

‘Born between two women...’

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I wish to begin by saying how honoured I feel to be giving this lecture dedicated to the memory of Professor C. A. Mayer, known to his family and friends as Klaus. It is perhaps fitting that a historian should be doing so, as Klaus believed passionately in the unity of learning. All too often, literature and history, are allowed to go their separate ways or to run along parallel lines without meeting. No one who is familiar with Klaus's many publications, notably *La religion de Marot*, could accuse him of ignoring the historical evidence. Never would he accept a statement however persuasive that was not backed up by a contemporary source, particularly an archival one. Thus, he indignantly rejected the idea, so often repeated by historians, that Clément Marot was present at the battle of Pavia in 1525. For Klaus this became a kind of litmus test of a historian's worth. I am glad that I did not commit the solecism in my biography of Francis I. If I had, I might not be here to-night! Klaus has also been extremely cautious in his approach to Francis I's poetry. Much of it, as his disciple, June Kane, has shown in her admirable thesis on the subject can be ascribed to others.

The fact that C. A. Mayer's name will always be primarily linked to that of Clément Marot should not be allowed to obscure the valuable work that he and his wife, Dana, have done in respect of Florimond Robertet, whose long career as a royal secretary, spanned three reigns - those of Charles VIII, Louis XII and Francis I. Florimond was much respected in his own day as an astute civil servant with an unusual mastery of foreign languages. He was also a notable patron of scholars, poets and artists. He built the Hotel d'Alluye at Blois and the château of Bury nearby and owned a bronze statue of *David* by Michelangelo (now lost). Filling a major gap left by historians of the period, Klaus and Dana have indicated that Florimond was principally responsible for the policy of amity towards England pursued by the regent, Louise de Savoie following her son's defeat and capture at Pavia. By so doing he may well have saved France from being carved up by her enemies.

Yet for all the importance Klaus attached to history, he was too sensitive a scholar to believe that creative genius was environmentally generated. Thus he stressed the independence of Marot's muse, rejecting the notion that he was a mere court poet or as he put it 'une espèce de Triboulet, amusé attiré de la cour et des grands'. Like Racine or Mozart, his genius was his alone. It would be wholly wrong, Klaus has asserted, to claim that all the reforms which Marot introduced into French poetry were due to the court and its ambiance. What was true of Mozart was equally true of Marot. 'Quelques mesures de Mozart', writes Klaus, 'suffisent pour qu'on reconnaisse le compositeur'. This statement reminds us of his great love of music, particularly opera. I got to know him rather late in his career, when he had retired to Wisbech St Mary. I will never forget his kindness and Dana's, when at a particularly sad moment of my life they invited me to spend a week-end with them. We talked

about many things, including history and opera, and I was able to appreciate another of Klaus's loves: cooking and good food. One evening, as I recall, he and I sat on a bench and talked about academe. He had no time for its many sillinesses. His tenure of the chair of French at Liverpool coincided with a vogue for the creation of specialized institutes, little 'empires' offering scope for rapid self-advancement to ambitious young dons. I have it on good authority that Klaus proposed the establishment of an institute of Andorran studies and laughed heartily when his proposal was taken seriously.

I must now turn to the subject of my talk which is appropriately enough concerned with the reign of Francis I whom Marot and Robertet both served in their respective ways. Four years ago marked the 500th anniversary of Francis's birth, yet for some strange reason it passed almost unnoticed. That *the Times* should have omitted it from its preview of the year's anniversaries may not surprise, but that France with her boundless addiction to historical conferences should have been so indifferent to the occasion, calls I think for an explanation. I may be wrong, but I suspect that the reason is not so much the long shadow cast by giants of the more recent past, like Louis XIV or Napoleon, as the low esteem in which Francis is still held by French people in general. Instead of recalling the great cultural achievements of his reign- the building of so many fine châteaux, the gathering of one of the finest collections of works of art north of the Alps, the patronage of scholars and artists of the first rank- they think of him as little more than a playboy. If they remember him at all, it is as the king who brought disgrace on the nation by allowing himself to be defeated and taken prisoner at Pavia. Only one other king of France had suffered a similar fate, Jean le Bon, who was defeated and captured at Poitiers in 1356, and I doubt if his birth is ever remembered.

