The Political Importance of the English Bishops During the Reign of Edward II

‘INDIGNOS quoque et ineptos ad gradus ecclesiasticos rex promovit, quod postmodum sudes in oculis et lancea in latere sibi fuit.’ Thus Higden described the part played by the leading English ecclesiastics in Edward II’s reign, and most contemporary chroniclers apparently agreed with him. They readily elaborated denunciations of the bishops’ insufficiency in colourful and emphatic language, attributing all the evils of the time to their influence. These denunciations have been repeated in historical work down to the present day. Stubbs’ verdict that ‘the misgovernment of the reign was generally attributed to the prelates, some of whom were distinctly evil men, and the great majority weak ones’, has been followed without much modification by Capes, Tout, and Mr. Conway Davies. The troubles of the reign undoubtedly gave to the episcopate an opportunity for political leadership not offered to it since the minority of Henry III. The object of this paper is to see how the bishops used this opportunity and to investigate the truth of the chroniclers’ opinions of their activities.

Bishops were bound by three chief loyalties: to the king,
to the pope, and (in varying degrees) to the barons, particularly those who were their neighbours. Their reaction to the interplay of these frequently conflicting loyalties was determined largely by their individual personalities, but also by their very varied social background and early careers. Only a few, about a fifth of the episcopate, were connected with powerful baronial families, but naturally some of these eight or nine bishops, such as Louis de Beaumont, Henry Burghersh, or David Martin, adopted the political attitude of their kinsmen. More important was the fact that about half the bishops ruled dioceses in or near which they had been born, while ten more had previous connexions in their dioceses through landholding kinsmen or as members of the cathedral chapters. These local or regional influences often played a considerable part in shaping their political outlook. The large and important group of at least sixteen king's clerks on the other hand, many of them new men who had risen through long years of service in the royal administration, might be expected to have entered on their episcopal careers with a strong political bias in favour of the court party. Many of them continued to be employed in the king's service after their appointments as bishops. It is, however, interesting to notice a definite change in the number and kind of royal clerks promoted to the episcopate in the last half of the reign. At the beginning of the reign the episcopate included a fairly large proportion of theologians without previous experience in the royal administration, while those king's clerks who obtained bishoprics were often men without university degrees who had been trained in the wardrobe, or, less often, in the chancery or exchequer. But after the accession of John XXII in 1316, and the greatly increased use of papal provisions as the normal method of appointing to bishoprics, king's clerks came to form considerably more than half the episcopate. These men, unlike the wardrobe clerks, were often distinguished scholars with high qualifications in canon and civil law; while their experience in the royal service had been chiefly in diplomatic work, which gave them a rather different outlook from that of the household clerk. Apparently they mostly owed their bishoprics to John XXII, himself a lawyer, who had known certain of them at Avignon, rather than to the king, who was often angrily opposed to their appointments. Therefore, though they might normally have greater sympathy with the political outlook of the court party than with that of the opposition barons, they were

1 I have collected detailed evidence for the conclusions given below on the social background and early careers of the bishops, and hope to publish some of it soon.

2 E.g. this was the case in the appointments of Adam of Orleton, John Stratford, and William Airmyn, who intrigued at Avignon for their bishoprics in opposition to the king's wishes.
unlikely to be personally loyal to Edward; and their attitude was a chief factor in the triumph of Isabella. Certain bishops, recruited chiefly perhaps from monks, theologians, and resident secular clergy, withdrew as much as possible from politics and concentrated their energies on ruling their dioceses. But all these groups of men included leading statesmen, such as Archbishop Winchelsea himself, or John Salmon, the Benedictine bishop of Norwich. Monasteries were certainly not cut off from political influences; while certain secular cathedral chapters were undoubtedly often influenced in their political attitude by the local aristocratic outlook. Moreover, at the universities certain scholar bishops had made varying political contacts; for instance, pupils of Archbishop Winchelsea at Oxford co-operated with him later in politics as bishops.

Dom David Knowles has recently suggested that the accession of Winchelsea to the see of Canterbury in 1294 marked the beginning of a new epoch in English church history. For nearly a century the archbishops had been nominated from Rome and had identified themselves with the great movement of centralization and reform which the thirteenth-century popes were directing, but Winchelsea, like his successors in the fourteenth century, had his centre of gravity firmly fixed in England. Henceforward, with the exception of Bradwardine, no English theologian of European fame was appointed to the see of Canterbury. Possibly the much greater interest which Winchelsea took in English affairs than his predecessors, the two friars Kilwardby and Pecham, may be partly responsible for the increased political activity of the episcopate as a whole under his rule. But in other ways Winchelsea, a great theologian and a famous preacher, had more in common with the thirteenth-century archbishops of Canterbury than with his successor Walter Reynolds. He was a strong-willed, independent-minded man, uncompromisingly asserting what he thought to be his rights against all rival powers. In politics he combined high clerical claims with strong sympathies for the baronial opposition

1 Nine bishops in the episcopate of forty-five were regular clergy. This is a surprisingly large number in comparison with the eight monks among the seventy-eight bishops of Henry III's reign (cf. M. Gibbs and J. Lang, Bishops and Reform, 1215–72, Oxford, 1934, pp. 3, 5–10).

2 The election of the abbot of Westminster in 1308 illustrates the extent to which political influences might enter into the life of monasteries in this reign (see H. Johnstone, 'Isabella, the She-Wolf of France', in History, xvi. 210–11).

3 See below, pp. 318, 320.


5 See Birchington's description of him in Anglia Sacra, i. 11–12. He had been rector of Paris University and chancellor of Oxford University, and his surviving quaestiones show that he was one of the most eminent scholars in the episcopate (cf. A. G. Little and F. Pelster, Oxford Theology and Theologians (O.H.S.), pp. 39, 71, 103, 111, 115–16. 122–3, 130–1, 139–45).
to the king. He felt himself to be treading in the footsteps of St. Thomas Becket, and was honoured as a saint by contemporaries. Walter Reynolds, on the other hand, had spent his early life as a clerk in the royal service, where from 1301–7 he had been keeper of Edward’s wardrobe while Edward was prince of Wales. In character he seems to have been very easy-going and lacked power of decision. He owed both his bishopric of Worcester and his archbishopric to Edward II, and his chief political object was apparently to work in peaceful co-operation with the ruling power in the state, whoever that might be. Winchelsea had force of character and power of political leadership; Reynolds was almost completely lacking in both.

Winchelsea’s pontificate thus seems to form a link between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in episcopal history. Certainly, for the episcopate the main dividing line in the political history of Edward II’s reign comes in the spring of 1313, when Winchelsea’s death removed from the political stage the only really dominating personality among the bishops. Up till then the political issues had appeared simpler, more clear-cut, and more in line with those of the thirteenth-century struggles than they were under Reynolds. After 1313 the episcopate was for some time virtually without a leader. But towards the end of the reign, as politics became more complicated and more involved with dynastic issues, and when there was an increase of opportunism and political self-seeking generally in the country, the extremists among the bishops seized the political initiative, leaving the worried and anxious archbishop to accept the accomplished fact of their triumph.

I. THE PONTIFICATE OF ROBERT OF WINCHELSEA, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, DURING EDWARD II’s REIGN, 1307–13

In these first five or six years of the reign, corresponding roughly both to the struggles against Edward’s first favourite, Peter de Gavaston, and to the most important phase of the wider movement for the ordinances in which the Gavaston crisis was involved, the English Church, through the archbishop of Canterbury, provided the baronial opposition with a determined political leader. During

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1 Cf. Birchington, p. 17.
3 For Reynolds’ official career, see Tout, Place Edw. II, pp. 71–2 and n., 285–9, 297; Chapters, ii. 168 n., 170–1. The chroniclers disliked Reynolds, saying he was only ‘simplex clericus et minus competenter litteratus’, who won favour with the king as a manager of theatricals (Malmesbury, p. 197). Tout, however, has pointed out that we can hardly trust a writer who ignores Reynolds’ early official career and Edward I’s responsibility for his choice (Place Edw. II, p. 71 n.).
these years, and more especially after the death of the earl of Lincoln in 1311, there was no one among the earls with the necessary qualifications either of character or experience for political leadership. Partly, perhaps, in contrast to their efforts, Winchelsea's energy in his declining years appears remarkable. In spite of his palsy, he was able far more effectively than the earl of Lancaster to assume the leadership of both the baronial and episcopal opposition. Certainly he had no rivals for the political leadership of the episcopate. The archbishop of York, William of Greenfield, though fairly conscientious in attending parliaments, was for the most part preoccupied with affairs of his diocese; while, of the other two bishops who had played a leading part in the politics of Edward I's reign, Walter Langton, the famous treasurer and Winchelsea's bitterest political enemy, was in prison, and Anthony Bek, bishop of Durham and patriarch of Jerusalem, was worn out and took little part in the struggles of the new reign. For the rest, about a third of the episcopate apparently adopted a more or less non-political attitude. Yet Winchelsea succeeded in uniting at least six or seven bishops in support of his policy, though he could not prevent four or five from supporting the king openly or secretly.

The reign opened with a policy of conciliation on the king's part. Edward pressed the pope to reinstate Winchelsea in time for him to return to England to crown him, saying that he had no personal quarrel with him; and when it appeared that Winchelsea was too ill to travel back immediately the king did all he could, even to the postponement for a week of his coronation, to comply with the archbishop's demand that the rights and liberties of his church of Canterbury should be respected. Therefore Edward was crowned by the Benedictine, Henry of Woodlock,

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2 He died in 1311 and the chroniclers lamented his death saying, 'supponitur a plerisque quod, si talis mediator episcopus adhuc esset, inter regem et comites discordia non duraret' (Bridlington, p. 39; cf. Langtoft, ii. 290-2).

3 Little evidence has been found for political activity on the part of Robert Orford or John Ketton, bishops of Ely, or Thomas Wouldham, bishop of Rochester, who were all monks; for Walter Hazelshaw, bishop of Bath and Wells, or for the Welsh bishops, Llywelyn Bromfield, Gruffydd ap Iorwerth, and Eineon Sais. Richard de Swinfield, bishop of Hereford, and John Dalderby, bishop of Lincoln, apparently sympathized with Winchelsea's policy, but did little actively to promote it.

4 Foedera, ii. i. 23; Wilkins, Concilia, ii. 290-1. Cf. Clement V's letter to Edward II printed by H. G. Richardson, ante, lvi. 101-2, which proves that the action taken soon after Edward's accession to continue the proceedings at Avignon against Winchelsea was without the king's approval, and that as soon as he heard of it he repudiated it.

5 H. G. Richardson, 'Early Coronation Records', in Bull. Inst. Hist. Research, xvi. 1-11, and 'The English Coronation Oath', in Trans. Royal Hist. Soc. 4th ser. xxiii. 142-3, quotes evidence to show that the postponement of the coronation from 18 to 25 February 1308 was due to the failure of the archbishop's messenger to deliver in time his letters appointing a commissary to crown the king.
bishop of Winchester, acting as Winchelsea’s commissary, and not by the archbishop of York, originally appointed by the pope, whose performance of the ceremony would have infringed those rights.\textsuperscript{1} There was apparently little immediate political significance in the new and stringent coronation oath which Bishop Woodlock administered, and it is most unlikely that either Winchelsea or Woodlock had any share in framing it. The only bishop who may have had some influence on it was the chancellor, John Langton, bishop of Chichester;\textsuperscript{2} and there is no reason to suppose that his attitude was particularly hostile to Edward at this time.\textsuperscript{3}

It was not until the April parliament held at Westminster shortly after Winchelsea’s return to England on his own terms that the opposition insisted on Gavaston’s exile; and the archbishop then pronounced sentence of excommunication on him should he return to England, and on all who might favour or help him.\textsuperscript{4} The importance of this sentence is shown by the fact that Edward did not dare to recall Gavaston until he had persuaded the pope himself to revoke it, and even then Gavaston did not return until the papal bull of revocation had been definitely received and accepted by the archbishop. Thus the king broke up the alliance between the various elements in the opposition and defeated its plans largely through inducing the pope to control the determined archbishop of Canterbury.\textsuperscript{5} This is a striking illustration not only of the political power of the Church, but also of the difficulties of Winchelsea’s political position. With regard to his relations with the pope an undated letter from the archbishop to Clement V, written probably towards the end of

\textsuperscript{1} See Lit. Cant. iii. 386–7; Registrum Henrici de Woodlock (Cant. and York Soc.), pp. 245–6, 250, 253–4, and the documents quoted by Mr. Richardson, \textit{ubi supra}. Winchelsea left Edward free to choose either the bishop of Winchester, Salisbury, or Chichester to crown him (B.I.H.R. xvi. 8).

