Luke—Hubert de Burgh's former confessor and friend—had no right to hold it. The case dragged on from June 1244, when she first got an order for the restoration of her lands, until at least August 1247, when Matilda, after she had obeyed a command to come to the king, no doubt to give him proper assurances, was at last put in possession of Coonagh and her other castle at Blathach near Limerick. The legal point at issue had been an interesting one. Inspection of Archbishop Henry's charter revealed the fact that his grant to Matilda was sealed with the seals of his two chapters of St. Trinity and St. Patrick as well as with his own. Her title was a good one. The question then arose, could the outlawry of her husband affect the wife's possession of her *maritagium*? The answer was that forfeiture of the wife's *maritagium* did not follow. Matilda's lands, therefore, should never have been escheated.

King Henry and his council were very thorough in their dealings with the relatives of William de Marisco. Justice was

incredibly slow, suspicious, remorseless, yet in the end justice was done. There were two kinsmen of William, John and Richard, who seem to have been detained at Chester, while inquiries were made in Ireland. The justiciar's investigations showed that they had not "consented with the felony and deliberate malice" of William. So in June 1244 the justice of Chester was ordered to deliver them to the justiciar of Ireland, who, after they had given security that their release would result in no harm to king and realm, was to set them free and put them in seisin of their lands. And there was the nun who was alleged to be a relative of the traitor. This was Agnes Ferrers, a nun of the abbey of St. Edward at Shaftesbury. As its patron and a devotee of its patron saint, King Henry felt a deep personal interest in the fortunes of this famous house. Its dignity was a reflection of his own. The nuns were anxious to make Agnes Ferrers their abbess, but unfortunately the vacancy occurred in 1242, the year of William's execution. She was elected, but the king, then in Gascony, refused to confirm the election, and she had the good sense to renounce her claim. The execution of her kinsman was too recent. When the new abbess, Agnes Longspée, a nun of Wherwell, died in 1246, and the nuns got licence to elect, they again wished to have Agnes Ferrers as their abbess. The king was still opposed to the idea. He ordered Robert Passelew, the custodian of the abbey during the vacancy, to appeal publicly in his name, if the nuns proceeded to elect Agnes, "whatever spirit might lead them". Agnes, he wrote, "is sprung of the blood of traitors, and the king has other good grounds of exception to her, which, when put forward and proved, would make her utterly ineligible and put her out of consideration (*repulsa*)". This was strong language; but the nuns were not frightened by it, and the bishop of Salisbury was brought upon the scene. The great issue of liberty to elect

was raised, and some compromise had to be reached. Henry and the bishop agreed that, without prejudice to the church of Salisbury, a royal clerk might on this peculiar occasion be sent to take part in the proceedings on the king's behalf and to examine the election in his interests. In October 1246, five months after the trouble had begun, Master William of Powick was sent. The deadlock must have continued, for in November we find that the jurisdiction of Canterbury had been invoked. The nuns had presumably appealed to the provincial court. By this time the king was getting weary; he gave his clerk, Master Roger de Cantilupe, full power to settle the affair with the archbishop's official, and by the end of the year all was well. On 9 January 1247 the royal assent to the election of Agnes Ferrers was given, and a mandate was sent to the dean and chapter of Salisbury to do their part therein. We see how at every turn the murder of Henry Clement, years before, led to difficulties in the lives and fortunes of innocent men and women whom we should never expect to be involved, to high questions of law and politics, to problems in the relations between church and state, to issues affecting the welfare of the kingdom and the dignity of the crown.

We have yet to see what happened to Lundy Island and to the old Geoffrey de Marisco, the traitor's father.

7. *The Fortification of Lundy Island*

King Henry, who was kept informed of events, was determined not to let go of Lundy Island. The exploits of William de Marisco and the difficulty in dislodging him had revealed its importance. At some time during the recent operations against William he had taken the precaution of seizing the

lands of William son of Jordan, the nominal tenant of the island, and always, at his home in Huntspill, a possible ally of his cousin. Henry, as the phrase went, wished to speak of certain things against him, in his court. One of these matters, no doubt, was his ransom, not yet fully paid; another, we may be sure, was his responsibility as tenant for the deplorable behaviour of his outlawed relative in Lundy Island. The object in view was, of course, the return of the island to the crown. In June 1243 at Bordeaux the seneschal of Gascony became surety for William's appearance in court, when required, and the king gave orders for the restoration of all William's lands in Somerset and Ireland, "with the exception of the island of Lundy, which the king wishes to retain in his own hands".

