The Travels of Edward Webbe

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of the division of the exchequer may well explain the retirement of Stapeldon from office in July 1325. But the whole subject is well worth working out in detail. Even here it should be noticed that the separation did not, as I suggested earlier, involve as in 1322–3 two exchequers, working simultaneously at York and Westminster. The new 'place' of the writ, appointed for the sessions of the southern exchequer, seems clearly to have been some portion of the exchequer premises at Westminster, close to the 'place' of the usual meetings, where Norwich, without any change of quarters, was henceforth to preside over the northern department alone. But local decentralization might well have followed, and was perhaps prepared for when Archbishop Melton of York was made Stapeldon's successor at the treasury. However, Belers' death followed a few months after, in January 1326. Thereupon the whole plan of separation seems to have been dropped. This fact, as well as the enormous improvement in Belers' position, as the result of the new plan, may easily explain the Westminster chronicler's attribution of its origin to the overweening ambition of the renegade Lancastrian knight. T. F. TOUT.

The Travels of Edward Webbe

EDWARD WEBBE, born apparently in 1554, declares himself the son of Richard Webbe who (it is known) was Master Gunner of England in that year. The work in which his adventures are related bears the following title :

The
Rare and most wonderful
things which Edward Webbe
an Englishman borne, hath seene and passed
in his troublesome trauailes, in the Citties of Ieru-
-salem, Dammasko, Bethelem and Galely : and
in the Landes of Iewrie, Egipt, Grecia,[1]
Russia, and in the Land of Prester John.
Wherein is set foorth his extreame slauerie sust-
ained many yeres togither, in the Gallies and wars
of the great Turk against the Landes of Persia,
Tartaria, Spaine, and Portugall, with the
manner of his releasment, and coming
into Englande in May last.[2]

The 'Epistle to the Reader' is dated 19 May 1590.

In 1566 Edward went to Russia as page to our ambassador, Captain Anthony Jenkenson, and he was in Moscow when the city

[1] Printed 'Gtecia' in the book. [2] Arber's *English Reprints*, No. 5, 1868.

was burned by the Tatars in 1571. He escaped from the flames only to be seized by the Tatars, who carried him to Kaffa in the Crimea, where he remained a prisoner until 1576. The sole observation he makes on his sojourn among the Tatars occurs on p. 18: 'I noted especially this one thing, that their children being new born, do never open their eyes until they be 9 days and 9 nights old,' an assertion (I am told by an able physician) without any foundation in fact. Elsewhere, however, he makes two statements which refer indirectly to this period. He states that he served in the *Royal* under Don John at the taking of Tunis (p. 35). If this were so, he could not have been in Kaffa in October 1573. Again, he tells us (p. 32) how pleased he was to see an Englishman, Lord Oxford, defeat all comers at a tournament in Palermo. It is true that Edward de Vere, 17th earl of Oxford, travelled once in Italy;[3] but he was there in the year 1575, during the alleged imprisonment of Webbe at Kaffa. Webbe complains of a defective memory, as Mandeville had done before him;[4] but forgetfulness cannot explain the observation about the eyes of Tatar infants, and does little to explain the difficulties about Tunis and Palermo.

After being ransomed from the Tatars, Webbe appears to have travelled through Russia to the Baltic, whence he sailed for England, and presently he sailed from England to Alexandria via Leghorn. At Alexandria he embarked on the *Henry* to return home, and on the voyage the ship was attacked by 50 Turkish galleys, 'with which we fought for two days and two nights' (p. 19). It was only after 50 men out of a crew of 60 had been killed that they struck their colours and were carried off prisoners to Constantinople. Webbe remained a prisoner with the Turks for 6 years (twice, p. 20) or 13 years (p. 29). Webbe's account of this fight is at least grossly exaggerated, and it is inexplicable that a master gunner should make no allusion to the service of his guns. No detail is given which satisfies us that he was present, or invalidates the supposition that the account was written by one living in England who heard of the fight from a gossip or invented it.

When Webbe reaches the wars of the Turks with the Persians he fairly quits the domain of history and enters into the region of romance. He does not, indeed, visit the Dark Land through which Alexander the Great passed in his vain search for the Fountain of Life,[5] but he enters the realm of the fabulous Prester John. Some of the marvels he describes seem to be taken with variations from Mandeville; but to leave no doubt of his having

[3] Supposed by some to be the 'Italianated Courtier' of Greene's satire.

