

FATHERS AND SONS

CHAPTER V

Henry, Baron Beaumont, who had all his life regarded the conquest of Scotland as the most important object of English policy saw with dismay that this would never come about under Mortimer and the ill-feeling that resulted made it dangerous for him to stay in England. He then went to France where he met Edward Balliol, with whom he plotted to reinstate Edward III on the Scottish throne. The King, however, refused permission for their troops to pass through England or even to undertake the expedition, but Henry persisted. In his manor at Barton-on-Humber he completed his plans for the invasion and set sail on July 31st, 1332.

The hopes of the two brothers were in the end justified. The death of Edward III brought the Scots again pouring into Northumberland and after the complete defeat of an English army Mortimer made a humiliating treaty with them. One of the clauses of this treaty was that those estates in Scotland belonging to English barons which had been seized by Robert Bruce and distributed among his partisans, should be restored to their owners, but this was not done.

Louis was at Harwich when the invading party landed, and Henry with his followers went with them on their march through Bury St. Edmunds and Cambridge, then westwards in pursuit of the King and Despenser, who was forced to yield Bristol without show of resistance. The elder Despenser was convicted and hanged, the younger escaped with the King in a small boat, hoping to reach Lundy Island from which they had a chance of escape to Ireland. But continuous storms forced them to land on the Welsh coast. The Earl of Lancaster and Henry de Beaumont were sent with a troop of soldiers in pursuit. After some searching, the King, his Chancellor Robert Baldock, Hugh Despenser and a household clerk were found at Neath Abbey. The sad story of Edward III ended with the execution of his principal adherents and finally, with his own deposition and murder at Berkeley Castle.

Shrewd judges as they were of public opinion and of the probable resources of the two sides, they must have been fairly certain that Isabella and the young prince Edward were likely to have the sympathy of the people once they landed, and therefore the greater access of power, otherwise they would not have openly committed an act of treason against a consecrated monarch. Though not by any means principals in this upheaval, they were so far involved that, had the outcome been different, it would have gone ill with them.

In forsaking the King's cause for that of the queen and Mortimer, Henry and Louis were probably moved by considerations both of self-interest and the maintenance of public order. In their case these two coincided, for neither Henry nor his brother had anything to gain from a state in chaos. Indeed Louis had much to lose if when the Scottish truce ended the lands in his diocese could not be defended, while Henry saw clearly that under the regime of Edward and Despenser nothing could be done to win back the lands he had by his Scottish marriage, or to make his title Earl of Buchan anything more than a fiction. In the past the brothers had received favours from both the King and the Queen. Now that the break had come, they had to choose.

in the company of David, Earl of Atholl, and Richard, Baron Talbot, with 88 vessels. Seven days after they set sail they landed at Kinghorn, C. Fife with about 2,500 men. In order to show the troops that they had nothing to trust but their own valour, the fleet was sent back to England.

Their hazardous expedition met with instant success and culminated in the battle of Dupplin Moor where, after a night attack on the camp followers, they defeated the main Scottish force commanded by the Earl of Mar. Perth was occupied and on September 24th, 1332, Edward Balliol was crowned King of Scotland at Scone. Two months later he acknowledged Edward III as his lord.

Secretly the English King was pleased, for although he had forbidden the expedition to sail, it had given him what he wanted. At the same time he had to make some show of displeasure to satisfy the Scottish ambassador at his court and so he seized the estates of Lord Beaumont and other lords in Derby, Leicester, Nottingham and Warwick. These were very soon returned.

Balliol was King of Scotland, but it was well known that he could not keep the crown without English support. In the following year, therefore, Edward prepared for war. He was none too soon, for in spring, Balliol was surprised at Annan by the Earl of Murray and fled, half clad, to England.

Lord Beaumont was one of the leaders of the army which Edward sent north. They laid siege to Berwick and a Scottish army under Archibald Douglas marched to its relief. The two forces met at Halidon Hill where Lord Beaumont commanded the left wing of the English army. It was a Bannockburn in reverse, the Scottish charge being checked by showers of arrows from the English long-bows and brought to a standstill in a marsh. The Earl led his troops in the counter-attack and pursuit in which Douglas was killed, then he crossed the Tweed to the storming of Berwick. In February 1334 Edward Balliol sent Lord Beaumont as his deputy to do homage for his kingdom to Edward III.

