

**THE  
CHRONICLES  
OF  
ENGUERRAND DE  
MONSTRELET  
Vol. 1**

*TO  
HIS GRACE  
JOHN DUKE OF BEDFORD,  
&c. &c. &c.*

MY LORD,

I am happy in this opportunity of dedicating the CHRONICLES OF MONSTRELET to your grace, to show my high respect for your many virtues, public and private, and the value I set on the honour of your grace's friendship.

One of MONSTRELET'S principal characters was JOHN DUKE OF BEDFORD, regent of France; and your grace has fully displayed your abilities, as regent, to be at least equal to those of your namesake, in the milder and more valuable virtues. Those of a hero may dazzle in this life; but the others are, I trust, recorded in a better place; and your late wise, although, unfortunately, short government of Ireland will be long and thankfully remembered by a gallant and warm-hearted people.

I have the honour to remain,  
Your grace's much obliged,  
Humble servant and friend,  
*Thomas Johnes.*

*CASTLE-HILL,  
March 13, 1808.*

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## *THE LIFE OF MONSTRELET.*

Materials for the biography of Monstrelet are still more scanty than for that of Froissart. The most satisfactory account, both of his life and of the continuators of his history, is contained in the *Memoires de l'Académie de Belles Lettres*, vol. XLIII. p. 535. by M. Dacier.

‘We are ignorant of the birthplace of Enguerrand de Monstrelet, and of the period when he was born, as well as of the names of his parents. All we know is, that he sprang from a noble family,—which he takes care to tell us himself, in his introduction to the first volume of the chronicles; and his testimony is confirmed by a variety of original deeds, in which his name is always accompanied with the distinction of ‘noble man,’ or ‘esquire.’<sup>u</sup>’

‘According to the historian of the Cambresis, Monstrelet was descended from a noble family settled in Ponthieu from the beginning of the twelfth century, where one of his ancestors, named Enguerrand, possessed the estate of Monstrelet in the year 1125,—but Carpentier does not name his authority for this. A contemporary historian (Matthieu de Couci, of whom I shall have occasion to speak in the course of this essay,) who lived at Peronne, and who seems to have been personally acquainted with Monstrelet, positively asserts that this historian was a native of the county of the Boulonnois, without precisely mentioning the place of his birth. This authority ought to weigh much: besides, Ponthieu and the Boulonnois are so near to each other that a mistake on this point might easily have happened. It results, from what these two writers say, that we may fix his birthplace in Picardy.

‘M. l’abbé Carlier, however, in his history of the duchy of Valois, claims this honour for his province, wherein he has discovered an ancient family of the same name,—a branch of which, he pretends, settled in the Cambresis, and he believes that from this branch sprung Enguerrand de Monstrelet. This opinion is advanced without proof, and the work of Monstrelet itself is sufficient to destroy it. He shows so great an affection for Picardy, in divers parts of his chronicle, that we cannot doubt of his being strongly attached to it: he is better acquainted with it than with any other parts of the realm: he enters into the fullest details concerning it: he frequently gives the names of such picard gentlemen, whether knights or esquires, as had been engaged in any battle, which he omits to do in regard to the nobility of other countries,—in the latter case, naming only the chief commanders. It is almost always from the bailiff of Amiens that he reports the royal edicts, letters missive, and ordinances, &c. which abound in the two first volumes. In short, he speaks of the Picards with so much interest, and relates their gallant actions with such pleasure, that it clearly appears that he treats them like countrymen.

‘Monstrelet was a nobleman then, and a nobleman of Picardy; but we have good reason to suspect that his birth was not spotless. John le Robert, abbot of St Aubert in Cambray from the year 1432 to that of 1469, and author of an exact journal of every thing that passed during his time in the town of Cambray and its environs, under the title of ‘Memoriaux,’<sup>[2]</sup> says plainly, ‘*qu’il fut né de bas,*’—which term, according to the glossary of du Cange, and in the opinion of learned genealogists, constantly means a natural son; for at this period, bastards were acknowledged according to the rank of their fathers. Monstrelet, therefore, was not the less noble; and the same John le Robert qualifies him, two lines higher, with

the titles of 'noble man' and 'esquire,' to which he adds an eulogium, which I shall hereafter mention,—because, at the same time that it does honour to Monstrelet, it confirms the opinion I had formed of his character when attentively reading his work.