The council in England had not awaited the issue of these formalities. William Bardolf, before he left the island, had made arrangements for the erection of a stone tower, and a constable of Lundy had been appointed. Towards the end of June 1243 Henry Tracy, lord of the honour of Barnstaple, and the greatest man in the parts of Devon opposite the island, who had gone to court to report on local affairs, returned with orders from the council. These referred to the distribution of the wages of the men who had taken and were guarding the island—Henry Tracy brought £100 with him for this purpose —but they also contained the information that a very important person indeed might be expected early in August. One of the three chief men in the government, William de Cantilupe, the seneschal of the royal household, was coming down in person to take charge of the island. Nothing could reveal more clearly the serious view taken at court of the activities of William de Marisco. Before the great man arrived, Henry Tracy was instructed to go to Lundy

with the sheriff and to decide whether the time was suitable for the construction of the fort which William Bardolf had planned. By time, we should understand weather, for it was no easy matter, even if the stone could be quarried on the spot, to get materials across and to carry on building operations. The castle was begun, as we learn from a letter of the following April. The constable of Lundy—I suppose William de Cantilupe's deputy—had caught 2500 rabbits on the island, and the sheriff of Devon was told to sell the skins "by view and witness of lawful men" and place the proceeds towards the expense of building the new tower. This rocky place contained something more precious than rabbits. There was an eyrie of falcons, which about this time was given by King Henry to one of his favourite clerks. One begins to get a vivid impression of Lundy, with its castle, rabbit-warrens and birds, and, I should add, its shipping, for the constable had a galley at his disposal.

William de Cantilupe was relieved of his responsibility for Lundy Island in May 1244 and was succeeded as constable by Richard Clifford. A change was made, however, in July 1245. A constable sent from outside had not much to do and was expensive; hence the government decided to entrust the island to Henry Tracy, the man who by this time must have known most about it. He and Richard Clifford made an agreement by indenture—that is to say, Henry Tracy received the island with its stock and profit, and the details of the transaction were described in documents identical except for the names of the parties. Henry kept Richard's and Richard kept Henry's. Henry was to hold the island for the king at the royal pleasure, and in return was allowed to keep all profits and make what he could out of it. So the island remained legally in the king's hands, but without any expense to the royal treasury.

The memory of William de Marisco is enshrined in that invaluable work, Samuel Lewis's *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (1840), in the article on Lundy Island:

> It is recorded that one Morisco, having been frustrated in a conspiracy to assassinate Henry III, made this his retreat, became the chief of a band of pirates, and for his crimes was executed here by command of the king; and also that Edward II, at one time during his disturbed reign, proposed retiring hither for safety from his rebellious nobles. Morisco's castle, situated near the south-eastern point, was originally a strong fortification, with considerable outworks: it is encompassed by a moat, but no ordnance are now mounted upon the battery, though a few dismantled guns occupy the ramparts, beneath which is a remarkable cave.

The true story is good, but this is better. That frustrated gentleman, William Marsh, has become Morisco. His name has a fine Barbary flavour. The castle is his; William Bardolf did not plan it, Henry Tracy and the sheriff of Devon and William de Cantilupe took no part in the building of it. Morisco's ghost walks among grass-grown batteries in the garb of Captain Kidd or Long John Silver. Romance has taken William Marsh for its own. He breathes the spice-laden air of the Indies; he brings to the Bristol Channel the spirit of the corsairs of the Mediterranean. His exotic, mysterious figure moves in the company of the sea dogs of Devon. He is hanged on his island, where there is a remarkable cave.

8. *The End of Geoffrey de Marisco*

And now, in the end, we must come back to William's father, Geoffrey de Marisco, lord of Killorglin, once the servant of King John and justiciar of Ireland. We left him in sanctuary in

Clerkenwell, just after the murder of Henry Clement in May 1235. Although he had no share in the crime, he had run to shelter, afraid that he would be involved in the fury which was to break his son. Before long he was released from suspicion. In August 1235 the king took him into his grace and gave him letters of protection while he was in England trying to arrange for the payment of his heavy ransom. He was allowed to pay this on easier terms and could go back to Ireland and receive possession of his lands there. Till 1238 he was trying to regain possession of Kilmallock, which he claimed to hold of the bishop of Limerick, Hubert de Burgh, a nephew of his famous namesake. Geoffrey had subinfeudated Kilmallock to his son the outlaw, and the bishop, in flat contradiction to the rules of feudal law, had seized it as an escheat after William's disgrace. The escheat, after being held a year and a day by the king, should have gone to its immediate lord, William's father. How far Geoffrey was successful in his case against the bishop is not clear. By 1238 he was in trouble because he had not paid the instalments of his ransom, and as he had no lands in England, where the money should have been paid, the justiciar of Ireland was ordered by the king to distrain on his lands in Ireland "to satisfy us for the fine at our exchequer in Dublin".