My friend Jean Jacquart and I have tried in recent years to show that the traditional portrayal of Francis is less than just, but we are having to combat an overwhelmingly powerful influence dating back to the mid-XIXth century. I am referring, of course, to the great French historian, Jules Michelet, the centenary of whose birth is currently being celebrated. I have been reading the volume on the Renaissance in his *Histoire de France* and also the wonderful lectures which that other great historian, Lucien Febvre, devoted to it at the Collège de France in 1943. It is, of course, from Michelet's book that I have taken the title of my talk. Let me quote the passage in full¹: 'This dangerous object, who was to deceive everyone, was born, one might say, between two prostrate women, his mother and sister, and thus did they remain in an ecstasy of devotion and worship'.

The portrait which Michelet paints of Francis is consistently hostile. Let me offer you some more examples. The omens, he points out, were not good even before his accession. His physical prowess, as demonstrated by his love of hunting or by his duel with a wild boar, coupled with his graceful body and his facility -that distinctively French feature - the ignorant man who thinks he knows everything - caused people to believe that a great monarch was in the making. But what happened afterwards? Michelet won't even give Francis much credit for his victory at

¹ 'Ce dangereux objet, qui devait tromper tout le monde, naquit, on peut le dire, entre deux femmes prosternées, sa mère, sa soeur, et telles elles restèrent dans cette extase de culte et de dévotion'.

Marignano. The letter which he wrote to his mother describing the event is, he writes, ‘astonishingly inaccurate, frivolous and boastful’.² Instead of following it up, by siding resolutely either for or against the pope, the king amused himself with a *boulangère* [woman baker] of Lodi, who was to achieve fame as *la fornarina*. ‘Faced with the choice between the revolution and the pope, what did he choose? a *boulangère* of Lodi’³ And Michelet adds : ‘il tomba malade, comme il l’avait été déjà , avant son avènement’. And who was this man, he asks, around whom the French Renaissance revolved? Michelet is ashamed to admit that ‘this royal wordsmith, this brilliant king who spoke so well and behaved so badly, who was more fickle in his policies than he was even in his loves, this rash hare-brained fellow, this Janus, this weathercock, Francis I, was a Frenchman’.⁴

Michelet goes on to blame Francis I for the first stirrings of the Protestant Reformation at Meaux. It is absurd, in his view, to ascribe these stirrings to the timid teaching of Lefèvre d’Etaples or to the preaching of the local bishop, Briçonnet. The real preacher, he writes, was the misery, the terror, the necessity and the despair stemming from the king’s abandonment of the Northern provinces. At the Field of Cloth of Gold, he allowed vanity to get the better of his political judgment. Forgetting that the purpose of the summit was to achieve friendship between England and France, he angered and humiliated Henry VIII by throwing him to the ground in a wrestling match. ‘This trivial yet fatal event’, writes Michelet, ‘had incalculable consequences’.⁵ The judgment dies hard. Not long ago a French newspaper traced English Euro-scepticism to this single unhappy event. The fact that it probably never took place is immaterial. Needless to say, Francis brought upon himself, according to Michelet, his crushing defeat at Pavia. Did he not block the fire of his own guns by impetuously charging in front of them? Did he not also waste the four months that preceded the battle by lolling about in ‘a plush abbey in Lombardy’⁶ of the kind that had shocked Luther during his recent visit to Italy. He had ‘amused himself, slept, and made love’. In poems, which he allegedly wrote during his subsequent captivity, he recalled with nostalgia the Italian countryside. But, writes Michelet, ‘one may suspect, without impugning his memory, that the charms of the surroundings were not everything to him. Imagine four months without making love. That would be an extraordinary thing in such a life as his!’⁷ But who were the Italian ladies who caused Francis to forget his amours back home? Michelet offers no names. ‘In Italy woman is all’.⁸ He is reminded of Corregio’s graceful nudes and of Titian’s. He imagines that Francis sat for Titian during his Italian sojourn. He points to the crow’s feet in the famous portrait now at the Louvre and, laying on the irony, invites the reader to blame ‘the worries of kingship, the work and the vigils of ‘such a hard-working prince’.⁹

² ‘étonnamment inexacte, légère, pleine de vanterie’.