\textsuperscript{2} Mr. Richardson’s recent researches (\textit{T.R.H.S.} 4th ser. xxiii. 140–1 and \textit{passim}, 129–58) show that the oath was not a last minute affair designed by an exasperated barony on the eve of the coronation, as Professor Wilkinson suggested in his ‘\textit{Coronation Oath of Edward II’}, in \textit{Hist. Essays to James Tait} (Manchester, 1933), pp. 406–8; but had probably been amicably settled between the king and his council during the early months of the reign.

\textsuperscript{3} He had been a chancery clerk for many years under Edward I and was described by Tout as ‘a good official . . . innocent of all revolutionary aims’ (\textit{Place Edw. II}, pp. 54, 77). Three future bishops of the reign, Walter Reynolds, the treasurer, William Melton, controller of the wardrobe, and John Sandall, lieutenant of the treasurer, were also acting on the council at this time, and so may have been concerned in drawing up the oath.


\textsuperscript{5} Edward had, of course, done all he could by concessions, grants, and favours to win over certain of the earls to agree to Gavaston’s return; but the revocation of the archbishop’s sentence seems to have been the decisive factor in his success.
March 1308, has a special interest, for it shows that from the first
the easy-going Clement V had feared Winchelsea's return to
England would cause trouble. In it the archbishop alleged a
royal prohibition as an excuse for not executing a papal mandate,
reminding the pope that he had warned him on leaving the papal
court to abstain from offending the king as far as possible.1 Now,
encouraged possibly by the pope's attitude, it appears that at
least two of Winchelsea's suffragans were ready to work against
their archbishop for Gavaston's return. Both John Salmon, the
Benedictine bishop of Norwich, and Walter Reynolds, bishop of
Worcester, took part in the mission to Avignon in March 1309,2
which resulted in the recall of Gavaston. Reynolds had long
been associated with Gavaston in the prince of Wales's household; 3
had lent Gavaston his London house at the beginning of the reign,4
and had acted with him in ordering a proclamation in the city of
London concerning complaints against Walter Langton; 5 and
it was only to Reynolds, with the earl of Richmond, that the
commission dealing with Edward's 'secret business' 6 with the pope,
which concerned Gavaston, was addressed.6 Probably, however,
Salmon also had something to do with it, for the author of the
Annales Paulini asserted that it was he who, about 24 June 1309,
'came to London from the papal court with a certain bull sought
for Peter of Gavaston's absolution from his oath'.7

Obviously Winchelsea was reluctant to publish the papal bull
revoking his sentence against Gavaston. On 15 June 1309 he
sent letters to at least two, and possibly to others of his suffra-
gans, describing how at London on 11 June the king had read
the bull to him and to the bishops of London, Winchester, and
Chichester. He enclosed copies of the bull, and asked the bishops
to send him their comments on it, after careful consultation with
their advisers.8 Two replies, accessible in print, are of especial
interest in showing the divided counsels of the episcopate.
Bishop Woodlock's reply, as might be expected from his probable
connexion with Gavaston,9 was that he believed the rescript to be

1 This letter will be published in Reg. Winchelsey, pt. x. 1044–6. The editor,
Dr. Rose Graham, has very kindly allowed me to see the proofs before publication.
The papal mandate was to execute the provision of Bernard de Bonisvilla to the bene-
fit of Reculver in Canterbury diocese.
2 Foedera, ii, i. 68–9.
3 Cf. Tout, Place Eduw. II, pp. 65–6; Chapters, ii. 171–2.
4 Miss A. A. Taylor, in her unpublished London M.A. thesis on Peter of Gavaston
6 Foedera, ii, i. 69.
7 Ann. Paul. p. 267. This statement, however, must be inaccurate, for Winchelsea
had seen the bull at London as early as 11 June (see below). Mr. Richardson
has pointed out that the author of the Annales was a much less accurate writer than
9 See below, pp. 322–3.
canonical and valid; but for the quieting of scruples, and to secure unanimity, it would be well to summon the bishops and magnates for a joint counsel, should the king approve.\(^1\) Simon of Ghent, on the other hand, was as disturbed as the archbishop at the course of events. He gave no definite advice, saying that he neither could nor ought to estimate the force of law in such a matter, more especially since there had certainly been a different feeling about the sentence less than a year ago than was now expressed in the bull; but he stated his readiness to support the archbishop in whatever he should decide to do.\(^2\)

Winchelsea showed his resentment at Gavaston's return by fixing the consecration of John Droxford, bishop of Bath and Wells, at Canterbury Cathedral at the same time as the king's parliament at Stamford in July 1309,\(^3\) thus making it impossible for those bishops who obeyed his summons to the consecration to be present also at the parliament. The king angrily ordered him to postpone the consecration;\(^4\) and a definite political breach in the ranks of the episcopate was plainly shown up by the following events. John Droxford, who had long been a trusted civil servant, and who owed his appointment as bishop to the king, preferred to forgo his own consecration rather than to be absent from the parliament at which the magnates ratified Gavaston's recall.\(^5\) Bishop Woodlock, too, informed the archbishop that his parliamentary duties at Stamford would prevent him from assisting at the consecration;\(^6\) while the charter dated at Stamford, which confirmed the exchange of Gavaston's lands was witnessed by four other bishops, Anthony Bek, John Langton, Ralph Baldock, and Walter Reynolds.\(^7\) Simon of Ghent, however, wrote to say he was too ill to attend either the parliament or the consecration;\(^8\) and three other bishops, David Martin, bishop of St. Davids and later an ordainer, Richard Swinfield, bishop of Hereford, and Robert Orford, bishop of Ely, did not go to Stamford in person.\(^9\)

The king at this time was ready enough to make concessions in order to purchase goodwill for his favourite's return. The Articles of Stamford granted at this parliament might perhaps have been expected to make a special appeal to Winchelsea, being in effect a re-enactment of the *Articuli super Cartas* of 1300. But

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1 Reg. Woodlock, p. 371.  
4 Ibid.  
5 On 11 August 1309 John's proctor appeared before the archbishop and explained that the bishop had been unable to appear at Canterbury at the time fixed because he was summoned to Stamford, *multipliciter et specialiter*, by the king. Winchelsea finally agreed to accept John's excuse as legitimate and canonical, and fixed a later date for his consecration (Reg. Winchelsey, pt. x. 1113–14).  
6 Reg. Woodlock, p. 382.  
9 Ibid. 2/66, 2/67, 2/69.
DURING THE REIGN OF EDWARD II

During the reign of Edward II the archbishop refused to be won over. Murimuth wrote that he was especially angry at Gavaston's reinstatement, and would not treat in any parliament about any business.1 Defeated on the main political issue, he only transferred his opposition to the more strictly ecclesiastical sphere, and worked to unite the episcopate in defence of its rights by demanding the release from prison of his old enemy Bishop Walter Langton,2 and by drawing up a further long list of clerical gravamina against the encroachments of the king and royal officials on ecclesiastical liberties.3 In both these moves Winchelsea naturally had the full support of the pope and his suffragans. Indeed, Clement V urged him on further to admonish the king against doing wrongs to the Church and to complain of Edward's non-payment of the annual cess of 1000 marks to the holy see.4 Eleven bishops, with Winchelsea as spokesman, presented these papal demands to the king;5 and on 16 March 1310, when Edward finally agreed to the appointment of the ordainers, Winchelsea made it clear to king and magnates alike that the episcopal ordainers would continue to press the claims of the Church in face of any lay opposition. He then presided over a meeting of bishops, apart from the lay magnates at the inn of the imprisoned Bishop Walter Langton.6 There they agreed to promise nothing to the prejudice of the Church of Rome, or to the liberty of the Church, or to the good of their order; and later, led by the archbishop, they all made public protestation of their resolve before the lay magnates, promising that with these exceptions they would uphold whatever 'should be ordained concerning the state of the house of our king and his realm by those commissioned by him as ordainers.'7 The united front presented by the episcopate on this issue was shown by the attendance at the meeting not only of the seven bishop ordainers, but of Reynolds, Droxford, and Woodlock, together with John Dalderby, bishop of Lincoln, and Walter Stapleton, bishop of Exeter.

With the election of the ordainers on 20 March 1310 we have for the first time in the reign record evidence of the bishops' political importance. Bishops formed one-third of the ordaining committee (they were seven as compared with eight earls and six

1 Cont. Chronicarum Aedae de Murimuth (R.S.), p. 14. 2 Ibid. 3 Concilia, ii. 314-22; Reg. Winchelsey, pt. x. 1013-31. 4 Ibid. pp. 1031-8; Concilia, ii. 322-5. Cf. Foedera, ii, i. 97-8; Ann. Lond. pp. 165-7; Reg. Woodlock, p. 424; Reg. S. de Gandavo, p. 387. 5 Ibid. pp. 387-8; Reg. Woodlock, pp. 424-8; Reg. Winchelsey, pt. x. 1042-4; Concilia, ii. 328-9. A moderately conciliatory reply from the king was finally obtained only through the efforts of Bishop Walter Reynolds, the treasurer, who mediated with him on behalf of his fellow bishops. 6 Register of Walter Reynolds (Worc. Hist. Soc.), p. 16. 7 Ibid.
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barons), a marked contrast to the three bishops on the committee of 24 in 1258, or the two episcopal members of the standing council of fifteen, which may well reflect their greater political importance in Edward II's reign. The personnel of the episcopal ordainers is of considerable interest in showing how bishops of very different shades of political opinion were ready to serve on the committee. Naturally they were headed by Archbishop Winchelsea; and two of his former pupils in theology at Oxford, Simon of Ghent and John of Monmouth, bishop of Llandaff, each of whom had like himself been chancellor of the University, were also elected. The latter, in addition to holding a Welsh see, may have had kinsmen among the Welsh marcher lords. His appointment, therefore, and that of David Martin, bishop of St. Davids, born of a Pembrokeshire family, suggests that these two bishops shared and perhaps represented the political views of the marcher lords, who gave their full support to the ordaining movement. The north, on the other hand, was fully occupied during these years in trying to ward off the Scottish invasions, and no northern bishop was an ordainer. Only two ordainers were ministerial bishops, and of these, Ralph Baldock, bishop of London, had ceased to be chancellor at the beginning of the reign, while John Langton, bishop of Chichester, was dismissed from the same office within a few weeks of his election as an ordainer. The seventh bishop ordainer, John Salmon, was throughout his episcopate a loyal supporter of the king; yet he seems never to have lost favour with the opposition groups, which apparently respected his judgement, independence, and moderation.

1 The form of election is printed in Parl. Writs, ii, i. 43. First the bishops elected two earls; the earls then elected two bishops; and these four, together with two barons whom they associated with themselves, chose the remaining 15 ordainers.