Matthew Paris, who always had some authority for his stories, however much he distorted them, gives a much more gloomy picture of the old man's last years. One of his scandalous remarks is illuminating. Matthew, in spite of the capture of Geoffrey at the Curragh and the murder of Henry Clement by his son, was firmly convinced that Geoffrey had betrayed Richard the Marshal. He could think no good of him. Naturally enough, therefore, he says that Geoffrey had incited William de Marisco to plot the assassination of the king

in 1238. Now we may be sure that what he thought, others thought, and, when we remember how carefully the king and his servants traced out and held in suspicion William's relatives between 1238 and 1242, we cannot assume that Geoffrey, his father, escaped attention. I suggest that after the attempt on the king's life at Woodstock in September 1238, Geoffrey's lands in Ireland were seized, and that this explains his disappearance. The end had come. He was an outlaw for the death of a man.[1]

King Henry, Matthew Paris writes, was informed that, after the execution of his son, Geoffrey had gone to Scotland and had been received by King Alexander II. He had probably gone earlier than 1242. Scotland was, in fact, the only refuge in the British Isles open to him, and his connection with the Comyns may have encouraged him to seek protection there, for the head of the Scottish branch of this widespread family was one of the chief men in Scotland. The reception of Geoffrey de Marisco was one of the grievances which King Henry had against King Alexander and Walter Comyn, when he made a military demonstration against Scotland two years later, in 1244. The ejection of Geoffrey from Scotland may well have been one of the unwritten understandings at the time when peace was made[2]. The unhappy man, in any case, was forced to leave. He died in the following year (1245).

[1]Geoffrey de Marisco is so described in 1244, in a royal letter which also describes him a tenant in Linford (Bucks.) and Crowmarsh (Oxfordshire). These lands were not his but had come to him in right of his third wife, Alice widow of Roger Pipard and daughter of the great Anglo-Irish lord Hugh de Lacy I. Hence in 1238 he could be said to have no lands in England.

[2]The *carta* of King Alexander (August 1244) contained, as its main clause, a promise that he would make no pacts with Henry's enemies (Rymer, *Foedera*, I, i. 257). This would cover the case of Geoffrey de Marisco, although its object was to prevent any understanding between Alexander and the French.

Matthew Paris, pitiless to the end, reports his death in a studied epitaph:

> About this time died Geoffrey de Marisco, a man once noble and not the least among the magnates of Ireland. In exile and misery, a fugitive, he was stained indelibly with the death by treason of Richard earl Marshal. Driven from Scotland, banished from England, disinherited in Ireland, he survived the disgraceful death of his son and the loss of all his friends, to end the tale of death with his own.

9. *Epilogue*

The search after truth plays strange tricks with an historian. He sets out to tell a plain straightforward story, and he finds himself running about in all sorts of places. Insensibly the interest of his story is merged in the excitement of the chase. He cannot bring himself to believe that his readers will not be as interested as he has been in seeing how one point leads to another, how this fact throws light on that, why one clue has to be discarded, and another pursued to the end. As Maitland once wrote: "Out of the thicket may fly a bird worth powder and shot"; but the thicket must be a clue, not any thicket, and the bird must be worth powder and shot, not any bird. If this condition is observed, the story becomes more than a story; it breathes a troubled life of its own as part of a living past. The things which first stirred interest, the picturesque, the amusing, the dramatic, are still there, but are no longer the essential things. Sometimes, as I work at a series of patent and close rolls, I have a queer sensation; the dead entries begin to be alive. It is rather like the experience of sitting down in one's chair and finding that one has sat on the cat. These are real people, this casual official letter is telling something that really happened, it was written on the impulse of a real

emotion. To be sure that this William is William son of Geoffrey and not William son of Jordan becomes as important as any problem of identity can be in a court of law to-day. It is necessary to take great care, no longer in the interests of learning, but for their sakes. I fear that the historian is quite incorrigible, when he has once had this experience. He becomes indifferent to insinuations of pedantry; for pedantry is a kind of darkness, and he is trying to let in the light.

All the same, the story of William Marsh is a gift to any good historical novelist.