³ ‘Entre la révolution et le pape, il avait choisi...quoi ? une boulangère de Lodi’.

⁴ ‘ce roi parleur, ce roi brillant, qui dit si bien, agit si mal, mobile en ses résolutions encore plus que dans ses amours, cet imprudent, cet étourdi, ce Janus, cette girouette, François Ier, fut un Français’.

⁵ ‘Petit, fatal événement qui eut d’incalculables conséquences’

⁶ ‘une bonne abbaye lombarde’

⁷ ‘on peut soupçonner, sans calomnier sa mémoire, que le charme des lieux n’y fut pas tout. Quatre mois sans amours! Cela serait une grande singularité dans une telle vie’.

⁸ ‘ Mais tout est dame en Italie’.

⁹ ‘ce prince si laborieux’.

I could go on. The catalogue of abuse, invective and contempt directed at Francis by Michelet is so long. My purpose is not to recite it all here. Nor indeed is it to point out its errors. As Lucien Febvre has argued, to seek to fault Michelet on his historical knowledge is a pointless exercise. What is interesting is less his historical accuracy than his motivation. Why was he so contemptuous of Francis I? Michelet's attitude becomes all the more puzzling if one recalls his boundless enthusiasm for the Renaissance. By the time he embarked upon its history, he had grown weary of writing the history of fifteenth-century France, particularly that of the reign of Louis XI whom he viewed as a 'bourgeois' monarch. Michelet's spirit had been lifted by his first visit to Italy which had provided him with a vision of revival at a time of happiness in his own private life. He coined the word Renaissance to define the collision of two civilizations the French and the Italian. This had produced a spark which, in turn, had ignited 'a column of fire called the Renaissance'. It set France alight, then the rest of Europe. Michelet was bowled over by Rome-even the Rome of the Borgias - for it was anything but 'bourgeois' On his return to France, he visited Fontainebleau and revelled in the magnificence of the galerie François Ier. Rosso's daring dazzled him. 'Nothing is crazier or more amusing...' Why then did he despise Francis I who had created Fontainebleau? Was he shocked by the king's taste for the erotic in art? I do not think so. Michelet's contempt had deeper roots. As Lucien Febvre has demonstrated, no one can understand Michelet who does not take into account his bitter hatred of the church and of the clergy. He was not an unbeliever, far from it. But his attitude to Christianity changed in the course of his life, as may be seen from certain deletions which he made to the text of his *Histoire de France* between 1820 and 1854. Though not a Protestant, he greatly admired Luther and even compiled an anthology of excerpts from his writings. He saw in the great reformer a liberator of the human spirit. The early French evangelicals also aroused Michelet's sympathies: he refers to bishop Briçonnet as 'the good bishop'¹⁰; Lefèvre d'Étaples as a 'gentle soul'¹¹ and Farel as 'the Bayard of God's battles'¹². Now, Francis I presided not only over the Renaissance in France but also over the beginnings of its Reformation. He could choose either to tread the old path of obedience to the Papacy or follow Henry VIII's example and break with Rome. In his history Michelet, who was no friend of England, nevertheless praises Henry for his confiscation of clerical property, the implication being that if Francis had done the same, he might have been spared the financial problems of his reign and would have been able to spare France crippling taxes and damaging fiscal expedients like the sale of royal offices. The Reformation offered Francis a choice. He could either resist the pressure exerted by the Parlement of Paris and of the Sorbonne to persecute religious dissent or allow it to be suppressed? What did he do? He dithered. At first, he protected evangelical scholars and preachers. He twice rescued from prison Louis de Berquin, one of Luther's French admirers. He also sought the alliance of the German Protestant princes and invited Luther's right-hand man, Melancthon, to visit France. But in 1533 Francis met Pope Clement VII at Marseille, and gave his second son in marriage to the pope's niece, Catherine de' Medici. A year later he turned on the Protestant reformers who had dared to put up an anti-Catholic poster on his bedchamber door. A wave of public burnings followed. Among victims of the persecution was Clément

