The Scourge of the Clergy

Painter, Sidney

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The Scourge of the Clergy: Peter of Dreux, Duke of Brittany.

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This book has been written because I wanted to write it. I first met Peter of Dreux in the pages of Henry Adams' Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres, and my interest in him ripened into fascination as I read more deeply into the historical literature dealing with thirteenth-century France. But my personal relish for the details of the stormy career of this baron is hardly sufficient justification for inflicting another book on the overburdened shelves of our libraries. Fortunately, however, it is always easy to produce plausible rationalizations in support of what one wishes to do. Any reasonably competent historian who works over the material used by his predecessors should be able to make some additions to the sum of historical knowledge. I believe that I have made several definite contributions to our knowledge of the years covered by the life of Peter of Dreux, but the points which I hope I have elucidated will be of interest primarily to specialists in the history of France and Brittany during this period. The principal justification for the publication of this biography must be sought in its possible didactic value. Many people who are interested in thirteenth-century France have read vague general accounts of the development of the great feudal states, the struggles between the French kings and their vassals, the rivalry of the Capetian and Plantagenet monarchies, the quarrels between church and state, and the crusades of St. Louis. All these and many other phases of the history of the first half of the thirteenth century are concretely illustrated by the career of Peter of Dreux. Finally if my artistic competence has been equal to the task set before it, the reader will share my enthusiasm for Peter himself. Even if he had not played an important rôle in the political life of his day, his personality would have made him a worthy subject for a biography.

Several years after I started to gather material for a life of Peter of Dreux, I learned that a contemporary of mine, the French scholar Jacques Levron, was engaged on the same task.
In addition to several articles M. Levron has published a *Catalogue des actes de Pierre de Dreux, duc de Bretagne* and *Pierre Mauclerc, duc de Bretagne*. Although the latter appeared in two sections in the *Mémoires de la société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Bretagne*, it is a formal biography of over two hundred pages. In my fourth appendix I have given some illustrations of M. Levron's competence as a historian, and I believe that it is fair to say that they are typical of his work as a whole. I am glad, however, to be able to acknowledge my indebtedness to him for a number of documents which I might well have missed.

While full responsibility for the deficiencies of this biography must rest solely upon me, I must share the credit for its good qualities with my colleagues and students in the department of history of The Johns Hopkins University. I am particularly indebted to Professor Kent Roberts Greenfield for the time and effort which he devoted to reading and criticizing the manuscript. The staffs of the libraries of The Johns Hopkins, Princeton, and Yale Universities, of the Peabody Institute, and of the Library of Congress have been unfailingly helpful in supplying the books needed for my research. The officials of the Archives nationales in Paris have contributed much to the ease of my work by their prompt and courteous compliance with requests for photostats of unpublished documents. Finally I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Ernst Cloos and Miss Lucille Havens who drew and lettered the map which accompanies this volume and to Mrs. Victoria Golz who assisted me in reading the proof.