2 Stubbs, Const. Hist. ii. 85 n. In the scheme attributed to 1244 in the Chronica Majora of Matthew Paris (iv. 362), however, the committee of twelve consisted of four bishops, four earls, two barons, and two abbots.

3 Winchelsea himself had provided Monmouth to Llandaff by papal authority (Reg. Winchelsey, pp. 5-11, 513-14). Further evidence of Monmouth's connexion with the archbishop may be seen in Winchelsea's legacy to him in his will of 100 marks and a precious ring (Sede Vacante Wills, ed. C. E. Woodruff, Kent Arch. Soc. p. 65).

4 For evidence that Monmouth and Ghent had studied under Winchelsea at Oxford, see A. G. Little and F. Pelster, Oxford Theology and Theologians, pp. 79-81, 97-8, 103. Their appointments as chancellors of Oxford in 1290 and 1291 are given in Snappe's Formulary, ed. H. E. Salter (O.H.S.), pp. 46-9, 324.

5 Cf. A. F. Pollard's article on John Monmouth, Lord marcher, died ? 1247, in D.N.B. The bishop was sometimes called John of Ludlow by the chroniclers (e.g. Ann. Osen. p. 324), but either of his names suggests a Welsh border origin. Archbishop Winchelsea says that though John was born in England, he had long lived in Wales and could speak Welsh (Reg. Winchelsey, p. 514).

6 He was the fifth son of Nicholas FitzMartin, Lord of Cameis in Pembrokeshire (see H. C. Maxwell-Lyte, ' Burci, Falaise and Martin ', in Proc. Somerset Arch. and Natural Hist. Soc. 4th ser. v. 20).

7 Place Edw. II, p. 289.

8 Ibid. The author of the Annales Paulini, p. 268, says John was ' depositus . . . per regem ad honorem suum '.

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In the eyes of contemporaries Winchelsea seems to have been regarded as leader of the ordaining movement. The chroniclers wrote of how he fearlessly urged on the magnates to demand their liberties against the king.\(^1\) Higden said that Lancaster was inspired by Winchelsea; \(^2\) and Lancaster himself associated the ordinances with Winchelsea's name.\(^3\) There is little evidence for the bishops' direct influence on the framing of the ordinances, though the Additional Ordinance of November 1311 requesting the king to do right to Walter Langton \(^4\) was probably due to them. Moreover, Tout has pointed out that the experience in office of the two ex-ministerial bishop ordainers would have shown them where the root of the trouble lay, and suggested that they may have been partly responsible for the purging of the household.\(^5\) Naturally, in the publication of the ordinances the Church took the lead.\(^6\) Sentences of excommunication against all who should infringe them were proclaimed by the archbishop and bishops; \(^7\) and, as with the Confirmatio Cartarum of 1297, Winchelsea had copies of the ordinances sent to every diocese of his province, and ordered them to be read annually.\(^8\) In the meantime certain bishops of the southern province had apparently been adopting an attitude of unhelpfulness similar to that of some earls towards the king's efforts to defend the north. In July 1310 Simon of Ghent and Richard de Swinfield, bishop of Hereford, refused to send supplies for Edward's Scottish expedition.\(^9\) Winchelsea, with the prelates in provincial council at London, and certain magnates, immediately took up their cause, making representations against the royal writs, so that the earl of Lincoln, keeper of the realm in the king's absence, declared them to be entirely revoked.\(^10\)

Up to the time of the publication of the ordinances little was heard of a king's party in the episcopate, although Reynolds was probably loyal throughout the period, and his tenure of the chancellorship was apparently contrary to the ordainers' wishes.\(^11\)

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\(^1\) Trokelowe, p. 81.
\(^2\) Polychronicon, viii. 302; Chron. de Melsa, ii. 326.
\(^3\) Murimuth, app. p. 273; Bridlington, p. 51.
\(^5\) Poly. Hist. ii. 147; Hemingburgh, ii. 278.
\(^7\) Reg. S. de Gandavo, p. 391. Cf. also Ann. Paul. p. 270, where a different but evidently inaccurate account of the publication is given.
\(^8\) Ann. Paul. p. 270, where a different but evidently inaccurate account of the publication is given; and oaths to maintain them were taken on the archbishop's cross (Pipewell Chronicle quoted by M. V. Clarke, Medieval Representation and Consent, p. 180).

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1 Tregelles, p. 147; Hemingburgh, ii. 278.
5 In Ann. Paul. p. 269; his appointment on 6 July 1310 is said to have been made 'communitate tamen Angliae non consentiente'. Tout thinks the change in his official title from chancellor to 'keeper of the great seal' after the early part of 1312 was because he had never been accepted as chancellor by the baronage in parliament, and it was then impolitic to parade the name (cf. Place Edw. II, pp. 285–8).
As in 1309, however, the king found means to break up the ranks of the opposition once the crisis had passed. Some three months after Gavaston’s third banishment, about Christmas 1311, Edward felt strong enough to recall him. Possibly it may be significant of a revival of loyalty to the king among certain bishops that John of Droxford acted on the council at least once about this time, when all of ordaining sympathies were excluded from it.¹ Moreover, in March 1312 Bishop Salmon received a royal commission to treat with the prelates, earls, and barons for the correction of those ordinances prejudicial to the king,² while on 3 September 1312 a further proof of Edward’s trust in the loyalty of these two bishops was his order to them to forbid the earls from proceeding against their king with an armed force.³

Reynolds, Droxford, and Salmon were the same bishops who had supported Edward on Gavaston’s second return from exile in 1309. Now a remarkable undated fragment of a letter in the register of Bishop Henry of Woodlock ⁴ suggests that he also was working with the king and Gavaston. Probably this letter was written to Gavaston ⁵ sometime in December 1311, though its date may possibly have been in the summer of 1309 when Gavaston was preparing to return from his second exile.⁶ Certainly it was addressed to an exile from England, and the bishop felt he was in danger in writing it. He begged that it should be destroyed as soon as read, saying he feared some of his earlier letters had fallen into the hands of enemies who were threatening him with them. But he sent good news ‘that your friends increase greatly in the regions where we are, and your enemies have decreased, for which we praise our Lord, and hope with God’s help to speak with you personally in England before long’. Woodlock had acted against the archbishop’s wishes in attending the Stamford parliament, and was one of the five English bishops who attended Gavaston’s funeral.⁷ Evidently, therefore, the bishop whom Edward had

² Parl. Writs, ii, ii. 71. Naturally nothing came of this commission, for this time the opposition magnates were irreconcilable.
³ Ibid. ii, i. 89.
⁴ Reg. Woodlock, p. 689.
⁵ Canon Goodman, the editor of Woodlock’s register, has added to his rubric describing the letter as written to an exile, ‘? Piers Gavaston’. The person addressed was clearly someone of political importance, and, if not Gavaston, may possibly have been one of the other ‘evil counsellors’ exiled on the barons’ demand. Two other undated letters to Gavaston are contained in the same bishop’s register (pp. 705, 710), though, as these were naturally written in common form, it is impossible to deduce any special connexion between Gavaston and the bishop from them.
⁶ December 1311 seems the more probable date in view of Trokelowe’s remark (p. 74), that the earl of Surrey was at that time inclined to favour the king’s side. Surrey was in Bishop Woodlock’s diocese, and when the bishop wrote of ‘the increase of your friends in the regions where we are’ he may have been referring to the earl and his followers.
⁷ W. Dugdale, Baronage of England, ii. 44; cf. Trokelowe, p. 88. Three of the other bishops present, Reynolds, Droxford, and Maidstone, are known to have been royalist supporters. The political attitude of the fifth bishop, Gilbert Segrave, is obscure, but he was not appointed bishop of London until after Gavaston’s death.
chosen to crown him from the three nominated by Winchelsea was by no means so loyal a supporter of his archbishop in politics as he has usually been represented.¹

About the same time, yet a fifth bishop became involved in Edward’s schemes. Walter Langton had only recently been rescued from prison by the ordinainers, and had the strongest personal reasons for resentment against both Edward and Gavaston. Edward, however, had apparently thought of making use of his administrative skill to upset the ordinances as early as 23 October 1311, when he ordered him to be admitted to the council.² Then on 23 January 1312 he appointed him treasurer ‘until the next parliament’.³ This appointment roused the anger of the opposition magnates more than anything after Gavaston’s return. Langton was excommunicated by Winchelsea for infringing the ordinances ⁴ and chased away from the exchequer by the earls.⁵ Tout thinks that his treasurership was a purely nominal one, and that Walter of Norwich, the baronial nominee, acted continuously from October 1311 to May 1312.⁶ Yet there seems to be some evidence for Langton’s activity in the administration, if not as treasurer. Twenty-four writs appear on the Calendars of Patent and Close Rolls as issued on his ‘information’ between 21 and 30 January 1312; 16 in February, and 13 in March. On 1 May he withdrew defeated to Avignon with royal letters of commendation to seek absolution from the archbishop’s sentence.⁷

Winchelsea’s reaction to Gavaston’s third return from exile and to the king’s further disregard of the ordinances had meanwhile been more vigorous and had much greater authority than his protests against the favourite’s second return. He was no longer hampered by papal opposition: hence his general sentence of excommunication against all infringers of the ordinances came into force against Gavaston as soon as he reached England; and the archbishop then held a meeting of Canterbury convocation where the bishops’ obligations to uphold the ordinances were debated under eight headings.⁸ It was decided that the bishops were bound by oath to observe the ordinances and to force others to observe them; that they should pronounce excommunicate all who had worked against the ordinances; that those notoriously sinning in this respect should be notoriously punished; and that

¹ Even Canon Goodman, who had noticed Woodlock’s letter, wrote in his introduction to the bishop’s register (p. viii) that ‘Archbishop Winchelsea was a friend who was to find in Henry a loyal supporter in his troubles with the king.’
⁴ Concilia, ii. 407; Murimuth, p. 18; Flores Hist. iii. 148–9.
⁵ See the account of this incident sent by the barons of the exchequer to the king and printed by C. Davies, op. cit. app. pp. 551–2.
⁶ Place Edw. II, p. 297 n.
⁷ Feodera, ii. i. 166–7.
⁸ The agenda are printed in Ann. Lond. pp. 177–8.
the earls and barons who had sworn to uphold the ordinances should be advised that they were bound to do so. For the present, however, it was considered inexpedient for the bishops to write to the pope and cardinals in favour of the ordinances. Having thus again united the majority of the bishops under his leadership with a definite political programme, Winchelsea proceeded to summon a joint meeting of the bishops and magnates to St. Paul's on 13 March 1312. Here he made his public denunciation of Gavaston, and it was probably at this council that the measures for defence against the king and Gavaston were drawn up, certain earls and barons being directed to guard different parts of the country. The archbishop, indeed, seems now to have been acting in a sense as party leader. He was said to have won over the earl of Warenne 'qui diu ante titubans, parti regis favebat, per Archiepiscopum Cantuariensem paribus suis, ad praedicta negotia prosequenda reconciliatur'. Moreover, for the first time in the reign his policy of opposition received some support from at least one of the northern bishops. Richard Kellaw, bishop of Durham, was at this time in serious trouble with the king, 'because the bishop did not firmly stand by the king in favouring Peter of Gavaston against the community of the kingdom, as the king wished . . . the bishop was moved to do otherwise by conscience and because to him it was a serious thing to oppose the community'. Kellaw's action may well be an indication that the north was becoming disillusioned about Edward's ability to defend it against the Scots, and was beginning to think that Lancaster might be able to do more for it.