¹⁰ 'le bon évêque'

¹¹ 'âme tendre'

¹² 'le Bayard des combats de Dieu'

Marot, who sought the protection of the king's sister, Marguerite, before going into exile at Ferrara. Another exile was Calvin, whom Michelet describes in glowing terms. Why did Francis allow himself to be so easily swayed by the forces of Catholic obscurantism? Why did he not seize the opportunity presented to him by the Reformation of leading the movement. Instead he helped to stifle it in France leaving the way clear for the Jesuits to turn back the spiritual clock and paving the way for the horrors of the Wars of Religion culminating in the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Instead of listening to his sister, Marguerite, the friend of evangelicals, he preferred to follow the lead of his wicked mother Louise de Savoie and of her evil minister, the chancellor Duprat. 'This royal person', writes Michelet, 'who seemed to understand everything and bragged so superbly was in reality a splendid puppet manipulated by his mother, the intriguing, violent and crafty Savoyard and a clever, vile and base civil-servant, called Duprat, whom he made his chancellor.'¹³ I believe that the contempt in which Michelet held Francis I derived from the king's decision to stifle the Reformation in France rather than to become its champion.

Two contradictory influences worked on the king according to Michelet. 'His mother and mistresses were his evil genius, and Marguerite was his good genius'.¹⁴ Louise is described as handsome but also haughty, passionate, violent, sensual and avaricious. She is accused of driving the constable of Bourbon into treason by forcing her attentions upon him. Her avarice is blamed for France's loss of Milan in 1522. She allegedly diverted into her own coffers funds intended for the payment of the king's army. By so doing she killed two birds with one stone: she brought disgrace on the head of marshal Lautrec and rid herself of his sister, Françoise de Châteaubriant, who was then the king's mistress. By her selfish action Louise exposed France to the threat of foreign invasion from two directions. Michelet has little to say about Louise's rule during her son's Spanish captivity. He merely accuses her of ingratiating herself with the pope at the expense of the early French reformers. Nor is she given any credit for the Peace of Cambrai, also known as the Peace of the Ladies, which she and Mary of Hungary negotiated in 1529. Under this treaty, Francis recovered his sons, then being held as hostages in Spain, in exchange for an enormous ransom in gold. France also retained Burgundy, which the Emperor had long demanded. But for Michelet the treaty was a moral catastrophe, as France deserted her allies. 'How could one crime contain so many?' asks Michelet. 'Could the mother not feel that she was destroying her son? that by making him contemptible, execrable, she was isolating him for ever and that Cambrai weakened him more than Pavia?'

As for Marguerite, Michelet has nothing but praise for her. 'Enlightened in both heart and mind, she guided him [Francis] along the true path, where he would have found moral strength and huge material resources. She was, of course, acting instinctively without seeing or being aware of the consequences, believing only in putting him on the right religious path and earning for him God's help'.¹⁵ For a time

¹³ 'Cette royale figure qui semblait tout comprendre et hâblait à merveille, était en réalité un splendide automate entre la main de sa mère, l'intriguante, violente et rusée Savoyarde, et d'un homme d'affaires, Duprat, fin, vil et bas, qu'il prit pour chancelier'.

¹⁴ 'Il avait son mauvais génie en sa mère et ses maitresses, son bon génie en Marguerite'.

