

Georges Clemenceau, *Correspondance (1858-1929)*, annotated edition by Sylvie Brodziak and Jean-Noël Jeanneney, Éditions Robert Laffont, Paris, 2008, 1,101 pp.

This book has been published in the well-known Bouquins collection, directed by Daniel Rondeau, which seems to us of great interest to become acquainted with one of the most significant politicians in France during the Third Republic, whose constitutional laws from 1875 lasted a long time.

His full name was Georges Benjamin Clemenceau (28th September 1841 – 24th de November 1929) and was born in a small village in La Vendée, called Mouilleron-en-Pareds. He undertook his secondary studies at Nantes Imperial Lyceum. He studied Medicine in Paris and earned his PhD, and occasionally practiced medicine. He published his PhD thesis in 1865 and, two years later, translated John Stuart Mill's book on Augusto Comte and positivism into French.

Clemenceau mainly devoted himself to politics, journalism and literature. He was a town councillor, a member of parliament, a minister and Prime Minister, but never managed to become the President of the Third Republic.

Georges Clemenceau, commonly nicknamed as *Le Tigre* [the Tiger], took part in important debates in the Chamber related to amnesty, the separation of State and Church Law, the French colonization, the freedom of education, etc. He also participated actively in the drawing up and signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28th June 1919.

The correspondence contained in this book is, above all, of literary, personal and political interest, but of social interest to a lesser extent. Then, we will not be dealing with Clemenceau's turbulent relationship with Mary Elina Plummer (1849-1922), whom he married on 20th June 1869, and for whom he showed a passionate love as reflected in the letter written in English he sent her on 19th December 1870, from Paris, by balloon (since the French capital was being besieged by the Prussian), which is published on pages 142-144, and its translation into French on pages 144-146. Nevertheless, it gives the impression –according to Sylvie Brodziak– that Clemenceau was unfaithful to his wife and Plummer, a bit tired of it, decided to arrange a rendezvous with a youngster. This outraged Clemenceau and the police confirmed there had been a proven adultery. Clemenceau got a beneficial divorce and Mary Plummer lost custody of her three children, her French nationality and was forced to go back to the United States of America. (pp. 1,041-1,042). Plummer returned to France in 1920 but died on 13th September 1922 without the presence of either her children or Georges Clemenceau. Countess d'Aunay Sarita Kimball Berdan (1855-1935) was Clemenceau's close friend and kept fluent correspondence with him but we ignore the extent of their relationship since their letters before 1918 had been destroyed. We cannot dwell on Marguerite Baldensperger's correspondence (1882-1936) either, who was married to a Comparative Literature professor in the Sorbonne University, which is extensive in this epistolary book. She had met Clemenceau as a journalist and editor on 3rd May 1923 (see the description of their first meeting by Sylvie Brodziak). It was just a literary friendship for Clemenceau was 81 when he first met Marguerite. Clemenceau also had other solid friendships with women; let us not forget his frequent visits to Princess Matilde's aristocratic and worldly salon, which was very well known in Paris and whose access was very restricted.

But since this review is published in a journal devoted to Labour Relations and Social Policy, we will dwell on aspects of his political and literary activity which relate to social issues. Firstly, we would like to point out that Clemenceau, when he was the Prime Minister, created the Labour Ministry on 25th October 1906, being René Viviani the first Labour Minister. There would not be such a ministry in Spain until much later, 8th May 1920, and Carlos Cañal Migolla (1876-1938) would become the Minister in charge of the portfolio.

One of Clemenceau's measures, somewhat unpopular at the time, was that on the occasion of an electricians' strike in Paris, on 8th March 1907, he replaced them by soldiers from the engineer corps. Then, on 30th July 1908, Clemenceau ordered the demonstration by the General Labour Confederation in Davreil to be stopped (p. 64).

Clemenceau collaborated with *L'Aurore*, *La Justice* and *L'Intransigeant* newspapers, and influenced all of them with not only his literature and political thought but also his ideas about social justice and the reforms to be carried out in France in this respect. Clemenceau was in favour, among other things, of abolishing the death penalty (pp. 1,036-1,037).

Clemenceau and the socialist politician Jean Jaurès (1859-1914) had agreements and disagreements about social conflicts, political reforms, trade unions and the freedom of education, of which Jaurès was against as he blatantly advocated an education which was totally controlled by the State, etc. In spite of this, when Jaurès was murdered in 1914, Clemenceau praised him appropriately (p. 1,011), a position which is not clear he had maintained over time. He never got along with the politician Jules Ferry (1832-1893); the beginning of these two republicans' disagreements is located by Jean-Noël Jeanneney in 1870, during the Paris Commune, a social revolution with an unsuspected scope. As a matter of fact, Clemenceau, throughout his correspondence, attacked Ferry as can be read in a letter from 11th March 1883 (pp. 177-178), which was addressed to Admiral Frederick Augustus Maxse, whom he writes again on 3rd April 1884 to mention Ferry's speech in praise of Léon Gambetta, which would be delivered in Cahors on 14th April 1884. Ferry is mentioned a third time in a letter addressed to Maxse on 2nd December 1884 (pp. 188-189), where Clemenceau points out he had had an "interesting conversation" with Ferry. The last time he appears in this epistolary book is anecdotally. On the other hand, in Jules Ferry's correspondence¹ there is no trace of any letter sent to Clemenceau or from Clemenceau to Ferry, but he is mentioned by Jules Ferry several times, considering "boulangisme" as «created by radicals..., it is the fatal creation developed by the press at the orders of Clemenceau, [Henry] Rochefort or [Charles de] Frecynet»². On several occasions, Ferry criticized Clemenceau with some of his correspondents for his destabilizing radical mood³, for being a zealot leftist⁴, for being a man full of fantasy⁵, etc. J. Ferry does not hesitate to pour all sorts of insults against Clemenceau for acting in a "thoughtless" frame of mind, with a "demagogic

¹ See Jules Ferry, *Lettres, 1846-1893*, Paris, 1914.

² Jules Ferry, *Lettres, 1846-1893*, p. 487, letter CCXI.

³ Jules Ferry, *Lettres, 1846-1893*, p. 419, letter CLXXVIII and p. 459, letter CXCVII.

⁴ Jules Ferry, *Lettres, 1846-1893*, p. 415, letter CLXXVII.

⁵ Jules Ferry, *Lettres, 1846-1893*, p. 387, letter CLXII.

impatience” and with an “utter and naive lack of political morals” which «will doom the Republic’s destiny»⁶.

Notwithstanding, where Georges Clemenceau’s social thought can be best appreciated is in his book *La Mêlée sociale*, which brings together several of his articles aimed against social injustice in the working class as a result of the Industrial Revolution, but this fact did not lead him to share either anarchist or socialist ideas (pp. 1,023-1,024). He suffered a considerable disappointment with the 1871 Paris Commune. [*Recibida el 2 de noviembre de 2010*].

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⁶ Jules Ferry, *Lettres, 1846-1893*, pp. 274-275, letter CV, sent from Jules Ferry to Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, on 13th May 1879.