Once more then Winchelsea had been successful in building up a party of opposition to the king, but he could not hold it together against the royalist reaction which followed the capture and execution of Gavaston. Trokelowe, the contemporary chronicler at St. Albans, where many of the scenes which he described took place, attributed much of the credit for the successful mediation between the king and the extremists among the earls to the English bishops and the earl of Gloucester. He said that when the papal legates came to St. Albans to treat for peace they were repulsed by the barons who told them they had enough

noble and learned bishops in England whose counsel they preferred to that of foreigners. But afterwards the bishops and the earl of Gloucester moderated the barons' fury, and persuaded them to restore to the king Gavaston's treasure, horses, and jewels which they had taken at Newcastle. The papal nuncios, however, in the well-documented but, as it survives, incomplete report on their work to the pope, made little mention of the bishops' activities, though Bishop David Martin was said on one occasion to have acted as their ambassador to the ears. Walter Reynolds, the only bishop mentioned by name as witnessing the final treaty of peace in December 1312, and John Sandall, the future bishop of Winchester, were appointed on 22 February 1313 to receive Gavaston's goods. Winchelsea, John Langton, and Baldock were the three bishops nominated by the ears and barons to keep their acquittances until they should swear obedience to the king.

This was one of the last signs of Winchelsea's political activity and he died soon afterwards. It seems that he had ceased to play a leading part in the reign from the time of Gavaston's murder, a year before his death; possibly because he did not approve of the violence of Lancaster and Warwick, and because he could no longer control them. His death was a serious loss, for he was the only real political leader, combining both integrity and ability, which the episcopate provided to any party or group during the reign. Professor Wilkinson has pointed out that the ordaining movement was essentially conservative when compared either with the earlier attempts to control the king in 1259–60, or with those of the middle and later years of Edward II's reign. This conservatism and restraint may have been partly due to Winchelsea's influence and long political experience. Moreover, the importance of his work is shown by the fact that the programme of reform laid down in the ordinances remained the foundation of the Lancastrian demands for the rest of the reign. Throughout his pontificate there is little evidence to support the chroniclers' denunciations of the egoism and political careerism of Edward II's bishops or for the charges attributing all the evils of the time to them.

1 Trokelowe, pp. 78–9; cf. pp. 80–1.
2 Printed by R. A. R. Roberts in Camden Miscellany, xv. (1929).
3 Ibid. p. 12. Ann. Paul. p. 272, says he was present in London on 29 October 1312 when the negotiations were in progress.
4 Camden Misc. xv. loc. cit. p. 21; Foedera, ii, i, 192.
5 Ibid. p. 203; C.P.R. 1307–13, p. 553. This was after the ears had failed to deliver them to John Sandall and Ingelard Warley, previously appointed to receive them at St. Albans on 13 January (cf. ibid. p. 519; Foedera, ii, i, 194; Trokelowe, p. 79).
II. THE PONTIFICATE OF WALTER REYNOLDS, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, 1313-27

Archbishop Reynolds succeeded a great man to whose political views he had been opposed, and his suffragans were probably prejudiced against him on account of the suspicions of simony and intrigue connected with his appointment.1 He was unsuited by character and temperament to be a political leader. Moreover, although his letters show that he was genuinely anxious to promote the peace and prosperity of the country,2 he also set much store by a quiet life for himself, particularly towards the end of his pontificate, and was unwilling to take any strong line of action which might bring him into conflict with the king. Therefore he made little effort to lead the episcopate, or to provide it, as Winchelsea had done, with a political policy which emphasized the bishops' duties to the Church equally with their duties to the State. For the future each bishop was generally left to decide for himself in which direction his political duty or interest lay; and it was perhaps natural that towards the end of the reign, as the political situation became more confused, the bishops' attitudes were swayed far more by regional and personal influences than they had been under Winchelsea. There was less consistency and continuity in their actions, and different groups of bishops appeared as leaders in different crises.

At the same time the increasing number of king's clerks in the episcopate were more important in administrative and political work, a development certainly helped by the fact that the archbishop of Canterbury was no longer trying to force the episcopate as a body to adopt a policy of opposition to the Crown; but, as Tout has shown, also largely the result of the way in which administration was coming for the first time to be mixed up with the general political conflict.3 In particular, the attempts of the barons to control ministerial appointments caused the key officers, such as the chancellor and treasurer, who were generally bishops, to adopt a much more definite political attitude than had been usual formerly. Further, the changing character of the council was giving greater opportunities for administrative and political work to both barons and bishops not holding office, but willing to co-operate in the work of government. Recent work on the council emphasizes the importance of Edward II's reign as the time when there definitely came to be a magnate element in the

1 See, e.g., Bridlington, p. 45; Chron. de Melsa, ii. 329. The letter of Clement V to Edward II about this appointment printed by H. G. Richardson, ante, lvi. 97-103, shows beyond doubt that Clement's acceptance of Reynolds as archbishop was conditional on payment.
3 Charters, ii. 189-90, 213.
council in addition to the ministerial element; and when the functions of the council were expanding from advisory to executive work.\textsuperscript{1}

Two main stages may be seen in the bishops' political activities under Reynolds. First come the periods of collaboration and the rise of the middle party, when many bishops did valuable work in the government. Then, after the break up of the alliance of political groups about the end of 1320, few men could avoid either taking sides or adopting an unhelpful attitude of indecision.

I

For some time after Reynolds' accession, in spite of the restless state of the country, there is little evidence of open opposition to the king by the bishops. Rather the keynote of their attitude throughout the middle years of the reign, from 1313 until nearly the end of 1320, was, apart from brief periods and a few exceptional cases, one of co-operation with the government and of striving to keep the peace between the king and magnates. Study of their activities at this time shows how an increasing number of them were gradually drawn into the general policy of collaboration, not so much as members of a united clerical body, but rather as men adopting the only course open to practical statesmen whose object was to preserve the peace, until by 1318 there were apparently no dissentients from it in the episcopate.

During the first critical years about 1314–16 Reynolds took a leading share in the work of collaboration and was more active politically than at any other time in his pontificate. He seems indeed to have directed the main work of government, deriving his authority, like the earl of Pembroke in the years 1312–14, from his dominant position on the council and as keeper of the realm in the king's absence.\textsuperscript{2} A striking illustration of the way the administration had come to depend on him is one of his letters rebuking John Sandall, lieutenant of the treasurer, and other officers for saying they dared do nothing without him.\textsuperscript{3} At the same time at least six other bishops were also using their administrative or political experience in the king's service, either by acting on the council, by opening parliaments or by holding other royal commissions. These were John Droxford, John Langton, Walter Stapleton, Walter Maidstone, the new bishop of Worcester, and Walter Langton, all of whom had formerly been


\textsuperscript{2} Ample evidence has been collected by Mr. Conway Davies, \textit{op. cit.} pp. 331-5, to show Reynolds' domination of the council at this time. Dr. Wilkinson, however, thinks he was acting on the council as king's representative and keeper of the realm rather than as an ordinary councillor (\textit{Studies}, p. 152).

\textsuperscript{3} C. Davies, \textit{op. cit.} app. p. 554.
royal clerks; and, more surprisingly, David Martin, who is not known to have had previous experience in the king's service.1 Droxford in particular was very active in administrative work in the summer of 1313 when the king was absent in France.2 This suggests that his opposition to the king was of considerably later date than Tout supposed when he wrote that John drifted into opposition soon after giving up his wardrobe office in 1309.3 Moreover, Richard Kellaw, bishop of Durham, previously a bitter enemy of the king, was reconciled with Edward on his way to Bannockburn, and gave him 1000 marks and a war horse of great price.4

After Bannockburn there was naturally a reaction against Edward, especially in the north, which suffered most from the defeat, and here the bishops plainly helped to voice the general discontent. In the early months of 1315 William Greenfield, archbishop of York, held two pseudo or counter-parliaments of barons, knights, and clergy, independently of the king, at York and Doncaster to decide on measures for defence.5 The second writ of summons, sent out for the Doncaster meeting on the urgent request of Lancaster and other magnates, definitely stated that the plan was the result of an accord between the archbishop and Lancaster.6 In the south the clergy received little help or sympathy from Archbishop Reynolds in their protests against the form of the writs by which they were summoned to parliaments 7 or in their complaints that the liberties of the Church were being infringed by the king and his ministers. They did, however, find a defender of their privileges in Walter Stapleton, bishop of Exeter, who, though he often gave valuable support to the king, was a man of independence and courage who refused to be bound to any political party. He apparently had some support from

1 For evidence of these bishops' activities, see C.P.R. 1307–13, p. 594; 1313–17, pp. 169, 280, 286; C.C.R. 1313–18, p. 185; Parl. Writs, ii, i. 97; ii, ii. 135; Poedera, ii, i. 220, 233–4. Walter Langton had evidently been serving on the council, because he is said to have been thrown out of it in the February parliament of 1315 (see below, p. 329).

2 I have noticed in the Calendars of Patent, Close and Fine Rolls for 1313 seven writs in May, fifty-three in June and twenty-six in July tested by him.

3 Chapters, ii, 193.

4 Graystanes, p. 94. The chronicler added that the earl of Gloucester was killed on this war horse at Bannockburn: ' Quid justius ? Contra Episcopum deliquit, et in equo Episcopi punitus est '. Kellaw's quarrel with Gloucester and Edward apparently dated from the bishop's election in 1311 when Edward sent Gloucester to Durham to persuade the convent to elect Anthony de Passano, a foreigner (ibid. p. 93). This incident is not noticed by Dr. W. E. L. Smith in his Episcopal Appointments and Patronage in the Reign of Edward II (Chicago, 1938), p. 16, where he describes Kellaw's election as one of the few to pass without friction.

5 The writs of summons are printed in Reg. Greenfield, ii. 196–7; i. 158–60.

6 Ibid.

7 For their protests in 1314 and 1315, see Parl. Writs, ii, ii. 123–4; Concilia, ii, 442–4; Reg. Stapeldon, p. 122; Wake, State of the Church, pp. 264–6; App. pp. 37–9.
Winchelsea's old pupil, Simon of Ghent, but the main responsibility for the conditions laid down by the clergy when they made their grant to the king in the Westminster parliament of February 1315 was probably his. They demanded that the king should guarantee the liberty of the Church, observe the ordinances, and use the proceeds of their subsidy only for the common utility. Walter Langton, one of the king's most convinced supporters, was thrown out of the king's council at this parliament.

By 1316 the result of all the distress and unrest was to make Lancaster appear to many as the indispensable man and to force the king to give way once more temporarily to his demands. Yet even at the important Lincoln parliament in February, when the earl was made chief of the king's council, a number of bishops were apparently still ready to support the king, and, in spite of Archbishop Reynolds' absence through illness, their influence at the parliament seems to have been more powerful and that of Lancaster less dominating than has sometimes been supposed. In the first place, on 8 February, before Lancaster had even troubled to arrive at the parliament, four bishops, Salmon and Stapleton, who were also appointed king's lieutenants in the parliament, John Langton and Roger Mortival, the new bishop of Salisbury, were sworn of the king's council. Thus a considerable magnate element had already been added to the council before Lancaster presented his bill to the king demanding a baronial council; and it is significant of episcopal support that all the magnates so chosen were bishops. On 17 February, when an agreement had finally been reached between the king and Lancaster, it was Bishop Salmon who finally announced in full parliament on the king's behalf that Edward wished to observe the ordinances, that he bore sincere goodwill towards Lancaster and the other magnates, and that he invited Lancaster to become chief of his council.