¹⁵ 'Fort éclairée d'elle-même, de plus, illuminée par la seconde rue du coeur, elle le conduisait alors dans la vraie voie de son règne, où il eût trouvé à la fois le nerf moral et d'immenses ressources

she seemed to make headway. In December 1521 she informed bishop Briçonnet: ‘The king and Madame are keener than ever on church reform...they are determined to show that the truth of God is not heresy’.¹⁶ But in reality Francis was not greatly interested in matters of faith. Michelet doubts whether he was much affected by the Epistles of St. Paul which Marguerite sent him during his Spanish captivity. The king, he thinks, preferred tales of chivalry. Two descriptions keep on appearing in Michelet’s portrait of him: braggart (*hâbleur*) and ‘feather-headed’ (*un homme léger*). The king, Michelet claims, was far more concerned to recover Milan than to save his soul. He loved his sister and now and again offered his protection to certain religious dissenters under her influence, but he could not resist the forces opposing religious change, mainly the Parlement and Sorbonne. Thus the young aristocratic reformer, Louis de Berquin, who had twice been released from prison at the king’s bidding, was eventually burnt at the stake when the king’s back was turned. But Francis’s blood was impure and corrupt like his mother’. Following his return from Spain, he allowed his sister to be displaced in his affections by a new mistress, Anne de Pisseleu, soon to become the redoubtable duchesse d’Etampes. With her circle of favourites she was to cast a malign influence over the last years of the reign. By then, Louise of Savoie was dead. Francis found himself more or less alone, as venereal disease destroyed his body. Once Marguerite had been married off to Henri d’Albret, ‘a king without a kingdom’, the persecutors were able to have all their own way. The Affair of the Placards unleashed a wave of savage executions, including a total ban on the printing of books. And the end of the reign was tarnished by the massacre of the Vaudois in Provence.

So we may understand why under Michelet’s lasting influence, the French are not as proud of Francis I as perhaps they ought to be. His portrayal of the king is so grotesquely prejudiced, so heavily influenced by the circumstances of the author’s own life, that we might be tempted to ignore it save as a remarkable piece of literature. Yet it cannot be dismissed out of hand. Michelet combined an astonishing breadth of erudition and cultural awareness with a poetic imagination of rare intensity that enabled him to capture the very essence of the past more surely than countless historians dependent on their card-indexes or data bases. Lucien Febvre has put it all so well. ‘Michelet’, he writes, ‘transmits his feelings as they occur. This magician with a wave of his wand transports you into the world that he has reconstructed or rather into his innermost thoughts. Thoughts so seductive that you begin by adopting them even if afterwards reflection causes you to correct them and to raise serious objections. But as you read him you cease to be a free agent’.¹⁷

Well, let us free ourselves for a moment and reflect on Michelet’s portrayal of Francis I. In what ways is it contradicted by modern research? Was the king, for instance, less pleasure-loving than Michelet suggests? I do not think so. His

materielles. Bien entendu qu’elle agissait instinctivement, sans voir ses conséquences ni sans s’en rendre compte, croyant seulement le mettre en bonne voie religieuse, lui mériter l’aide de Dieu’.

¹⁶ Le Roi et Madame sont plus que jamais affectionnés à la réformation de l’église...déliés de donner à connaître que la vérité de Dieu n’est point hérésie’.

¹⁷ ‘Michelet traduit ce qu’il sent, à l’heure où il le sent. Cet enchanteur vous transporte, d’un coup de baguette, au milieu d’un monde par lui reconstitué, ou plutôt, en plein milieu de sa pensée à lui. D’une pensée si séduisante qu’on l’adopte d’abord quitte à réfléchir ensuite, et s’il y a lieu, à se reprendre, à formuler de graves objections. Mais sur le moment quand vous lisez, vous n’êtes plus libre’.

licentiousness is abundantly attested by contemporaries. Witness the secretary of the Cardinal of Aragon, who visited France early in the reign. Francis, he writes, 'is a great womaniser and readily breaks into others' gardens and drinks at many fountains'. Or Stazio Gadio who describes a visit to the château of Blois by his young master Federico Gonzaga, the future duke of Mantua. After showing him the gardens and the facade of the loggias, then under construction, Francis took him up to the dormitory where the queen's ladies were sleeping. The king threatened to break down the door unless he and his guest were admitted. They went in, leaving Gadio, outside who states cryptically that he had to wait for a long time for them to emerge. As late as 1543 the papal nuncio Dandino reported: 'The king is more addicted to his lascivious pleasures, being totally in the power of Madame d'Estampes, who, in order to appear wise always contradicts others and lets the king believe that he is God on earth...' When the king died, Paul III compared his life-style to that of Sardanapalus. Several courtiers rounded on their wives accusing them of having been the last king's concubines.

