

INTRODUCTORY

"Speak boldly and speak truly."

(Beaumont and Fletcher, *Wit without Money*, IV.4)

"This Booke contains the names of mortall men,

But thear's a Booke with characters of Golde,

Not writ with Incke, with Pensill or with Pen,

Wheare Godes Elect, for ever are inrolde;

The Booke of Life, wheare labor thou to bee

Beefore this Booke hath once registered thee."

(Register of St. Peter's, Cornhill, London, 1538)

It has been well said that "family history is a subject of sur-

passing interest now that men have come to know that genealogy is a branch of science which, if rationally pursued will be productive of important knowledge. It is ceasing to be degraded by being a mere slave to those who possess rank and title." (The Athenaeum, September 29th 1888, p. 413)

Grosart writes (Poems, Sir John Beaumont, Fuller's Worthies Library, XVII) - "It is much to be wished that living Beaumonts would do for their family history what has been done so admirably for the Lindseys by Lord Lindsay, and for the Manchesters by the Duke of Manchester."

In fear and trembling, and realising fully the numerous difficulties ahead, knowing that the path of the genealogist and historian is always strewn with thorns and pitfalls, we have taken up this work, craving indulgence of friends for any errors which may have crept in.

We undertake this work, however, not so much for the present generation as for the future. Many things which were known to our grandfathers are now forgotten, and our successors will search in vain for details with which we are probably familiar. For the sake, then, of coming generations, it seems desirable to commit to print such facts as can be obtained from the living, combining therewith much interesting and valuable information discovered among ancient records. Concerning the early periods of the Beaumont history, these are exceptionally abundant.

Some no doubt will not value our efforts for, however much we fight against the thought, we fear there is much truth in the lines taken from Sherwood's Pedigree Register (September, 1909, p.300) which says:

"Tis sad to think, that when our course is run,

Inherited our work may be by one

Who, caring not for pedigrees a jot,

Sells to the local butlerman the lot.

He to warp butter, candles, cheese, doth take

Each priceless sheet, which p'haps took years to make.

Then greasy, stinking, torn, our work at last

In fire or dust in ruthlessly is cast."

In every great crisis in English history from the days of the Norman Conquest to the Great War of 1939-45, the Beaumont family has always been in the forefront as leaders of men. English, Irish and Teuton, Welsh and Scottish, Frenchman and Spaniard, Turk and Indian, savage and barbarian have in turn been compelled to own their prowess; and on every major battlefield members of the family have freely made the supreme sacrifice for God, King and Country.

Carlyle (VII, 329) tells us that "the Crusades, which took their rise in religion, appealed to these men (the Franks and the Normans), it was the boundless invisible world that was laid bare to their imaginations, and in its burning light the visible shrank as a scroll."

In every one of the seven Crusades the Beaumonts played their part, at least one being slain and another dying while returning. Three fell at Towton, the battle which stabilised the Yorkist regime, another at Edgehill in 1642, and others were killed at the sieges of Paris (1436), Gloucester and Leeds (1643). One was drowned at sea with Prince William in 1120; Admiral Basil Beaumont was lost on the Goodwin Sands in 1703, all hands being drowned; many have been captured in battle, imprisoned, their estates sequestered as the result of the various English civil wars, and others have lost their lives in the two recent world wars.

Through marriage they are descended from, and were progenitors of, various royal families. The ancient kings of Naples and Sicily, Castile, Leon and Jerusalem were their sires. The fleur-de-lis on their coat-of-arms indicates their descent from the royal house of France and the lion is derived from John of Brienne, King of Jerusalem. They took wives from, and gave their daughters in marriage to the royal houses of England and Scotland. Henry IV was a great-grandson of Sir Henry de Beaumont, first Baron and Earl of Buchan; Henry V and Henry VI had therefore Beaumont blood in their veins. Sir Henry was also through his grand-daughter Blanche an ancestor of the royal house of Spain, Portugal and the Austrian Empire of the Habsburgs, while William the Lion of Scotland in marrying Ermengarda, daughter of Viscount Richard de Beaumont, became the mother of a line of Scottish kings.