1 Bishop Simon of Ghent wrote to Archbishop Reynolds protesting against the irregular form of summons of the clergy to the January parliament in 1315, saying that many experienced men dreaded the mandate as prejudicial to the rights of the clergy. Therefore he made returns saving ecclesiastical liberty (Reg. S. de Gandavo, pp. 550-1; Reg. Stapeldon, p. 122). He himself was absent from the parliament pleading illness (Reg. S. de Gandavo, pp. 551-2; Parl. Proxies, 3/131).

2 See M. V. Clarke op. cit. p. 134. Stapleton refused to make any return to the writ of summons, and the formal protest of the clergy against it is entered in his register (Reg. Stapeldon, p. 122).

3 These conditions are printed in Reg. Swinfield, pp. 497-8.

4 Malmesbury, p. 209.

5 Parl. Write, ii. i. 171; Wake, op. cit. p. 267; Concilia, ii. 456; Cal. Reg. Droxford (Somerset Record Soc.), p. 104.

6 Rot. Parl. i. 350; Parl. Write, ii. ii. 156.

7 Ibid.; Rot. Parl. i. 350. On 5 February these four bishops, with Woodlock and Droxford, had been chosen as auditors of petitions (ibid.).

8 Parl. Write, ii, ii. 157; Rot. Parl. i. 351.
for a baronial committee to draw up plans for the reform of the king's household and the realm. But the names of the members are given in a letter of Lancaster dated July 1317.¹ These show the strength both of episcopal representation and of Edward's supporters on the committee. Five bishops, five earls, and one baron are said to have been appointed. Thus numerically, the bishops were now on an equality with the earls, and formed a much higher percentage of the whole than they had done on the ordaining committee. Possibly the two bishop ordainers on the committee, John Monmouth and John Langton, with Roger Mortival, may have been ready to support Lancaster at this time. Mortival had been born of a knightly family in Leicestershire within the sphere of Lancastrian influence;² and also had connexions with his predecessor as bishop of Salisbury, Simon of Ghent, the follower of Winchelsea. Mortival had studied theology at Oxford at the same time as Simon, and had succeeded him as chancellor of the University;³ and later Simon collated Roger to a prebend at Salisbury cathedral.⁴ But the bishops on the committee were headed by two of the king's leading supporters, Archbishop Reynolds and Bishop Salmon, while the earls included Arundel, Pembroke, and Richmond. This suggests that Lancaster would not have had everything his own way on the committee any more than he had in the parliament. Probably it was partly due to its very mixed character that the committee, in spite of its meetings in London and its written plans for reform,⁵ achieved so little. The author of the Flores Historiarum, a rabid Lancastrian, accused Reynolds of trying to persuade the king soon after the Lincoln parliament to break his false peace with Lancaster.⁶ But the main reason for the failure of the 1316 experiment was, of course, Lancaster's irresponsibility and incapacity for the routine work of government, which his acceptance of the office of chief councillor only served to reveal. Mr. Conway Davies has pointed out that during 1316 Reynolds easily maintained his dominant position on the council against Lancaster.⁷

Further work of the Lincoln parliament concerned the relations of Church and State, though now the disputes between the two societies had less connexion with the general political conflict than in Winchelsea's time, and the Church and Lancastrian

¹ This letter is printed in Murimuth, app. pp. 271-6, and Bridlington, pp. 50-2, but the names of all the members are given in Murimuth only.
² He was the son of Anketil of Mortival, lord of the manor of Nousely in Leicestershire (W. Burton, Description of Leicestershire, 1622, p. 211).
³ Snappe's Formulary, pp. 49-51, 324; Oxford Theology and Theologians, pp. 79-81.
⁴ Reg. S. de Gandavo, p. 508. Mortival himself says that he had had experience of personal residence at Salisbury while Simon was bishop there (Statutes of Salisbury Cathedral, ed. C. Wordsworth and D. Maclean, 1915, pp. 152-3).
⁵ Cf. Bridlington, p. 51; Murimuth, p. 273.
⁶ Flores Hist. iii, 173.
⁷ Baronial Opposition, p. 335.
oppositions seem to have been working against the king independently of each other. In the absence of Archbishop Reynolds the party in the Church which wanted constitutional forms to be observed asserted with remarkable success its claim that the clergy should vote subsidies to the king only in their own convocations, and Edward was induced to grant the Articuli Cleri, guaranteeing the liberties and privileges of the clergy in the form of a charter which Winchelsea himself had been unable to obtain for them. Miss Clarke attributed both these victories to Bishop Stapleton, possibly supported on the bench by Bishop Mortival, and suggested that the striking omission of Stapleton's name from the reforming committee appointed after the bargain with Lancaster may have been due to the way in which he had pressed the claims of the Church.

Meanwhile a number of men from all political groups were beginning to work together to save the country from the anarchy into which Lancaster's inability to govern was plunging it. Bishops took a leading share from at least 1315 onwards in building up the alliance known as the 'middle party'; while during the period of its ascendancy from 1318–20 about seventeen out of twenty-three bishops took an active part in its work.

It was in the mission to Avignon in December 1316 of the experienced Bishop Salmon and John Hotham, the new bishop of Ely, with the earl of Pembroke and Bartholomew Badlesmere that Tout saw the origins of the middle party. About this time Hotham in particular, a Yorkshireman, formerly a confidant of Gavaston and an exchequer clerk, seems to have been one of the chief links between the disgusted officials of the court party and the barons of Pembroke's group. Between 1315 and 1317, however, many barons and bishops later connected with the middle party were working together on the council and about court, and the idea of co-operation may well have begun to develop among them during these gatherings. Bishops prominent at them

1 In result two sessions of Canterbury convocation and four of York were necessary before the clerical grants were finally made in October and November 1316 (cf. Concilia, ii. 456-7, 458, 462; Wake, p. 269, app. p. 42; Records of Northern Convocation (Surtees Soc.), pp. 66-8; Parl. Writs, ii. ii. 158).
2 These were finally published on 24 November 1316 after the convocations had confirmed their subsidies to the king. They are printed in Statutes of the Realm, i. 171-4.
3 Medieval Representation and Consent, p. 136.
4 These were Salmon, Hotham, John Langton, Reynolds, Sandall, Monmouth, Orleton, Mortival, Walter Langton, Cobham, Halton, Martin, Melton, Stapleton, Droxford, Assier, Gravesend.
6 See ibid. pp. 86 n., 320; Foedera, ii. i. 157. Details for the early part of Hotham's long official career, chiefly in the Irish and English exchequers, are given in Dr. A. Redford's Manchester B.A. thesis (1915), The Climax of Medieval Ireland, pp. 117-19.
7 Many examples of these gatherings are quoted by C. Davies, op. cit. pp. 426-43. For instances of the bishops' activities at court, see also C.P.R. 1313-17, pp. 808, 905, 634, 654.
included Salmon and Hotham, John Langton, Stapleton, Reynolds, Walter Langton, and the chancellor John Sandall, a king’s clerk of long and varied experience, recently promoted to the bishopric of Winchester, through the efforts, at least in part, of the earl of Pembroke. Sandall’s associations with Pembroke seem indeed to suggest that Mr. Conway Davies was wrong in supposing that the bishop had been too closely connected with Lancaster to prove acceptable to the middle party. By the spring of 1318 the new party had gained sufficient support and authority to undertake to make terms of peace with Lancaster on the king’s behalf. Naturally ex officio at least ten bishops took part in the long series of negotiations which resulted on 9 August in the treaty of Leake and which have been fully worked out and disentangled by Mr. J. G. Edwards. Hotham, Salmon, and John Langton were especially prominent, and Mr. Edwards has suggested that they may have formed a kind of left wing of the middle party, being more reluctant than the other lay missi to go back on their word to Lancaster.

The treaty of Leake shows the paramountcy of the bishops’ position. Eight bishops, four earls, four barons and one of Lancaster’s bannerets were nominated to guide the king; and of these, two bishops, one earl, one baron and Lancaster’s banneret were to be constantly with him. Thus for the only time in the reign in a committee of the three orders the number of bishops was equal to that of the earls and barons together. At the October parliament at York the symmetry of this rather academic agreement on the distribution of powers broke down, probably under pressure of the claims of individuals, and two more bishops and seven barons were added to the council. Even so, bishops still formed two-fifths of the whole council, and their exceptionally large representation does seem to reflect the leading part they

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1 For details of his career as a royal clerk in Gascony and Scotland, as well as in the wardrobe and exchequer, and latterly as treasurer and chancellor, see Register of John de Sandale (Hampshire Record Soc.), pp. xx–xxii, 291; Tout, Place Edw. II, pp. 297–8, 290, 308, 347; Chapters, ii. 214 n.
2 Reg. Sandale, pp. 335–6. In 1316 Pembroke went to Winchester on the king’s behalf to press for Sandall’s election. In 1312 Sandall’s presentation by the king to a prebend at York had been granted on Pembroke’s information (C.P.R. 1307–13, p. 481).
3 Baronial Opposition, p. 430.
4 ‘The Negotiating of the Treaty of Leake, 1318’, in Essays Presented to R. L. Poole (Oxford, 1927), pp. 360–78. The bishops present at various times during these negotiations were Reynolds, Hotham, Salmon, Sandall, John Langton, Monmouth, Orleton, Cobham, Walter Langton, Mortival, and Alexander Bicknor, archbishop of Dublin. For their activities see also Bridlington, p. 54; Trokelowe, p. 112; Knighton, i. 413; Ann. Paul. p. 282; Flores Hist. iii. 184; E. Salisbury, ‘A Political Agreement of 1318’, ante, xxxiii. 78–83; H. M. C. Var. Coll. i. 220–1, 267–70; Rot. Parl. i. 453–4; Foedera, ii, i. 370.
had played both in the negotiations with Lancaster and in building up the alliance.

Two impressions from the list of bishops appointed to the standing council indicate, however, that certain of the bishops now most active politically were no longer working in such friendly co-operation with the king as their predecessors during the early critical years of Reynolds' pontificate; and this, together with the drastic nature of the council's control of the king, may suggest some modification of the generally accepted view that the middle party exercised its power in friendly collaboration with the king. In the first place, some of the bishops elected cannot have been acceptable to the king. Edward had been bitterly opposed to the election of Adam of Orleton as bishop of Hereford only a year ago, saying he could not trust Adam, who, although his proctor at Rome, gave away his counsel and behaved in a way that he should not. Yet Adam, with Roger Mortival, the two ordainers, David Martin and John Langton, and Thomas of Cobham, bishop of Worcester, whom Edward had refused to accept as archbishop of Canterbury, were all appointed to the committee; while Walter Reynolds, who had been present with the king during the greater part of the negotiations and who was looked on by the chroniclers as his chief supporter, was passed over. John Salmon probably represented Edward's interests on the committee, but his election, like that of John Hotham and John Langton, was the natural result of the leading part he had taken in the negotiations with Lancaster. The addition of Walter Langton to the council in October may have been a concession to royal influence, but that of Sandall at the same time was more probably connected with his coming appointment as treasurer and his known support of Pembroke.

Secondly, the way in which certain bishops were apparently co-operating with the barons of their regions may possibly foreshadow later developments during the period of the break up of the alliance. The chief strength of the middle party at this time was in the support of the Welsh march, and the political importance of this region was reflected in the choice of episcopal councillors. Nearly half the bishops appointed, David Martin, Adam of Orleton, and Thomas of Cobham, held sees either in Wales or near the

1 This council was described by Dr. Wilkinson, op. cit. pp. 164–5, as the most revolutionary experiment of the reign, which, in attempting to control rather than to advise the king, went farthest towards infringing his most vital power. Mr. J. G. Edwards has shown, ubi supra, pp. 371–2, 377–8, that it was Lancaster who proposed the standing council and who persuaded Pembroke and the other missi to accept it.