But if Michelet is right on that score, is he also correct in suggesting that the king allowed pleasure to get in the way of business? On this he has the backing of Marshal Tavannes who states in his Memoirs 'Alexander sees women when there is no business, Francis attends to business when there are no women'. But hunting also occupied much of the king's time, though he obviously managed to combine both sports. As he dashed about the forests in pursuit of deer, he was accompanied by his 'fair band' of ladies. In the course of a hunt, he would have his bed set up in a forest clearing and would beckon 'a great number of ladies and gentlewomen'. The king's absences did interfere with diplomacy. In 1543 the English ambassador complained that the king never stayed two nights in any one place so that one could never be sure of where the court was. But Michelet is surely wrong to assume that a monarch in the early sixteenth century always had to be at his desk. Philip II of Spain was an exception in this respect. All kings had fun. They relied on their courtiers and councillors to carry out their wishes. We also know from the diplomatic correspondence and from a famous letter written later in the century by Catherine de' Medici to her son that Francis had a well regulated daily routine which involved the reading of dispatches and the consultation of ministers. Evidence that Francis could be attentive to state business has turned up recently in the course of research into his finances. On at least one occasion he closeted himself for a long time with his fiscal officials to devise ways of raising urgently needed funds for the army.

Michelet's suggestion that vacillations in Francis's religious policy were due to contradictory influences in his entourage may contain an element of truth in so far as such contradictions existed, but it also derives from a simplistic view of the religious crisis as it unfolded. The king had taken an oath at his coronation that he would defend the Church and stamp out heresy in his kingdom. The difficulty that faced him in the early days of the Reformation was how to recognize heresy. Was evangelical humanism of the kind favoured by his own sister and other members of his entourage heresy? Some of the theologians of the university of Paris said that it was, but Francis was not bound to accept their judgment. For a long time, the ideological situation was so fluid and confused that the king was bound to tread cautiously. He may even have sympathized with his sister's views, though we cannot be sure. The conscience of the king is not easily probed by the historian. But it does

seem that he drew the line at the rejection by the more radical Protestants- those of the Swiss or Zwinglian allegiance- who openly repudiated the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Eucharist. To my mind this is why Francis endorsed the campaign of persecution which followed the Affair des Placards in October 1534. Thereafter, he was more or less consistent in supporting the cause of orthodoxy. Although Michelet indicates that Protestantism took several forms, he seems not to have really understood the nature of the religious challenge that had faced the king.

Michelet's *History of France* is punctuated by remarks of an almost prophetic shrewdness. In recent years there has been a long and at times heated debate among historians regarding the nature of monarchy in early sixteenth-century France. Did it qualify as 'absolutism'? That is the question. French historians generally have argued that it did, while American scholars have pointed to its limitations. Absolutism has come to be seen as a variable concept in the sense that a monarch could be more or less absolute in respect of the tools at his disposal. Thus Francis I was probably less absolute than his successor, Louis XIV. Michelet touches on the problem in the following passage: 'Francis, whatever people have said, was not Louis XIV. He had strength, but far less authority. The great institutions [*les grands corps*] acted independently'¹⁸. In my judgment, this statement puts the cart before the horse. The king had more authority than strength. He disposed of only a small civil service by comparison with the total population [only about 5,000 for a population of some 18 million] and had no standing army of any significance. He was heavily dependent, therefore, on the support of his subjects, particularly the nobility, in respect of his wishes being carried out. But his rule had the backing of tradition and theory. He was God's lieutenant on earth and knew it. If the 'grands corps' tried to be independent, he came down on them hard, as he did at a *lit-de-justice* in July 1527 following his return from captivity in Spain, when he humiliated the Parlement ordering it to ratify its own subservience to him.¹⁹