[4] *Early Travels in Palestine*, ed. by Wright, Bohn's Library, p. 129.

[5] Nizami's *Sikander Nama e Bara*, canto 61.

personally witnessed one at least of the wonders he relates, he tells us (p. 25) that there were 'three score and seventeen unicorns and elephants all alive at one time, and they were so tame that I played with them as one would play with lambs'. Here we are presented with fabulous animals in a fabulous park belonging to a fabulous ruler, and this after the author's protest in his 'Epistle to the Reader' that 'in this book there is nothing mentioned or expressed, but that which is of truth and what mine own eyes have perfectly seen'. He had good reason to anticipate that 'some foolish persons perhaps will cavil and say that these are but lies and fables'; but we must not suppose that the book 'containeth nothing else'. To do so would be to misconceive the method of the author. Like Mandeville before him and Defoe after him, he had 'the art of introducing such little details as give to fictions the appearance of personal recollections';[6] for instance, the burning of Moscow and the presence of Dr. Allen at Rome. Webbe's remarks about Palestine and Egypt bear so close a resemblance to Mandeville's that it is unnecessary to dwell upon them; and his expedition to the Eastern seas is too nebulous to deserve notice. The whole might have been written anywhere by any one conversant with books of travel.

In his Dedication to Queen Elizabeth, Webbe recalls the humble thanks he returned to Heaven for saving his queen and country from the hands of the Spaniards—when 'to my great comfort, in the midst of my thraldom in Turkey, I did hear it most truly reported by a Christian Captive'. But presently he ignores the Christian captive and declares (p. 32) that it was on his homeward journey through Italy—'which was at such time as the Spaniards came to invade England, after I had been released from my imprisonment'—that he heard of the dispatch of the Armada. 'I said I trusted God would defend my Prince better than to deliver her into the hands of her enemies; wherefore they did greatly revile me.' To Venice Webbe took his way when ransomed from the Turks; and having reached Naples, after some adventures which will be presently mentioned, he embarked for England and arrived on 1 May 1589.

We now reach the culminating point of Webbe's career. In November 1589 he went to France, 'where I had good entertainment at the hands of the Renowned King . . . who received me into his pay and appointed me Chief Master Gunner in the field' (p. 34). An Englishman might have easily joined the force of 4,000 men which Lord Willoughby d'Eresby led into France to help Henry IV on 2 October of this year; and an incident related by Webbe (p. 35) suggests that he was acquainted with the

[6] *Cambridge Hist. of English Literature*, ii. 82.

movements of this force, which for his own reasons he does not mention:

> Shortly after my first arrival in France, I was hated by some lewde gunners who envying that I should have the Title to be Master Gunner in France, practised against me, and gave me poyson in drink that night; which thing when the King understood, he gave order to the Governor of Deepe that his Phisition should presently see unto me.

Now Lord Willoughby's men disembarked at Dieppe, 'and after returning to Dieppe to meet them, Henry marched on Paris'.[7] But as Elizabeth would not, and Henry could not feed, clothe, and pay these unhappy men, Lord Willoughby reported to the privy council that 'more men died of hunger and cold than in battle', and finally brought back the remnant of his force to England on 14 January 1590, exactly two months before the battle of Ivry.

The king left Dieppe early in October, and was busily engaged elsewhere with the enemy throughout the whole of November. He left Paris on November 3, and after various operations at Châteaudun and Vendôme, reached Tours on November 21, afterwards continuing his winter campaign 'avec une infatigable activité'.[8] It was during this strenuous month, Webbe asks us to believe, that the king heard of the arrival of an itinerant English gunner at Dieppe, gave him 'good entertainment', appointed him chief master gunner, and ordered the governor's doctor to attend him when nearly poisoned. Strong corroboration would be required to support this extraordinary story, and we possess none whatever.