2 C.C.W. i. 468.

3 Among the lay members of the committee the representation of the Welsh march was even more predominating. Three out of the four earls, Pembroke, Hereford, and Arundel, and two of the four barons, Mortimer and John Grey, were leading marcher lords, while Hugh Courtenay was also powerful in the south-west.
border, while a fourth Welsh bishop, John of Monmouth, had been present during the Leicester negotiations. The election to the council of John Halton, bishop of Carlisle, the first northern bishop to act on a baronial committee during the reign, and the prominence in the York parliament of William Melton, promoted to the archbishopric of York in 1317 and having great influence in that region, are signs that the north was now co-operating in the work of the middle party. Melton's activity is also of interest as that of a former royal clerk ready to use his administrative experience in the cause of reform. In this he was typical of a large number of royal clerks among the bishops now actively supporting the middle party. In all at least ten bishops with experience in the royal service were present at the parliament.2 Much of the administrative reform achieved was possibly due to their help and expert knowledge.

During 1319 and 1320 the alliance held together and bishops continued to work with the lay members of the group to make these years the most prosperous of the reign. In November 1318 Bishop Salmon prepared to assist the king until the beginning of Lent at the least, which probably represented his quarterly term of service on the standing council. The alliance also had two new recruits from the episcopate in Rigaud d'Assier, a Frenchman provided by John XXII to Winchester as Sandall's successor, and in Stephen Gravesend, whose consecration as bishop of London was said to have been performed by Archbishop Reynolds on the intercession of the two lay leaders of the middle party, the earls of Pembroke and Hereford.4 Both these bishops were active about court with other members of the alliance, such as Salmon, Hotham, Mortival, Melton, Stapleton, and, until his death in November 1319, Sandall; and Assier, Orleton, Hotham, Melton, Halton, and Cobham undertook diplomatic missions in support of its policy.5 There is little reason to suppose that the new appointments of Salmon and Stapleton as chancellor and treasurer in January 1320 indicated the beginning of the end of the middle party's ascendancy. The former was nominated 'in full parliament',7 and the latter had co-operated

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1 Melton, with the earl of Hereford, presented to the king in parliament the petition concerning the standing council (Cole, Documents, p. 12). He was also appointed with Hotham and Salmon to the committee which undertook the reform of the household (ibid.).

2 These were Sandall, Cobham, Walter Langton, Stapleton, and Droxford, who, with Halton, acted as auditors of petitions (ibid.), Reynolds, Melton, Hotham, Salmon, and John Langton (ibid. p. 11). Orleton was absent on a diplomatic mission (cf. Reg. Orleton, p. xvi) and sent a proxy (Parl. Proxies, 6/260).


5 E.g. Foedera, ii, i. 387, 422; C.P.R. 1317–21, p. 34; Ann. Paul. p. 290.

6 E.g. Foedera, ii, i. 410–11, 438, 441; C.P.R. 1317–21, pp. 414, 416, 554, 560; Reg. Orleton, pp. xvii–xviii.

with the alliance, and the exchequer reforms which he at once began to initiate were quite in accordance with its ideas of administrative reform. Moreover, the influence of the middle party was still apparently predominant in October 1320 in the last parliament before the baronial rising. Bishop Cobham, who was present, wrote cheerfully to the pope and cardinals, reporting that the political prospects seemed good. An ominous note was, however, sounded in a letter of 16 November 1320 from the English bishops to the pope which Edward did not allow them to send. They wrote of 'adversam condicionem moderni temporis in quo, jam in parte pace vacillante regni inter clerum et populum et ecclesiam et magnates, intestini discriminis posset emersio, sicut probabiliter timetur, de facili provenire'.

II

In the confused period which followed the break up of the middle party no unity or settled policy can be traced in the bishops' political outlook. Certain of them, such as Cobham, were frankly dismayed at the general revival of armed opposition to the Crown, which they could do little to check. Other bishops were swayed by family, territorial, and personal reasons as never before in the reign. During the baronial revolt of 1320–1 and the royalist reaction and triumph of 1321–2 instances may be found of bishops working politically with three or four different groups of barons in different parts of the country.

Henry Burghersh, for example, recently promoted to the bishopric of Lincoln through the influence of his uncle Bartholomew Badlesmere, was deeply involved in the cause of his baronial kinsmen in Kent. On 8 December, after the fall of Badlesmere's castle of Leeds in Kent, Edward wrote to the pope that he had been fraudulently deceived as to the merits of Henry, whose promotion to Lincoln he had requested the year before. Now he realized that Henry was totally unsuited to be a bishop. In particular, 'de bonis ecclesiae Lincoln, per progenitores nostros et nos ad pios usus deputatis et ordinatis, contra nos armatos parat et sustentat; bona illa sic indebita consumendo, et alias contra nos adversitates excercendo, ac pro viribus procurando'. Therefore he begged the pope to uproot him from his see. The bishop's temporalities were seized, and his brother, Bartholomew

1 For these reforms and their importance see Place Edw. II, pp. 170–2.
2 Register of Thomas de Cobham (Worc. Hist. Soc.), pp. 97–8. He said the king was behaving magnificently, prudently, and discreetly, rising early contrary to his wont, showing a cheerful countenance to prelates and magnates, and even helping in parliamentary business.
3 Registrum Hamonis Hethe (Cant. and York Soc.), pp. 89–90. The letter concerned the business of the Templars' lands.
4 Ibid. p. 78.
6 Foedera, II, i. 464.
Burghersh, sent to the Tower of London.¹ On 25 February 1322, about three weeks before Boroughbridge, the king wrote that Henry still 'dicto Bartholomaeo, nostro rebelli, totis viribus adhaeret, et nobis contrariatur'.² In the west of England, Adam of Orleton, bishop of Hereford, born either in the city of Hereford or on the Mortimers’ manor of Orleton in Herefordshire, threw in his lot with his friend and patron, Roger Mortimer of Wigmore;³ while John Droxford, bishop of Bath and Wells, also definitely went over to the side of the barons. Much of the evidence for their activities comes later in a succession of royal letters to the papal court written after the king’s triumph. Edward then declared that he could no longer bear in his kingdom without grave scandal the bishops of Bath and Wells, Lincoln, and Hereford, and demanded their translation overseas. They were the worst poison, proceeding from the race of traitors.⁴ After 1324 the campaign against Orleton became especially virulent.⁵ At a special assize on the rebellion at Hereford he was found guilty of sending armed men to Roger Mortimer,⁶ and on his refusal to answer before a secular court was accused of treason in the Lent parliament of 1324.⁷ It is interesting to find that Pope John XXII had few words of condemnation for these three bishops. At first, in May 1322, he urged Bishop Burghersh to desist from his offences and to endeavour to appease the king;⁸ and later he advised Bishop Orleton as a counsel of expediency to act humbly towards the king.⁹ But he categorically refused to depose any of them at Edward’s request, and wrote urgently to other bishops and magnates to intercede for them.¹⁰ As time

¹ Chron. de Melsa, ii. 340; Murimuth, p. 34; Parl. Writs, ii, iii. 618.
² Foedera, ii, i. 476.
³ On 28 January 1322 when the king’s army reached Hereford, Edward called Adam before him and ‘episcopum... acriter increpavit, eo quod contra naturalem dominum suum barones sustinuit, unde et plurima bona ipsius in ultionem confiscavit’ (Malmesbury, pp. 264-5). It was noted in the writs of military summons that ‘for certain causes’ neither Orleton nor Burghersh were required to send troops against Lancaster (Parl. Writs, ii, ii. 550).
⁴ E.g. Foedera, ii, i. 504-5. For similar letters, see ibid. pp. 464, 476, 509-11, 515, 532, 537, 549-50, 601, 629, 633. The last letter concerning Droxford is dated 10 October 1323, but those about Orleton and Burghersh continued with increasing bitterness until the end of the reign. The reconciliation of Burghersh with Edward in the spring of 1324 (Reg. Cobham, p. 169) was only temporary.
⁵ At first Edward does not seem to have treated Orleton’s share in the rising so seriously as that of Droxford and Burghersh, e.g. on 6 February 1322 he ordered Bishop’s Castle to be restored to him (C.P.R. 1321-4, p. 53). The attack against him was revived about the time when Orleton was said to be contriving Mortimer’s escape from the Tower. Possibly therefore the political situation in 1324 rather than the bishop’s actions in 1320-22 caused Edward’s exceptional anger against him.
⁶ The presentation of the jury on Orleton’s help to the rebels is printed from Assize Roll 1388, m. 5, by W. E. L. Smith, op. cit. p. 154; cf. also Rot. Parl. ii. 427-8.
⁷ Cf. Blaneforde, pp. 140-2; Murimuth, pp. 42-3; Reg. Cobham, p. 169. He was protected in parliament by the whole body of bishops led by the two archbishops.
⁸ Cal. Papal Letters, ii. 448.
⁹ Ibid. p. 472.
¹⁰ E.g. ibid. pp. 448, 456-7, 469, 465-6, 468-70, 472, 475-6; Foedera, ii, i. 538, 540.
went on he became more and more angry at the seizure of their temporalities and sharply rebuked Edward for his failure to respect the rights of the Church.\(^1\) His attitude is in marked contrast to that of Urban VI and Boniface IX at the end of the fourteenth century who translated a number of English bishops for political reasons on the demand of Richard II.\(^2\)

In the north, where there was a strong tradition of loyalty to the Crown, dating back to the battle of the Standard in the twelfth century, the attitude of the bishops was again similar to that of the barons of the region; and here Archbishop Melton, himself a Yorkshireman, whose natural feeling of loyalty had been strengthened by many years' service in Edward's household, both as prince and king, seems to stand out as leader of both northern barons and bishops. Possibly it was the weight of Melton's authority in the north, which made Lancaster especially anxious to secure the presence of the northern prelates at his counter parliament at Sherburn-in-Elmet on 28 June 1321.\(^3\) If at this time the north could be induced to give its whole-hearted support to the plan for an alliance with Lancaster and the lords of the Welsh march against the Despensers, the king could hardly avoid defeat; and so the reply of the bishops and clergy to Lancaster's Sherburn articles was eagerly awaited. In effect this reply\(^4\) expressed simply and with great clarity the political attitude of the north. Obviously the clergy were not vitally interested in the grievances elaborated in the articles, nor indeed in the general political situation in England. Throughout the reign the main object of the north was to secure some defence against the Scots, and the chief reason for the attendance of all three northern bishops at Sherburn seems to have been merely that for the present Lancaster was better able than the king to defend them. The condition of their co-operation was that Lancaster should help them against the Scots, and for this purpose the clergy were willing to grant him a subsidy.\(^5\) But they were not prepared to oppose the king, and stated definitely that parliament was the place in which to seek a remedy for Lancaster's grievances. None of the three bishops sealed the Sherburn

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1 E.g. C.P.L. ii. 469.
3 See Bridlington, p. 62. The irregular assembly held by Lancaster at Pontefract in May 1321 had decided that its business 'required the counsel ... especially of the prelates'.
4 It is printed, *ibid.* pp. 64–5.
5 Preparations for the payment of this subsidy seem actually to have been made, for on 9 April 1322 Archbishop Melton was rebuked by Edward for persuading the clergy of his province to grant 2000 marks to Lancaster, and was requested to make amends by securing a proper aid for the king (*Parl. Writs*, ii, i. 293; ii, ii. 566).
indenture, nor did they accompany the barons in their march on London in the summer of 1321. Then, in the spring of 1322, when it was finally clear that Lancaster could provide no better help than Edward against the Scots, the change in the attitude of the north marked a turning-point in the reign. The decisive help which both barons and bishops in the north gave to Edward was seen at Boroughbridge, where the victor, Sir Andrew Harclay, was an old associate of Bishop Halton of Carlisle, leading an army of northern borderers, which included Henry de Beaumont, brother of the bishop of Durham, and troops sent by Bishop Halton. Both now and in the following years of the royalist reaction Archbishop Melton apparently gave his full support to Edward.