From the outset of his historical studies Michelet came under the influence of the Neapolitan thinker, Vico, who proclaimed the triumph of the imagination over analysis. Logic never was Michelet's strongest suit. As Febvre writes: 'The thought of Jules Michelet is admittedly not a straight or logical line'.²⁰ This probably explains the contradiction in his portrayal of the royal trinity of mother, son and sister. On the one hand, we have the image of the king born between two women prostrate in a permanent act of worship; on the other, that of a monarch subservient to his wicked and selfish mother and ignoring his sweet, saintly and selfless sister. Baffled as the historian may be when pondering this picture, it is not altogether absurd. For Louise and Marguerite did worship Francis and he did listen to them, perhaps more to his mother than to his sister. Where the image is strained is in the sharp contrast it draws between good and evil. Louise may not have been faultless. Indeed, there are sound reasons for thinking that she was avaricious, jealous and vindictive; but she was also a remarkably courageous and able woman. Widowed at 18 she never remarried, perhaps because she never wished to sacrifice the authority that was hers. She gave her

¹⁸ 'François, quoi qu'on ait dit, n'était pas Louis XIV. Il avait la force sans doute, mais bien moins l'autorité. Ces grands corps procédaient sans lui'

¹⁹ See my 'Francis I and the Lit de justice: a "legend" defended', in *French History*, Vol. VII (1993), pp. 53-83.

²⁰ 'La pensée de Jules Michelet n'est point certes une suite rectiligne et logique...'

children as good an education as one could find at the time (both receiving equal attention) and imparted to them a taste for art and a love of books. She defended their interests during the difficult, closing years of Louis XII's reign, and once her Caesar, as she called Francis in her *Journal*, had gained the throne, she sat in his council and served him twice as regent with notable success. Far from encouraging his warlike proclivities, she tried to restrain him from going on that last, disastrous, expedition to Italy. Noted in her own day for her prudence-many are the manuscript illuminations showing the tall lady in black wielding a large compass- Wolsey called her 'the mother and nourisher of peace'.

As for Marguerite, she too served her brother well, appearing frequently at court and taking a lively interest in the international scene. Some of her indiscreet remarks to the English ambassador are such fun to read. They remind one of the mixture of scurrility and piety which Lucien Febvre has explained so well in his book, *Amour sacré, amour profane*-the contrast between the salacious tales of the *Heptaméron* and the mysticism of the *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*. Marguerite's greatest service to the king was in 1525, when she went on a hazardous mission to Spain where he was being held prisoner. Her appearance was enough to snatch him from the jaws of death. He, in turn, protected her from the enmity of the theologians of the University of Paris. Later in the reign, however, after her marriage to the king of Navarre a certain coolness set in. Francis fell under the influence of the pro-imperial Constable Montmorency and Marguerite thought that he did not make enough effort to win back the Spanish portion of her husband's small kingdom. She also felt displaced in his affections by his mistress, Madame d'Etampes.

So Michelet's portrayal of the royal trio does not carry complete conviction. The reality was almost certainly less polarized, less dramatic. The reign of Francis I remains in many respects an enigma. It may have been less disastrous than Michelet's flights of imagination would have us believe. Perhaps we should allow Clément Marot to have the last word even if it is tongue in cheek:

O Roy amoureux des neufz Muses,
 Roy en qui sont leurs sciences infuses,
 Roy plus que Mars d'honneur environné,
 Roy le plus Roy qui fut oncq couronné
 Dieu tout puissant te doint (pour t'estrener)
 Les quatre Coings du Monde gouverner,
 Tant pour le bien de la Rounde Machine,
 Que pour aultant que sur tous en es digne'.