'My researches to discover the precise year of his birth have been fruitless. I believe, however, it may be safely placed prior to the close of the fourteenth century; for, besides speaking of events at the beginning of the fifteenth as having happened in his time, he states positively, in his introduction, that he had been told of the early events in his book (namely, from the year 1400,) by persons worthy of credit, who had been eye-witnesses of them. To this proof, or to this deduction, I shall add, that under the year 1415, he says, that he heard (*at the time*) of the anger of the count de Charolois, afterwards Philippe le bon duke of Burgundy, because his governors would not permit him to take part in the battle of Azincourt. I shall also add, that under the year 1420, he speaks of the homage which John duke of Burgundy paid the king of the Romans for the counties of Burgundy and of Alost. It cannot be supposed that he would have inquired into such particulars, or that any one would have taken the trouble to inform him of them if he had not been of a certain age, such as twenty or twenty-five years old, which would fix the date of his birth about 1390 or 1395.

'No particulars of his early years are known, except that he evinced, when young, a love for application, and a dislike to indolence. The quotations from Sallust, Livy, Vegetius, and other ancient authors, that occur in his chronicles, show that he must have made some progress in latin literature. Whether his love for study was superior to his desire of military glory, or whether a weakly constitution or some other reason, prevented him from following the profession of arms, I do not find that he yielded to the reigning passion of his

age, when the names of gentleman and of soldier were almost synonymous.

‘The wish to avoid indolence by collecting the events of his time, which he testifies in the introduction to his chronicles, proves, I think, that he was but a tranquil spectator of them. Had he been an Armagnac or a Burgundian, he would not have had occasion to seek for solitary occupations; but what proves more strongly that Monstrelet was not of either faction is the care he takes to inform his readers of the rank, quality, and often of the names of the persons from whose report he writes, without ever boasting of his own testimony. In his whole work, he speaks but once from his own knowledge, when he relates the manner in which the Pucelle d’Orléans was made prisoner before Compiégne; but he does not say, that he was present at the skirmish when this unfortunate heroine was taken: he gives us to understand the contrary, and that he was only present at the conversation of the prisoner with the duke of Burgundy,—for he had accompanied Philip on this expedition, perhaps in quality of historian. And why may not we presume that he may have done so on other occasions, to be nearer at hand to collect the real state of facts which he intended to relate?

‘However this may be, it is certain that he was resident in Cambray, when he composed his history, and passed there the remainder of his life. He was indeed fixed there, as I shall hereafter state, by different important employments, each of which required the residence of him who enjoyed them. From his living in Cambray, La Croix du Maine has concluded, without further examination, that he was born there, and this mistake has been copied by other writers.

‘Monstrelet was married to Jeanne de Valbuon, or Valhuon, and had several children by her, although only two of them were known,—a daughter called Bona, married to Martin de Beulaincourt, a gentleman of that country, surnamed the Bold, and a son of the name of Pierre. It is probable, that Bona was married, or of age, prior to the year 1438,—for in the register of the officiality of Cambray, towards the end of that year, is an entry, that Enguerrand de Monstrelet was appointed guardian to his young son Pierre, without any mention of his daughter Bona. It follows, therefore, that Monstrelet was a widower at that period.

‘In the year 1436, Monstrelet was nominated to the office of Lieutenant du Gavènier of the Cambresis, conjointly with Le Bon de Saveuses, master of the horse to the duke of Burgundy, as appears from the letters patent to this effect, addressed by the duke to his nephew the count d’Estampes, of the date of the 13th May in this year, and which are preserved in the chartulary of the church of Cambray.