In the south the attitude of the more moderate men among the bishops, who were given no effective lead by their metropolitan, was generally confused and indecisive. At times they attempted to mediate between king and barons, but their activities had little interest or importance until in December 1321 Edward decided to use Canterbury Convocation as an instrument for reversing the judgement of the August parliament on the Despensers. His action in ordering Archbishop Reynolds to summon this convocation suggests that he thought the clergy were more likely to support him than parliament. But though he secured from them the formal decision which he sought, a number of bishops were apparently unwilling to give it their approval, or at least thought that parliament and not convocation was the place where such a decision should be made. Only five bishops out of a possible seventeen were present, which certainly detracted...
from the authority and political value of the decision; and Edward thought it necessary to send urgent writs to ten absent bishops ordering them to deliberate on the judgement with their advisers and to send him their opinion. Of the three replies found to these writs, those of Bishop Cobham and Bishop Stapleton are especially noteworthy. Both urged the king that if he were determined on revoking the sentence against the Despensers, the appropriate place for it to be done was in a parliament summoned for the purpose. Stapleton put the case more strongly than Cobham, and Edward was especially angry with him. He marvelled that the bishop, who, he thought, of all prelates was especially bound to wish a good issue to this business, should have sent him such a churlish reply, and ordered him to send a different answer and to come to him in person immediately. Stapleton boldly restated his previous advice, and ultimately Edward was wise enough to accept it. Public revocation of the sentence was made in the York parliament of May 1322, where Stapleton again took up the office of treasurer which he had resigned on 25 August 1321 after the exile of the Despensers. Apparently, therefore, the chief motive for his outspoken advice to the king had not been any political objection to the return of the Despensers, but rather the wish to make their position more secure by obtaining for it the legal authority of parliament. As in 1315 and 1316, when he is thought to have championed the cause of the clergy in convocation and parliament against the king, he seems to have been genuinely anxious that constitutional forms should be observed. His letters show independent judgement and outspoken frankness at a time when few men were willing to risk their careers for principles of this kind.

The controlling part played by four or five bishops in the last years of the reign, both in directing the revival of opposition to the Crown and the Despensers, and in the final act of the deposition, is well known, and has coloured the views of historians as to the character of the bishops' activities throughout the reign. Certainly these few bishops acted discreditably in a spirit of political self-seeking. It may, however, be of interest to discuss a few points on which some modifications or additions to the usual view of their activities may be suggested.

In the first place, the way in which bishops who had formerly

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1 Foedera, ii, i. 470.
2 The third reply found was from Bishop Droxford, who stated simply that he approved of Convocation's answer, and wished to agree with the conclusion of the king and his best men (Cal. Reg. Drokensford, pp. 199-200).
4 Ibid. He said that it did not seem suitable, expedient, or proper that revocation should be made without common deliberation and fuller discussion.
5 Ibid. pp. 442-3.
6 Ibid. pp. 443-4.
7 Place Edw. II, p. 298.

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been clerks in the royal service were treated by Edward and the Despensers helps to explain why so many of them readily joined Isabella and Mortimer. The vindictive revenge with which Edward pursued Orleton and Burghersh for their part in the baronial rising of 1320–1 was probably a main cause of their later hostility to him; but these were by no means the only bishops who suffered in these years. Possibly the dominance on the council and about court of the younger Despenser helped to antagonize certain of those bishops who had acted on the council during the middle years of the reign, especially since the Despensers were opposed to magnate influence on the council. In the case of Reynolds at least, who had formerly worked so devotedly on the council, the uncertainty of Edward’s moods may well have been a reason for indecision at the revolution. On one occasion the archbishop wrote that the king had flown into a violent rage against him which he had only been able to appease by pretending falsely that he had to make an urgent visitation of his cathedral. When he protested against Melton’s appointment as treasurer in 1325 on grounds that it would revive the claims that the archbishop of York’s cross should be carried erect before him in the southern province, the only notice Edward took was to threaten him with forfeiture of his temporalities should he dare to hinder Melton’s work. Later in 1326 the king angrily forbade Reynolds to enter his own diocese of Canterbury lest he should meet and talk with the papal legates who had arrived there on a diplomatic mission. Nor would he allow the archbishop to hold any convocations of Canterbury province after 1323. This all seems the more surprising because Reynolds was so obviously anxious to placate the king. He gave careful explanations and excuses for his actions when protesting against Edward’s decisions, and his letters to Prior Eastry show plainly that his most urgent wish in these last years was for peace between the king and queen, chiefly in order to save the country from invasion, civil war, and mob

1 See above, pp. 335–7. Edward’s anger against them seems steadily to have increased as the years went by. Apparently he would not have them summoned to certain parliaments (their names are omitted from the lists of summons to some parliaments of 1324 and ’25, Parl. Write, ii, i, 364, 397, 400, 421, 429); and showed his special spite against Orleton by appointing a personal enemy of the bishop to be keeper of his temporalities (cf. Reg. Orleton, pp. xx, xxviii; C.P.R. 1321–4, p. 452).

2 Lit. Cant. i. 174–5. 3 H.M.C. Var. Coll. i. 271. 4 Ibid. pp. 271–2. 5 Mr. W. A. Pantin has very kindly lent me a transcript from Ancient Correspondence, xlix. 92, of a letter of Reynolds dated 20 January 1326, in which the archbishop protested against Edward’s refusal to allow him to hold convocations, saying that he was canonically bound to hold a provincial council every year, and that he had no other means of obtaining redress for his clergy’s grievances. This letter is also quoted in G. O. Sayles’s review of D. B. Weske, Convocation of the Clergy, ante, liv. 491.

6 E.g. Ancient Correspondence, xlix. 92.
violence, of which he had a very real dread. In 1326, when Isabella was expected to land, the main object of both prior and archbishop was to ensure that no violent opposition should be offered to her army, and that her supporters in their turn should be warned not to disturb the peace. Throughout September and the greater part of October they were determined on a policy of mediation and appeasement, and Reynolds did not finally decide to join the queen until it was clear that Edward no longer had any chance of success. Reynolds had little strength of character, and was doubtless afraid to compromise his career and personal safety by adopting any strong line of action. But in the circumstances it is difficult to see what he could profitably have done. In any case there is no need to reproach him, as Dr. Sheppard and others have done, with lack of patriotism, and, following the curious tradition that Reynolds was Edward's tutor, with desertion of his old pupil in the last extremity. In the last year of the reign there were signs that Pope John XXII, though deploving the relations between the king and queen, was also preparing to back the queen and the French alliance, if a peaceful settlement were impossible, and his attitude may possibly have influenced Reynolds' final decision.

Other royal clerks among the bishops who, for various reasons were in disgrace with the king or found it difficult to work with him, had much less hesitation than Reynolds in joining Isabella. In this connexion it is interesting to see how for some time Isabella had apparently been using her influence, probably against Edward, but certainly in association with bishops who later supported her against him, and seems to have been trying to build up a party favourable to herself in the episcopate. She was associated with the bishops in forcing the king to come to terms with the opposition barons both in 1312–13 after Gavaston's murder, and in July and

1 See, e.g., his letter of 21 October 1326 describing his horror at Stapleton's murder and his refusal to return to London until peace was established (H.M.C. Var. Coll. i. 272–3). He conducted a long and anxious correspondence with Eastry on the measures to be taken in the event of an invasion (Lit. Cant. i. 127, 162–3, 172–4, 180–2, 194–6).


4 The first hint that Reynolds had reached a definite decision is in Prior Eastry's letter (ibid. pp. 202–3), advising Reynolds that his coming to the queen would be more pleasing to her if he set out on the journey before she invited him to go.

5 E.g. in 1325 he had been only too glad to let Eastry fabricate excuses for him to avoid going to France with Isabella (cf. ibid. pp. 137–8), thus rejecting an opportunity to play a leading part in events.

6 Ibid. p. lxxix.

7 E.g. on 12 March 1326 Prior Eastry wrote to Reynolds warning him that, if the king refused to come to terms with the papal envoys sent to negotiate peace between England and France, the pope and the king of France would together send a visitation on the land and misery would result (Lit. Cant. i. 172). A few weeks earlier John XXII had suggested that Despenser should retire from the government, since the queen said she could not return to her husband without personal danger while he remained (C.P.L. ii. 478).
August 1321 when the barons were demanding the exile of the Despensers.\(^1\) In November 1315 she joined with Archbishop Reynolds in protecting a certain nuncius of the king’s household who had criticized Edward after his defeat at Bannockburn.\(^2\) Most significant, however, was her influence on episcopal appointments. In 1317 she implored Edward on her knees to promote the provision to Durham of Louis de Beaumont, his kinsman, and probably a clerk in her household,\(^3\) and got her own way against Edward’s nominee.\(^4\) In 1319 she pushed hard without success to get her confessor John de Puteoli appointed to Rochester instead of the monk Hamo de Hethe whom Edward was supporting, so that the pope marvelled greatly that the queen should dare to write against her husband’s wishes.\(^5\) Henry de Burghersh may have been partly indebted to her for his appointment to Lincoln in 1320, for her brother, the king of France, then wrote to the pope on his behalf,\(^6\) and later interceded for him with Edward after the seizure of his temporalities in 1322.\(^7\) The provision to Norwich in 1325 of William Airmyn, the former chancery clerk, who was now finding diplomacy at the French court and at Avignon a more exciting and profitable career than routine work in a government department,\(^8\) was definitely due to her, and John XXII had a difficult task in persuading Edward to accept it.\(^9\) Another discontented bishop with whom Isabella came in contact at the French court shortly before the revolution was John Stratford. John had recently been in disgrace for obtaining the bishopric of Winchester against Edward’s wishes,\(^10\) but now, possibly owing to his outstanding diplomatic ability, was restored

\(^3\) His name is in the list of those accompanying the queen overseas in May 1313 (*Foedera*, ii, i. 212; *C.P.R.* 1307–13, pp. 580, 584).
\(^4\) Graystanes, p. 98.
\(^6\) Malmesbury, p. 251.
\(^7\) *Foedera*, ii, i. 504, 510–11.
\(^8\) For his early work in the chancery, see Tout, *Place Edw. II*, pp. 165–6, 288, 290–5. The first change in his steady official career was in May 1324 when Robert Baldock sent him to control the privy seal (cf. *Chapters*, ii, 306–8). After this experience of the opportunities for power and initiative in an office untrammelled by bureaucratic traditions, Airmyn abandoned the non-political attitude of the civil servant and became prominent as a diplomat and politician.
\(^9\) Cf. *C.P.L.* ii, 471–2, 474–9; *Foedera*, ii, i. 629, 633. Edward had intended Norwich for his chancellor, Robert Baldock, and Airmyn had been ordered to promote this at the papal court. Now Edward refused to grant Airmyn his temporalities and demanded his removal from the kingdom. Isabella had tried unsuccessfully to secure the bishopric of Carlisle for Airmyn earlier in the year (*C.P.L.* ii, 470).
to the king's favour,\(^1\) and was playing a leading part in the
negotiations with France.\(^2\)

Adam of Orleton and Henry Burghersh, the *alumpni Iezabele*,\(^3\) were, of course, among the leaders of a second court party, which
seems gradually to have come into existence from about 1324
onwards to support the claims of Isabella and her son. At this
time Adam's chief connexion with Isabella was probably through
Mortimer, but Canon Bannister seems to go too far in attributing
Orleton's share in the politics of these last years of the reign
almost entirely to his devotion to Mortimer as his patron and
feudal lord.\(^4\) The bishop's character, with its combination of
ability, subtlety, and boldness in seizing opportunities, seems to
have been more complex than this suggests; and in any case it is
difficult to see that the guiding principle of his political intrigues
was ever anything higher than his own personal advantage.\(^5\)
Moreover, Canon Bannister possibly tends to underestimate the
influence on Adam's later political attitude of the years which he
had spent in the royal service before he became a bishop.\(^6\) They
probably developed his liking for and ability in political intrigue,
but they may also have helped to give him that markedly royalist
outlook on politics, which, so long as it did not conflict with his
own interests, was apparent in his activities under Edward III.\(^7\)
Naturally, after 1321 it was impossible for him to work with
Edward II, and, like other discontented royal clerks, he seems to
have found a congenial outlet for his political experience and
energies in helping to build up the rival court group, which finally
split the king's party, and which, working with members of nearly
every other political group, was directly responsible for Edward's
downfall.

