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SSUNS – Scottish War of Independence

Richard Swinefield – Bishop of Hereford

“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft” (Samuel 15:23)

Richard Swinefield was likely named after the town of Swinfield, in the county of Kent, where it is commonly considered his place of birth¹. Richard Swinefield found early success in the ecclesiastical offices; he gained popularity as a preacher, given his persuasive manner of speech². Swinefield graduated Doctor of Divinity, likely from Oxford, and 1265 he entered service under St. Thomas de Cantilupe, the recently appointed Chancellor of England³. Swinefield worked under the Chancellor for numerous years, and up until the death of Cantilupe, was considered his closest confidant. Having been a member of the House of Hereford for such a long duration, and as a result of working under Cantilupe, it was not a surprise when the canons of Hereford proclaimed Swinefield the next Bishop of Hereford on December 1, 1282⁴. Bishop Swinefield, a man who cared little for politics, had spent much of his clerical leadership working to commemorate his predecessor; yet, Bishop Swinefield’s diocese was not without its troubles, and he was known involve himself in such concerns in a vigilant manner⁵. As of 1282, Bishop Swinefield is continuing to expand the presence of the Church of England, and is prepared to serve on his majesty King Edward I’s council.

In regards to the issue of choosing an heir to the Scottish throne, Bishop Swinefield agrees that the interests of England must be satisfied. Alexander III posed a sincere threat to the peace between Christians of

¹ Thomas Fredrick Tout, *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885 - 1990* (London: Smith, Elder & Co.), 232

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Tout, 233.

⁵ Tout, 234.

both English and Scottish residence, and his timely death has presented his majesty King Edward I with an ideal opportunity to influence the selection of the next Scottish monarch. While geopolitical conquest is no doubt a matter of great concern for England as a whole, Bishop Swinefield, a man who cares little for such far flung affairs, urges the council of King Edward I to consider the religious implications of such actions. As a result of the Great Schism, and the subsequent divide of the Catholic Church, it is evident that the Scottish Church has significantly more influence in papal decisions⁶. Therefore, Bishop Swinefield stresses that the council considers the religious impact of candidates for the Scottish throne, as a misguided decision could potentially threaten the foothold of the English Church in Scotland.

On the concern of maintaining English influence upon its northerly neighbour, Bishop Swinefield cautions the council of King Edward I to proceed with pragmatism against any threat of Scottish rebellion. The influence that England possess in Scottish territory is of paramount importance, a significance emphasized by the tension that resulted from Alexander III's prior rule; Bishop Swinefield acknowledges this and simply argues that before any military enforcement against the Scots comes to fruition, it is essential that England obtains blessing from the Holy See. While influence in Scottish affairs is no doubt synonymous with a prosperous England, Bishop Swinefield stresses that relations with the papacy is of greater importance. Thankfully, his majesty King Edward I has received blessings on all prior military ventures⁷, and there is no indication that this trend will change. Therefore, while Bishop Swinefield is aware of the utility of military action as a means to maintain English influence, he asserts that papal support must be a prerequisite to legitimize the aforementioned action.

On the subject of strengthening England against both domestic and international threats, Bishop Swinefield does not possess substantial input; the Bishop has never been one to concern himself with such political discourse. Bishop Swinefield is aware of the growing tensions with the Kingdom of France, and that England will have to be mindful of threats arising from the egregious Argonese Crusade. In addition, the

⁶ Wormald, J, *Court, Kirk, and Community: Scotland, 1470-1625* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 76.

⁷ "Part III: THE CHURCH AND PIETY." *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages* (Rigby: S. H Blackwell Publishing, 2003), Chap. 18.

Bishop has been informed that annexation of Wales has been an exceptionally painless venture as of late, and in contrast, that the occupation of Ireland has proved to be more difficult than expected. The Bishop suggests that a group of religious dignitaries from the England be stationed in Ireland as to encourage peaceful values among the rebellious Irish, while simultaneously expanding the influence of English the English Church. In terms of strengthening the military forces of England, Bishop Swinefield is not one to concern himself with such logistics, however, he would consider the use of clerical influence as a means to raise funds, if a defensive force against the Scots, Irish, French, or whomever presents a threat to English sovereignty, if required.

While it has been acknowledged that Bishop Swinefield of Hereford is not a man of politics, this fact does not negate his willingness to strive for a prosperous England while participating in discourse on King Edward I's council. When it comes to the concern of threats such as the Scottish, the Bishop is not naïve; the danger of a Scottish rebellion is one that must be quelled immediately, as the negative outcome would hurt England and the English Church in a most detrimental fashion. God save the King.