From the days when under Henry I, the first greater Charter of English Liberties was granted, down to modern times, the Beaumonts have had seats in Parliament, first as barons and later as statesmen elected by the constituencies. They have served their country as bishops, Judges, ambassadors, privy councillors, admirals and generals, and also as heads of colleges and schools. They have produced men of science, patrons of art, poets and one dramatist who with his colleague Fletcher ranks next to Shakespeare and Johnson. They have founded, built and endowed abbeys, priories, churches, almshouses and schools - they have built bridges and made roads at their own expense, and have established great modern industries. They have been generous with their wealth and property giving liberally and bequeathing money and land to feed, clothe and warm the poor.

With very few exceptions the Beaumonts in this book share one common trait, for they supported the crown through all its vicissitudes. Both before and during the Wars of the Roses they were Lancastrians, and the second Viscount, last of his line, kept his faith with Lancaster to the end. Among members of this family, Parliament men of the seventeenth century may be counted on the fingers of one hand. Since the days when the Earls of Warwick, Leicester and Worcester held sway in the twelfth century, the Beaumonts have consistently supported the Crown without ever desiring to usurp it as other noble families did with dire results to themselves. Partly as a result of these family traits, their political influence has always been far more effective than apparent, and their contribution to all aspects of the nation's welfare has been substantial and continuous.

THE BEGINNINGS

CHAPTER I

The proven origins of the family of Beaumont go back to the ninth century when bands of marauding sea-rovers from Scandinavia began to descend on the coasts of western Europe to plunder and to slay. At that time the once great Empire of Charlemagne had fallen into decay and his three grandsons among whom it was divided were in no position to withstand the savage incursions of the Northmen.

One of these bands fastened on the rich lands around the mouth of the Seine and made this region the base for their widespread expeditions. They occupied Rouen several times and never ceased their attacks, burning towns, pillaging monasteries, destroying harvests, carrying off treasure and slaughtering or enslaving peasants. Those who survived the devastation eventually became dependent on the foreign invaders, whom they called Normanni or Men of the North. Their leader was Rolf or Rollo, son of Rognewold and directly descended from the ancient kings of Norway.

The French king, Charles the Simple, could not resist the attacks of the Northmen and in 911 he made with Rollo at Clair-sur-Epte a treaty which marks the foundation of the Norman state. According to its terms Rollo was to have Rouen and the territory around it now known as Normandy, with the title of Duke, on condition that he received baptism and ceased from ravaging the lands of the French king. By the time Rollo died in 917, the Norman state was well established and its land had been parcelled out among the leaders of the Norman host.

Among these was Bernard, Rollo's brother and second in command. When the new Duchy was divided up, Bernard received as his share the lordship of Harcourt together with a large tract of territory lying between the rivers Sarthe and Risle in the province of Maine. This large lordship comprised most of what is now known as the three departments of Mayenne, Orne and Sarthe. After Rollo's death, Bernard became regent and chief counsellor of Rollo's son William "Longsword", and after William's death in 943, guardian of the young heir Richard, later to be known as the Fearless.

From those beginnings the family grew in wealth and influence. Bernard's son Turfus, known as the Rich gave his name to Tourville and added Torcy, Torcy and Pontatou to his paternal domains. By his marriage to Ermengarde de Brigenberg the family acquired the estate of Pont Audemar on the lower Risle. His son Turf, besides being the second cousin of Richard the Fearless, Duke of Normandy, also became his brother-in-law through marrying Weiva, sister of Richard wife Gunnora. Both these ladies were daughters of the Danish nobleman Harfust. Thus the generations of the family of Bernard ran roughly parallel with that of Rollo, and the two were closely connected.