\(^1\) Cf. Blaneforde, pp. 148-9, who says Stratford was a councillor after he became
bishop of Winchester. Edward agreed to restore his temporalities on 28 June 1324
(*Foedera*, 11, i. 557).

\(^2\) See *ibid.* pp. 579, 588, 595, 597-9, 601-2, 606, 611, 614, 629-30, 632-3; *C.P.R.*
1324-7, pp. 49, 84, 87-8, 94, 129, 175-5, 183; *Reg. Hethe*, pp. 277-8; Blaneforde,
p. 152.

\(^3\) Baker (pp. 16-23), who disliked both these bishops intensely, gives a vivid account
of the way in which they helped to revive the hostility of the magnates to the king.

\(^4\) Canon Bannister has tried to explain the bishop as one of the few consistent
politicians of the reign, who throughout his career was faithful to his two loyalties

\(^5\) E.g. in the reign of Edward III Orleton was quite unscrupulous in putting his own
interests before those of Mortimer. In 1327 he deserted the new government to go
on a mission to Avignon, where he secured another bishopric in opposition to the
wishes of Mortimer and Isabella (cf. *Chapters*, iii. 16); and the fall of Mortimer in 1330
did not cause him to lose the king's favour.

\(^6\) His long diplomatic career has been worked out in detail from entries in *Foedera*
and in the calendars of Patent and Close Rolls by Canon Bannister, *loc. cit.* pp. iii-
xiv. Between 1307 and 1317 he spent much of his time as king's proctor at the papal
court, travelling back to England once or twice every year.

\(^7\) See, e.g., *Chapters*, iii. 8, 16-17, 35.
By the end of the reign important sections of ecclesiastical opinion in all parts of the country were antagonistic to the government. Many in the north had been alienated by the failure of the Despensers' policy towards the Scots, while the clergy of the southern province were alarmed at the danger from France. The part played by the queen's bishops, Orleton, Burghersh, Airmyn, Hotham, and Stratford, was decisive at the time of the invasion and deposition. After the failure of the Lambeth council of bishops to undertake any kind of mediation, Bishop Cobham, who seems to have been as dismayed and undecided as Reynolds, finally reached the same conclusion as his archbishop. He sent a long and involved letter from his manor of Hillingdon to Bishop Orleton, lamenting that the king had left London before the queen arrived there, and that so peace could not be made between them by the prelates as he had hoped; complaining of his dropsy, and, in the end, begging Orleton to make his excuses to the queen for not coming to parliament, and to offer her the use of his London houses. The attitude of the bishop whose rejection from the archbishopric of Canterbury in 1313 had been so loudly lamented by the chroniclers was therefore hardly more heroic or useful in this last crisis than that of the man whom they abused. Yet in spite of the active and decisive opposition to Edward by some bishops, and the timidity and indecision of others, there seems to have been greater support for the king in his last extremity from the episcopate than from any other politically active section of the nation. Walter Stapleton, one of the most loyal, able, independent, and unpopular of the bishops, was murdered in his cause by the London mob; and, undeterred by Stapleton's fate, two of the northern bishops, Archbishop Melton and John Ross, the new bishop of Carlisle, with Stephen Gravesend, bishop of London, and Hamo de Hethe, bishop of Rochester, made a determined stand on Edward's behalf in the assembly of January 1327, at which the deposition was proposed.

1 E.g. the Beaumonts in particular seem to have been disgusted at the government's Scottish policy. In 1323 Louis, bishop of Durham, was rebuked by Edward for his lukewarmness in defending his diocese against the Scots (Parl. Writs, ii, ii. 619; Foedera, ii, i. 506); and in the same year his brother Henry was imprisoned for contempt after Edward's Bishopsthorpe council, where he refused to counsel the king on the business of the truce with the Scots, and said he would rather be absent than present (Abbreviatio Placitorum, p. 342).


3 William de Dene, p. 366, gives a dramatic account of this council.


5 William de Dene, p. 367; cf. M. V. Clarke, 'Committee of Estates and the Deposition of Edward II', in Essays in Honour of James Tait, p. 32. Melton, Ross, and Gravesend also refused to swear the Guildhall oath to support the cause of the queen and her son and to maintain the liberties of the city of London, while Hethe protested publicly that he only did so saving his order and the contents of Magna Carta (William de Dene, p. 367).
Investigation of the bishops’ connexions with different political groups has shown that the so-called ‘parties’ of the reign hardly existed, or at least were much more varied and fluctuating than has usually been supposed. Few bishops had permanent connexions with any one group, and it is impossible to divide them into supporters of the different baronial opposition groups, of the middle party, the king’s party, or the queen’s party. The political connexions of most men in the reign are puzzling and obscure, and generally there is little evidence by which they can be disentangled. The most that can be done is to indicate in each crisis which bishops seem to have inclined to this or that group. Even so, in one and the same crisis they might have connexions with several different groups, while their actions in successive crises show that the outlook of many bishops changed with the changing political conditions.¹

On a few points, however, some modification of existing views may be suggested. First, a much higher proportion of bishops apparently supported the king than has hitherto been supposed. Bishops had a special relationship to the king as his spiritual advisers, which was emphasized in the religious ceremony of the coronation; and there was also a strong tradition that Church and king should co-operate in the maintenance of law and order.² It was in the bishops’ interests as well as in the king’s to preserve peace, and in their letters they constantly lamented the general unrest and disturbances, and ordered prayers for peace to be said throughout their dioceses.³ Even Winchelsea was unable to force a number of his suffragans to adopt his policy of opposition to Edward. Under Reynolds many former royal clerks in the episcopate did valuable administrative and political work in co-operation with the government; and in the last years of the reign, when the court party was divided, five bishops remained loyal to Edward. It therefore seems that Tout went too far in maintaining that the normal political attitude of the spiritual aristocracy was absolutely the same as that of the lay magnates.⁴ Naturally some bishops, at times a fairly large

¹ Their position is well stated in a letter of Bishop Cobham apologizing to Bishop Stapleton and the king for his sudden change of front in the matter of an appropriation on which he had previously opposed them. He wrote, ‘You need not be surprised if, in these changeful times, the decisions and counsels of men about affairs that suddenly emerge and depend upon the actions of others seem equally changeful’ (Reg. Cobham p. 187).

² See, e.g., Materials for the History of Thomas Becket (R.S.), vii. 86, 90; Radulphi de Diceto Opera (R.S.), i. 336; Roberti Grosseteste Epistolae (R.S.), p. 349. Naturally it was always maintained in court circles that bishops should be utiles regi et regno (e.g. Foedera, ii, i. 468, 517–18, 525, 556).


⁴ Cf. Chapters, ii. 190.
number, including men who had been clerical civil servants, did co-operate politically with the lay barons. The chief influence in determining their attitude, however, seems to have been not so much the general fact of their promotion to baronial status, which Tout emphasized, as the regional influence with which they came in contact through the geographical position of their bishoprics. So long as Winchelsea remained to hold the opposition together these influences were kept in check, and at times the episcopate had a definitely ecclesiastical outlook on politics. Then in the middle years of the reign the bishops were chiefly occupied in trying to keep the peace and in working with the government. But in the falling apart of the alliance of baronial groups after 1320, bishops living in those regions where the barons usually presented a united front on political issues acted more and more with them, especially when, as so often happened in this reign, the bishops had local connexions in their dioceses before their promotion to the episcopate. Some of the most interesting examples of such influence on the bishops are seen in that of the Welsh marcher lords on the bishops of Wales and the Welsh march. The attitude of the north, too, with its tradition of loyalty to the Crown, and its preoccupation with the Scottish danger, was a chief factor in shaping the political outlook of most northern bishops. There were, of course, exceptions, particularly among bishops living in the sphere of Lancastrian influence in the midlands and north midlands. The career of Walter Langton, born in Leicestershire, and holding the see of Coventry and Lichfield midway between the Lancastrian and Welsh border lands, is a striking example of how long training in the royal service and a strong feeling of loyalty to the Crown could outweigh all regional influence on a bishop's political attitude. Nevertheless, the way in which regional influences so often shaped the bishops' political actions in the last years of the reign forms a very interesting chapter in the decline of the medieval Church. It shows the increasingly secular outlook of the leaders of the English Church, which had more in common with that of the fifteenth-century magnate bishops than with the attitude of men like Winchelsea and his predecessors in the thirteenth century, who looked on politics from an ecclesiastical angle.

Is it therefore true, as the chroniclers said, that the bishops acted discreditably in this reign, in a spirit of political self-seeking, and that the constant crises and general unrest were largely due to their intrigues? It seems rather that the exceptional difficulties of the time presented the bishops with problems beyond their powers to solve. The immediate urgency of these problems made it impossible for most of them to avoid being drawn into politics; and clearly a much larger proportion of the episcopate
was politically active in this reign than in the middle and later years of Henry III's reign or under Edward I. The bishops took an important part in the formation and break up of the different political groups and in the successive crises. Their actions, however, especially in Reynolds' pontificate, were important as those of individual politicians rather than as members of a united episcopate, and nearly always there were some bishops working against each other in opposite political camps. Moreover, except in the early years of the struggle for the ordinances, the bishops did not succeed in providing the much-needed political leader to steer the country through the dangers of irresponsible party or group politics. After Winchelsea's death there were still men of integrity in the episcopate who genuinely wished to do their best for the country. But Simon of Ghent, Richard de Swinfield, John Dalderby, John Salmon, Thomas of Cobham, and Roger Mortival, though most of them were distinguished scholars and all were good bishops, had not the force of character or the political ability to deal with the situation, and, like Archbishop Reynolds, were only too often unable to make up their minds on the right course of action. At times they did valuable work, particularly in mediating between the king and opposition groups and in the period of ascendancy of the middle party. But in times of crisis, especially towards the end of the reign, leadership passed to the more unscrupulous bishops such as Orleton and Airmyn, who have therefore been regarded as the characteristic bishops of the reign. Certainly these bishops were a 'prick in Edward's eyes and a thorn in his side', but they were few in number, and not, as Higden said, promoted by Edward. In fact they mostly secured their bishoprics against his wishes. Nor were they inepti. Their importance was due rather to their outstanding ability. The tragedy of the reign was that political ability was so rarely combined with integrity. In Reynolds' pontificate only two bishops could lay claim to partial possession of both these essential qualities for useful leadership. William Melton and Walter Stapleton, however, were both more interested in administrative reform and efficient government, which they did much to promote, than in party politics. Moreover, Melton was generally preoccupied with northern affairs, while Stapleton was apparently handicapped by an unexplained personal unpopularity. In any case neither of them could have had the political authority of an archbishop of Canterbury, which Reynolds, chiefly because of his general slackness and indecision, was incapable of wielding.

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