‘It is even supposed that Monstrelet had for some time enjoyed this office,—for it is therein declared, that he shall continue in the receipt of the Gavène, as he has heretofore done, until this present time. ‘Gave,’ or ‘Gavène,’ (I speak from the papers I have just quoted,) signifies in Flemish, a gift, or a present. It was an annual due payable to the duke of Burgundy, by the subjects of the churches in the Cambresis, for his protection of them as earl of Flanders. From the name of the tribute was formed that of Gavènier, which was often given to the duke of Burgundy, and the nobleman he appointed his deputy was styled Lieutenant du Gavènier. I have said ‘the nobleman whom he appointed,’ because in the list of those lieutenants, which the historian of Cambray has published, there is not one who has not shown sufficient proofs of

nobility. Such was, therefore, the employment with which Monstrelet was invested; and shortly after, another office was added to it, that of Bailiff to the chapter of Cambray, for which he took the oaths on the 20th of June, 1436, and entered that day on its duties. He kept this place until the beginning of January, in the year 1440, when another was appointed.

‘I have mentioned Pierre de Monstrelet, his son; and it is probable that he is the person who was made a knight of St John of Jerusalem in the month of July, in 1444, although the acts of the chapter of Cambray do not confirm this opinion, nor specify the Christian name of the new knight by that of Pierre. It is only declared in the register, that the canons, as an especial favour, on the 6th of July, permitted Enguerrand de Monstrelet, esquire, to have his son invested with the order of St John of Jerusalem, on Sunday the 19th of the same month, in the choir of their church.

‘The respect and consideration which he had now acquired, gained him the dignity of governor of Cambray, for which he took the usual oath on the 9th of November; and on the 12th of March, in the following year, he was nominated bailiff of Wallaincourt. He retained both of these places until his death, which happened about the middle of July, in the year 1453. This date cannot be disputed: it was discovered in the 17th century by John le Carpentier, who has inserted it in his history of the Cambresis. But in consequence of little attention being paid to this work, or because the common opinion has been blindly followed, that Monstrelet had continued his history to the death of the duke of Burgundy in 1467, this date was not considered as true until the publication of an extract from the register of the Cordeliers in Cambray, where he was buried.<sup>[3]</sup> Although this extract fully establishes the year and month when Monstrelet died, I shall insert here what relates to it from the

‘Memoriaux’ of John le Robert, before mentioned, because they contain some circumstances that are not to be found in the register of the Cordeliers. When several years of his history are to be retrenched from an historian of such credit, authorities for so doing cannot be too much multiplied. This is the text of the abbot of St Aubert, and I have put in italics the words that are not in the register:

“The 20th day of July, in the year 1453, that honourable and noble man Enguerrand de Monstrelet, esquire, governor of Cambray, and bailiff of Wallaincourt, departed this life, and was buried at the Cordeliers of Cambray, according to his desire. He was carried thither on a bier covered with a mat, clothed in the frock of a cordelier friar, his face uncovered: six flambeaux and three chirons, each weighing three quarters of a pound, were around the bier, whereon was *a sheet thrown over* the cordelier frock. *Il fut nez de bas*, and was a very honourable and *peaceable* man. He chronicled the wars which took place in his time in France, Artois, Picardy, England, Flanders, and those of the Gantois against their lord duke Philip. He died fifteen or sixteen days before peace was concluded, which took place toward the end of July, in the year 1453.”

‘I shall observe, by the way, that the person who drew up this register assigns two different dates for the death of Monstrelet, and in this he has been followed by John le Robert. Both of them say, that Monstrelet died on the 20th of July,—and, a few lines farther, add, that he died about sixteen days before peace was concluded between duke Philip and Ghent, which was signed about the end of the month: it was, in fact, concluded on the 31st: now, from twenty

to thirty-one, we can only reckon eleven days,—and I therefore think, that one of these dates must mean the day of his death, and the other that of his funeral,—namely, that Monstrelet died on the 15th and was buried on the 20th. The precise date of his death is, however, of little importance: it is enough for us to be assured, that it took place in the month of July, in 1453, and consequently that the thirteen last years of his history, printed under his name, cannot have been written by him. I shall examine this first continuation of his history, and endeavour to ascertain the time when Monstrelet ceased to write,—and likewise attempt to discover whether, during the years immediately preceding his death, some things have not been inserted that do not belong to him.