The eldest of the five sons of Turf was named Humphrey. Before his time surnames had not been common, and men had been known rather by some trait of person or quality of character than by their dwelling place or estates. Thus it was more common to be known as the Ganger, the Rich, the Simple, or Longsword than to carry the prefix 'de' as Humphrey did. Lord of Pont Audemar, Veulles and Preaux, he was known as 'de Bellomonte' or 'de Beaumont', a name descriptive of the pleasant site of the manor on which he lived. By some he was said to have been given the name through his prowess in battle (Bellio-monte - Mountain of

War). Long after his day, however, his descendants were known by their personal characteristics as English kings were, as well as by their chosen surname.

On Humphrey's vast estate were two manors known as Beaumont and they are both thus named today. Beaumont-sur-Sarthe is about fifteen miles south of Alençon and seventy south-east of Rouen; the other, Beaumont-le-Roger is named after Humphrey's son and lies on the bank of the Risle some thirty miles west of Rouen. On this estate Humphrey founded two abbeys - St. Léger for nuns and St. Pierre de Preaux for monks. He died in 1047 A.D. and was buried in the Abbey of St. Pierre.

Once established in northern France the character of the newcomers began to change. The old sea rovers died, and were followed by younger men who rapidly adopted the modes of life of their neighbours, the French nobility. They began to speak a variant of the French language known as Norman French, and the speed with which they absorbed everything that European life had to offer them was stupendous, for they were a people of remarkably high intelligence and boundless energy. After a hundred years in their new home, one would never have recognised them as the descendants of rough sea-rovers.

In some respects, however, they did not change. Fiercely independent in spirit and used to warfare as they were, no treaty could wipe out the enmity between the Normans and the French crown, which in time became traditional, and when they were not fighting the common enemy they often turned their arms against each other in their struggles to hold some rich valley, town or castle. All the efforts of a succession of able and strong rulers could not put an end to these private wars. In one campaign after another the manors of Beaumont-sur-Sarthe and Beaumont-le-Roger were frequently lost and won back again by the family.

The forty-first panel of the Bayeux Tapestry depicts a feast which was held by the Norman leaders shortly before the Battle of Hastings. In the centre of the group is Bishop Odo of Bayeux, Duke William's half-brother who is blessing the food, while the Duke sits on the Bishop's right. At the extreme left of the picture sits Roger de Beaumont, about to drink from a shallow vessel. Unlike the rest of the Normans he wears a beard and was generally known as Barbatous or La Barbe. He must have been already about fifty years of age at the time of the Conquest and perhaps because of this he does not appear to have taken part in the battle. He nevertheless did his share towards the cost of the expedition for he provided at his own expense 60 transports.

By the year 1066 Duke William had to some extent succeeded in establishing his authority over the unruly Norman barons, but this had necessitated clever statesmanship as well as armed strength. It appears that the Dukes before him had made private contracts with many Norman landowners by which each of them held his land of the Duke in return for an agreed contribution of military service in time of war. This was a process which was going on at that time all over western Europe. In William's case, however, it did not give him the freedom to decide on any war without reference to his barons. In 1066 he had to gain their support for his project of invading England and called them together at Lillebonne. When they showed their disavowal of the enterprise he had to resort to threats and persuasion of individuals in order to raise an army. Throughout all this period Roger supported the Duke and this may account for the favours he received and the high offices he held.

The presence of Roger at the banquet indicates that he must have been in England before the Conquest, but his main sphere of action was in Normandy where, after the Conquest he remained as the chief adviser to