Ivry was one of the earliest battles in which the artillery played a notable part; yet the chief master gunner, who devotes so much space to his sufferings, the rising of the Nile, and tournaments, and who can even find room for indecent sneers at the monks of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, confines himself to two short remarks about the battle. The first of them is, I believe, untrue, and the second contains a blunder no master gunner could have made. He first says they were 'constrained to make bulwarks of the dead bodies' of men and horses, a proceeding ignored by the historians I have consulted. Such a bulwark would have been out of the question in so fierce and rapid a battle as Ivry. Even if possible, a bulwark high enough to stop the enemy would have completely silenced the guns, and one some two feet high, which the guns could have cleared, might have delayed, but would not have stopped the enemy. Secondly, he says: 'I gave three charges upon the enemy, and they instead thereof

[7] *Cambridge Modern History*, iii. 48.
[8] Martin, *Hist. de France*, x. 190.

gave us fifteen.' Palma Cayet [9] and de Thou [10] agree that Henry's guns fired nine (not three) shots before Mayenne's guns replied ; and so far were the guns of the League from firing more rapidly than those of the royalists, that Sully (who was present) declares that Henry's guns fired four shots to one.[11] So much for what Webbe has said ; but what he has left unsaid is quite as important in judging of the character of this book. By an impetuous charge soon after the battle began, the Walloons drove back the king's light horse, and wheeling round took his artillery in rear, overturned the guns, and succeeded in keeping possession of them for a short time.[12] Not a hint does Webbe give us of this ; and the inevitable conclusion is, either that he did not consider this grave occurrence deserving of notice, or that he was not in the field and knew nothing about it.

The extraordinary statement that Henry IV appointed a wandering Englishman as chief master gunner over the heads of his own gunners, at a moment when he needed the support of every Frenchman so urgently, would require very strong corroboration, and I am not aware of any whatever. Appointments in the French Artillery were much sought after at this period,[13] and no soldiers are more sensitive about supersession than the French. If, therefore, Webbe had been appointed chief master gunner, there would have been an outburst of protests to a certainty, some traces of which would have come down to us in contemporary documents. But the presence of an Englishman among the French gunners, so far as I can discover, was unknown to the French officers who served at Ivry, or wrote about the battle afterwards. The only allusion to Webbe in French that I have succeeded in finding is in the *Discours de la Bataille de Garennes* (*Ivry*), by Charles, duc de Mayenne, reprinted in the *Bibliothèque des Bibliophiles*, 1875, with an excellent introduction by a modern editor, who appears to have been

[9] '[Le Roi] envoya commandement au Sieur de la Guiche . . . de faire tirer: ce qu'il fit incontenant et avec grande promptitude, dont ceux de l'Union receurent beaucoup de dommage. Il avait fait tirer neuf canonnades avant que ses ennemis eussent commencé': *Chronologie Novenaire*, 1608, i. 330.

[10] 'Rex . . . Guichio, ut tormentis rem gereret, imperat; quod opportune et tanta celeritate administratum est, ut novies displosio repetita sit, antequam tormenta hostilia ignem concepissent': *Historia sui Temporis*, 1620, v. 57. The nine discharges must mean 9 shots, not 9 *rounds*, i. e. 9 shots from each gun ; for 9 rounds from the slow and feeble guns of the period would have occupied an hour. 'One may well make 10 shots an hour, if the peeces be well fortified and strong ; but if they be but ordinary peeces, then 8 is enough': *The Gunner's Glasse*, by William Eldred, Master Gunner of Dover Castle, 1646, p. 165.

[11] Sully's *Memoirs*, i. 225. Henry had six, and Mayenne only four guns ; therefore the statement quoted above is antecedently probable, whether Sully himself wrote the *Memoirs* or not.

[12] Lavisse, *Hist. de France*, vii. 314 ; Sismondi, *Hist. des Français*, xvi. 55.

[13] Favé, *Hist. et Tactique des Trois Armes*, p. 59.

thoroughly acquainted with the literature of Ivry, manuscript as well as printed. In a note to this introduction, the editor says: 's'il faut croire un rare et singulier petit écrit qui nous inspire peu de confiance, le maître canonnier aurait été un Anglais nommé Edward Webbe.' The rare and odd little book was Arber's reprint of the *Travels*, from which the French first learned in 1869 of Webbe's existence.