‘Before I enter upon this discussion of his work, I shall conclude what I have to say of him personally, according to what the writer of the register of the Cordeliers and the abbot of St Aubert testify of him. He was, says each of them, ‘a very honourable and peaceable man;’ expressions that appear simple at first sight, but which contain a real eulogium, if we consider the troublesome times in which Monstrelet lived, the places he held, the interest he must have had sometimes to betray the truth in favour of one of the factions which then divided France, and caused the revolutions the history of which he has published during the life of the principal actors. I have had more than one occasion to ascertain that the two above-mentioned writers, in thus painting his character, have not flattered him.

‘The Chronicles of Monstrelet commence on Easter-day,<sup>[a]</sup> in the year 1400, when those of Froissart end, and extend to the death of the duke of Burgundy in the year 1467. I have before stated, that the thirteen last years of his chronicle were written by an unknown author,—and this matter I shall discuss at the end of this essay. In

the printed as well as in the manuscript copies, the chronicle is divided into three volumes, and each volume into chapters. The first of these divisions is evidently by the author: his prologues at the head of the first and second volumes, in which he marks the extent of each conformable to the number of years therein contained, leave no room to doubt of it.

‘His work is called Chronicles; but we must not, however, consider this title in the sense commonly attached to it, which merely conveys the idea of simple annals. The chronicles of Monstrelet are real history, wherein, notwithstanding its imperfections and omissions, are found all the characteristics of historical writing. He traces events to their source, develops the causes, and traces them with the minutest details; and what renders these chronicles infinitely precious is, his never-failing attention to report all edicts, declarations, summonses, letters, negotiations, treaties, &c. as justificatory proofs of the truth of the facts he relates.

‘After the example of Froissart, he does not confine himself to events that passed in France: he embraces, with almost equal detail, the most remarkable circumstances which happened during his time in Flanders, England, Scotland and Ireland. He relates, but more succinctly, whatsoever he had been informed of as having passed in Germany, Italy, Hungary, Poland: in short, in the different european states. Some events, particularly the war of the Saracens against the king of Cyprus, are treated at greater length than could have been expected in a general history.

‘Although it appears that the principal object of Monstrelet in writing this history was to preserve the memory of those wars which in his time, desolated France and the adjoining countries, to bring into public notice such personages as distinguished

themselves by actions of valour in battles, assaults, skirmishes, duels and tournaments,—and to show to posterity that his age had produced as many heroes as any of the preceding ones. He does not fail to give an account of such great political or ecclesiastical events as took place during the period of which he seemed only inclined to write the military history. He relates many important details respecting the councils of Pisa, Constance, and of Basil, of which the authors who have written the history of these councils ought to have availed themselves, to compare them with the other materials of which they made use.

‘There is no historian who does not seek to gain the confidence of his readers, by first explaining in a preface all that he has done to acquire the fullest information respecting the events he is about to relate. All protest that they have not omitted any possible means to ascertain the truth of facts, and that they have spared neither time nor trouble to collect the minutest details concerning them. Without doubt, great deductions must be made from such protestations: those of Monstrelet, however, are accompanied with circumstances which convince us that a dependance may be placed on them. Would he have dared to tell his contemporaries, who could instantly have detected a falsehood had he imposed on them, that he had been careful to consult on military affairs those who, from their employments, must have been eye-witnesses of the actions that he describes? that on other matters he had consulted such as, from their situations, must have been among the principal actors, and the great lords of both parties, whom he had often to address, to engage in conversation on these events, at divers times, to confront them, as it were, with themselves? On objects of less importance, such as feasts, justs, tournaments, he had made his inquiries from heralds, poursuivants, and kings at arms, who, from

their office, must have been appointed judges of the lists, or assistants, at such entertainments and pastimes. For greater security, it was always more than a year after any event had happened, before he began to arrange his materials and insert them in his chronicle. He waited until time should have destroyed what may have been exaggerated in the accounts of such events, or should have confirmed their truth.

