

GILBERT FOLIOT AND HIS LETTERS by Dom Adrian Morey and C. N. L. Brooke. *Cambridge University Press*, 1965. 60s.

Gilbert Foliot held positions of authority for over fifty years, becoming abbot of Gloucester in 1139, bishop of Hereford in 1148 and bishop of London in 1163. He took an active part in the great crises of the age, the anarchy and the Becket dispute, and he left a collection of letters which constitutes a major historical source for the understanding of his society and of himself. In a few months the authors of this book will see published their edition of *The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot*. The present book is not quite a biography of Foliot nor an introduction, subject by subject, to the contents of his letters. Concentrating chiefly on the problems of Foliot's personality, the authors have set out to scale a series of varied peaks, each requiring a different approach and each comprising a severe test of skill and perseverance.

The letters themselves are introduced with wit and zest through a consideration of the *genre*. The reconstruction of the Foliot family is a triumphant effort which lays bare a remarkably wide cross-section of English society. Gilbert's education and career in the schools are cleverly established. The authors also thoroughly examine letter 26 in which Gilbert, as abbot, justifies his support for the Matildine cause. They enquire into the Gloucester forgeries devised, while Gilbert was abbot, to protect properties acquired when Stephen was weak, and the authors connect this episode with the edge and subtlety which attached to Gilbert's expedients during the Becket crisis. On being translated to London, Gilbert showed 'something like a horror of submitting to the authority of Thomas Becket'. The authors display great penetration in analysing Gilbert's attitudes. They contrast the nobility of his own family and the London citizen background of Thomas. Gilbert, an experienced bishop and the trusted friend of the archbishop Theobald, may have felt himself to be the true leader of the English church. He reacted to excommunication by Becket in 1169 by himself claiming the primacy and metropolitan status for the church of London, and the authors show how this evoked many historic passions concerning the diocesan organization of the English church. The 'Celtic' legacy of an undefined pattern of boundaries had earlier resulted in the rejection, as Norman aggression, of Lanfranc's claim to be primate of all Britain, and the authors rightly emphasise the importance of this and the Welsh

and York primacy disputes as well as of the historic attitudes of mid-twelfth century churchmen for the understanding of the Becket crisis. Gilbert was no time-server and his envy of Becket did not drive him to support the king's cause; he was himself an indefatigable appellant to Rome. But 'his was a heart in which humility and love had long ceased to harbour' and the taunting invective of *Multiplicem* discredits him. The authors conclude with two very rewarding chapters on Gilbert's activities as bishop and as judge-delegate. There are valuable appendices listing Foliot families, groups of forgeries and (another skilful detective labour) the dignitaries of Foliot's chapters and household.

Some of these studies have appeared separately over the last two decades, but the book is more than the sum of its parts. It is very full, but it is written with an apt sense of relief (although pp. 48-9 need re-working). Perhaps the second and third of the charges which the authors bring against Gilbert (chicanery and a pharisaical attitude towards Becket) are artificially distinguished. Fresh and attentive as the literary contrasts between Bernard of Clairvaux and Gilbert are, Bernard has carried the authors away. It is odd to be told that reading the letters of Bernard enables us to see in sharp focus what the letter writers of the age hoped to achieve. The authors are a little peremptory in their judgement on Gilbert's non-epistolary writings which would help us to understand further Gilbert's attitude to Scripture and to the Fathers as well as the theological influences he underwent. The verdict on Gilbert's forgeries would be a little more final if an indication could have been given of the circumstances in which Gloucester had acquired property. It is a pity too that the authors judged it to be tedious to follow the argument of *Multiplicem* in detail. Perhaps the notes accompanying their edition will remedy this as they will surely supplement other brief references in this book, to the Cerne affair, for example, and to 'the case between the Lacys and the earl of Hereford' (p. 47). Yet this is a notable and distinguished book. The authors have constructed fine and stimulating arguments clearly and rigorously and they have skilfully combined close detective work with broad vistas into Gilbert's society and its assumptions.

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