In reading books of the early gunners—such as Bourne's *Art of Shooting in Great Ordnance* (1587), Smith's *Art of Gunnery* (black letter, 1600), Eldred's *Gunner's Glasse* (1646)—one quickly observes certain characteristics common to all of them. The most striking peculiarity is their inordinate use of the technical phrases of their art. It is very difficult, then, to believe that a gunner wrote these *Travels*, in which technical words are conspicuous by their absence. We look in vain for such words as *gun*, *piece*, *cartridge*, *sponge*, *ladel*, *wad*, *linstock*, *random*, &c. The author uses *charge* (once), *shooting* (once), *shot* (twice), and *gunner's art*; but such words were as well known and as much used by civilians as by gunners. The word *gunnership*, which he uses once (p. 27), I have never met with in gunners' books, and I believe it was unknown in the artillery world. No master gunner could have refrained from drawing a comparison between the Turkish, Spanish, and French gunners with whom Webbe asserts he served; no master gunner could have been present at, say, the fight of the *Henry* or the battle of Ivry without enlarging upon his guns, carriages, ammunition, and equipment.

The credit of the author of these *Travels*, whoever he may have been, is so much shaken by the contradictions, reservations, and downright untruths which have been pointed out, as to deprive the book of all historical value. Since he has presented his adventures in a way that renders verification impossible, there is no more reason to believe that he served under Don John at Tunis or met Dr. Allen at Rome than that he gambolled with unicorns in Central Asia or became chief master gunner of the French army. There is not a sentence in the book that might not have been written, with the help of Mandeville and similar books, by a man who spent his whole life in London.

The book proved to be a success; the first edition, a reprint of this, and a second enlarged and corrected edition all appeared in 1590. Its success was due beyond doubt to the advantage taken by its author of the anti-Moslem and anti-Catholic feeling which was at fever heat during the period 1588–90. Islam he utterly rejected, though the Turks, he tells us,

> by all means would persuade me . . . to believe in their God, Mahomed: which if I had done I might have had wonderful preferment of the Turk, and lived in as great felicity as any Lord in that country: but I utterly

denied their request, though by them grievously beaten naked . . . and reviled in most detestable sort (p. 29).

The English Catholics he represents as having treated him with contempt. At Padua he was accused of heresy before the bishop by an English friar ; and on the charge being disproved he was set at liberty, but 'constrained to give 15 crowns toward the finishing of Our Lady's shrine at Padua' (p. 30). Here we have a palpable allusion to the exactions of the Dominican monk, Johann Tetzel, in 1517, 'towards the finishing of' Saint Peter's shrine at Rome, which called forth Luther's famous 'Ninety-Five Theses', the prelude to the Reformation. Men of fifty years of age in Webbe's time could remember Peter's pence, which were only abolished in 1534. At Rome he was 'nineteen days in trouble with the Pope and the English Cardinal Doctor Allen, a notable Arch-papist', who on learning that he had been long a prisoner in Turkey, dismissed him with a gift of twenty-five crowns. He then fell into the clutches of the English College (at Rome, founded by Allen), and here he was despitefully used : 'I was put into the holy house 3 days, with a fool's coat on my back, half blew, half yellow, and a cockscomb with 3 bells on my head.' Unlike Aeneas with his *infandum renovare dolorem*, Webbe seems to revel in recounting his humiliations. Released by order of the pope—the busiest of popes, Sixtus V—he proceeded to Naples, although he knew it was in the hands of the Spaniards, and it is not surprising to learn that he was promptly arrested as a spy. The means taken by the Spaniards to induce him to confess were obviously intended by Webbe to suggest the methods of the Inquisition. One example will suffice : 'I was hoisted up backwards with my hands bound behind me, which strook all the joints of my arms out of joint' (p. 31). But carried away by the excitement of describing his sufferings, he quickly forgets this mishap ; for he tells us that some time afterwards, by the written order of Philip II, he was enlisted as a gunner, on thirty-five crowns pay a month, disjointed arms and all.

The people of 1590 were so charmed by the courage and constancy of the devout master gunner under the sufferings inflicted on him by Moslems and Catholics, that they accepted without question a relation of exploits as fictitious as those of Captain Carleton.[14]

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[14] See the article by Colonel the Hon. H. Parnell in this Review for January 1891.