‘An infinite number of traits throughout his work proves the fidelity of his narration. He marks the difference between facts of which he is perfectly sure and those of which he is doubtful: if he cannot produce his proof, he says so, and does not advance more. When he thinks that he has omitted some details which he ought to have known, he frankly owns that he has forgotten them. For instance, when speaking of the conversation between the duke of Burgundy and the Pucelle d’Orléans, at which he was present, he recollects that some circumstances have escaped his memory, and avows that he does not remember them.

‘When after having related any event, he gains further knowledge concerning it, he immediately informs his readers of it, and either adds to or retrenches from his former narration, conformably to the last information he had received. Froissart acted in a similar manner; and Montaigne praises him for it. ‘The good Froissart,’ says he, ‘proceeds in his undertaking with such frank simplicity that having committed a mistake he is no way afraid of owning it, and of correcting it at the moment he is sensible of it.’<sup>[5]</sup> We ought certainly to feel ourselves obliged to these two writers for their attention in returning back to correct any mistakes; but we should have been more thankful to them if they had been pleased to add their corrections to the articles which had been mistated, instead of scattering their amendments at hazard, as it were, and leaving the

readers to connect and compare them with the original article as well as they can.

‘This is not the only defect common to both these historians. The greater part of the chronological mistakes, which have been so ably corrected by M. de Sainte Palaye in Froissart, are to be found in Monstrelet; and what deserves particularly to be noticed, to avoid falling into errors, is, that each of them, when passing from the history of one country to another, introduces events of an earlier date, without ever mentioning it, and intermix them in the same chapter, as if they had taken place in the same period,—but Monstrelet has the advantage of Froissart in the correctness of counting the years, which he invariably begins on Easter-day and closes them on Easter-eve.

‘To chronological mistakes must be added the frequent disfiguring of proper names,—more especially foreign ones, which are often so mangled that it is impossible to decipher them. M. du Cange has corrected from one thousand to eleven hundred on the margin of his copy of the edition of 1572, which is now in the imperial library at Paris, and would be of great assistance, should another edition of Monstrelet be called for.<sup>[6]</sup> Names of places are not more clearly written, excepting those in Flanders and Picardy, with which, of course, he was well acquainted. We know not whether it be through affectation or ignorance that he calls many towns by their latin names, frenchifying the termination: for instance, Aix-la-Chapelle, Aquisgranie; Oxford, Oxonie,—and several others in the like manner.

‘These defects are far from being repaid, as they are in Froissart, by the agreeableness of the narration: that of Monstrelet is heavy, monotonous, weak and diffuse. Sometimes a whole page is barely

sufficient for him to relate what would have been better told in six lines; and it is commonly on the least important facts that he labours the most.

‘The second chapter of the first volume, consisting of thirteen pages, contains only a challenge from a spanish esquire, accepted by an esquire of England, which, after four years of letters and messages, ends in nothing. The ridiculousness of so pompous a narration had struck Rabelais, who says, at page 158 of his third volume,—‘In reading this tedious detail, (which he calls a little before *le tant long, curieux et fâcheux conte*) we should imagine that it was the beginning, or occasion, of some severe war, or of a great revolution of kingdoms; but at the end of the tale we laugh at the stupid champion, the Englishman, and Enguerrand their scribe, *plus baveux qu’un pot à moutarde.*’<sup>□</sup>

‘Monstrelet employs many pages to report the challenges sent by the duke of Orleans, brother to king Charles VI., to Henry IV. king of England,—challenges which are equally ridiculous with the former, and which had a similar termination. When he meets with any event that particularly regards Flanders or Picardy, he does not omit the smallest circumstance: the most minute and most useless seem to him worth preserving,—and this same man, so prolix when it were to be wished he was concise, omits, for the sake of brevity, as he says, the most interesting details. This excuse he repeats more than once, for neglecting to enlarge on facts far more interesting than the quarrels of the Flemings and Picards. When speaking of those towns in Champagne and Brie which surrendered to Charles VII. immediately after his coronation, he says, ‘As for these surrenders, I omit the particular detail of each for the sake of brevity.’ In another place, he says, ‘Of these reparations, for brevity sake, I shall not make mention.’ These

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