William's wife Matilda of Flanders to whom the Government of the Duchy was entrusted. As a result of the success of the English expedition together with Roger's wise administration, there was no revolt in Normandy during this critical period. He was, as the chronicler Wace tells us, "the noblest, the most wealthy and the most valiant Seigneur." The proximity of a noble to his ruler in those days is generally shown by the number of royal and state documents he witnessed. Roger must have moved about with the King a great deal between England and France for he witnessed many such. These include grants of Robert of Normandy to the Abbey of Marmoutier at Tours (1066), of the King to the Abbey of St. Stephen of Caen (1071), a royal charter to the Abbey of St. Wandrille (1074), a royal confirmation of a grant to the Abbey of Holy Trinity at Montivilliers (1076) and a gift by William of Warenne and his wife to the Church of St. Pancras, Lewes, in Sussex. The Domesday Survey of 1086 shows us that he had received extensive grants of land in Gloucestershire, Dorset and Devon. Though his English estates were not so large as those of other great magnates such as Odo of Bayeux, Robert of Mortain, William FitzOsbern, Roger of Montgomery or William of Warenne, it must be remembered that his interests, material and otherwise, were primarily in Normandy.

Roger's last days were not free from war. In 1090 William I had died, leaving Normandy to his son Robert who held the old Beaumont castle of Brionne and had placed it in the custody of Robert FitzBaldwin. Roger offered a large sum of money for its restitution. At that time enthusiasm was rising among the nobility of Europe for a holy war against the Turks, and Duke Robert, who eventually went on the first of these Crusades, was in need of money. He ordered FitzBaldwin to give up the castle to Roger but FitzBaldwin, who claimed the castle as his, refused to give it up to anybody other than Robert, his liege lord. Since the castle stood in the heart of Roger's own domain, he collected his forces and laid siege to it. Eight days the siege lasted, and on the ninth Roger made a vigorous assault. The weather was very warm at the time and there was a great drought, so the besiegers heated the steel points of the arrows red-hot and shot them on to the wooden roof of the great hall which was covered with dry tichen and moss. This was soon a mass of flames, which spread quickly to other parts of the castle, compelling the defenders to surrender.

In 1088 Roger founded the Abbey of Holy Trinity at Beaumont-le-Roger. King William had promised to attend the festival of dedication but his death in 1087 intervened. The Abbey was served by the Canons of St. Frideswide in Oxford and some remains of the old building still exist. He gave to his father's nunnery of St. Leeger the manor of Stowre Pratellis, Dorset and in 1080 he enlarged the endowment of St. Pierre de Preaux with a gift of five hides (about 600 acres) of land at Warwick. To this monastery he retired at the end of his life as his father had done.

Marriage settlements always played a great part in the advancement of the family of de Beaumont, and Roger's marriage not only did this but also provided a strong bastion of the Duchy of Normandy against the power of France. Adeline, Roger's wife, was the daughter and heiress of Walteran, Count of Lellient and Meulan, for her brother Hugh had taken the habit of a monk in the Abbey of Bec. Since Meulan is situated on the Seine no more than twenty miles downstream from Paris, the military importance of the place could not be overestimated. The fact that Roger was allowed to hold such a vital outpost is testimony to the high favour he enjoyed in the counsels of the Conqueror. Adeline, who was a friend of William's Queen, Matilda, died in 1081, leaving three sons and a daughter. Of the

sons, two, Robert and Henry became Earls of Leicester and Warwick. The daughter became a nun at the Abbey of St. Leger de Preaux and eventually Abbess of St. Etienne.

By the time Roger died, he had witnessed a truly rapid and spectacular rise in the fortunes of his family to a position of power and influence.

NOTES

(N.B. Many of the characters in this book are dealt with in the Dictionary of National Biography, with references, and in the Encyclopaedia Britannica).

1. William de Jumieges. Gesta Edn 1924. 324
2. Orderic Vitalis. Hist. Ecc. I. 383
3. David C. Douglas. William the Conqueror 100-1
4. Planche. The Conqueror and his Companions. I. 204
5. Wace. Robert. Roman de Rou. I. 11136
6. Archaeologia xxvii. 25
7. R.W. Elyton. Key to the Domesday Survey. Dorset
8. Ord. Vit.
9. Planche 207. Ord Vit. II. 491
10. A copy of the Charter is in the Mazarine Library, Paris. No. 3417
11. Thomas Turner. Notitia Monastica
12. William of Jumieges. Historia Normannorum 170