More marches and sieges followed, but in 1337 another situation arose, for Edward laid claim to the French crown. His claim was backed up by an expedition to Flanders in which Baron Beaumont took part. As a military demonstration it was fruitless, but it paid dividends in ensuring the support of the rich Flemings for Edward's schemes against France. In January 1340 he formally assumed the title of King of Britain, France and Ireland, quartering the arms of France on his royal achievement. This was the beginning of the Hundred Years War. Two months later, on March 10th Henry the first Baron Beaumont died, rich and full of honours, outliving his brother Louis by nearly seven years.

In his time he was one of England's foremost soldiers, and as a prime mover in the events of the day he helped to mould his country's destiny. "In keeping of his promises there was none more faithful; in counsel there was none more secret, and whenever danger threatened there was none more firm. In warfare he was never seen to act otherwise than as a valiant soldier should act; neither when excited to wrath did he do any wrong, nor when allured by love would he proceed beyond the truth." As to the single act which might be interpreted as a breach of faith, he did not commit it until he saw that the alternative of inaction could but lead to disaster both for his line and for his country. Among many other gifts, he completely restored the choir and inserted new windows in the Church of St. Peter at Barton-on-Humber. In the East window is

a figure dating back to this period which is supposed to represent him in the habit of a pilgrim garbed in long farn-coloured coat fastened with four gold buttons over a blue tunic, bearing a staff in his right hand and a book in his left, and wearing a wallet ornamented with the scallop-shell of the pilgrims who visited the shrine of St. James at Compostella. The family name is still preserved in the parish by a farm known as Beaumont Court.

Henry through his own ability and good fortune succeeded in establishing his family in England and Scotland but he could never have guessed how many kings and emperors would be descended from him. Here indeed, the efficacy of political marriage shows up at its best. Of his four surviving daughters Elizabeth married Nicholas, third Baron de Audley of Hadleigh, Stafford; Joan married Lord Fitzwarine and Maud the youngest married Ralph, son of Edmund Earl of Stafford and secondly William, fifth Duke of Bavaria younger son of the Emperor Louis IV. There is a brass to her memory in the Cathedral at Basle dated 1450. The most far-reaching marriage of all was that of Isabel who through union with Henry Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster married into the English royal family. Her daughter was Blanche, born in 1341, first wife of John of Gaunt, third son of Edward III.

Of all the Beaumont ladies Blanche is the most celebrated. She was married in May, 1359 at the Royal Abbey at Reading before the king and the royal princes. The festivities included a three days' tournament and this was followed by another lasting three days in the city of London at which King John of France and King David of Scotland, both prisoners of war, were present. The king, the princes and some of the great barons took the places of the mayor, sheriffs and aldermen and upheld the city's challenge, to the astonishment and delight of the spectators. In 1361 Henry, Earl of Lancaster, Blanche's father died and in her right John of Gaunt became Earl. Shortly afterwards he was raised to the dignity of Duke, the second in the kingdom, the first being that of the Black Prince who was Duke of Cornwall.

At the time of Blanche's wedding a young English courtier named Geoffrey Chaucer was campaigning with the army in France and had the bad luck to be taken prisoner. He was later ransomed and the king paid £16 towards obtaining his freedom. Later Chaucer entered the service of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, and when he died in 1368, the service of John of Gaunt.

In the following year the bubonic plague returned to England and among its victims was Blanche, at that time only 28 years of age. The whole court was thrown into mourning, Chaucer, who must have known her well, wrote in her honour The Boke of the Duchesse and in it he expresses the sorrow all must have felt:

"I have of sorwe so grete woon
That joye gete I never noon,
Now that I see my lady bryghte,
Which I have loved with al my myghte,
Is fro me dede, and ys agoon.
Alas! Dethe! what ayleth thee,
That thou nolest have taken me
When that thou toke my lady swete?
That was so fayre, so fresh, so free,
So good, that men may wel y-see
Of al goodness she had no mete!"

When he goes on to describe her beauty he likens her to her own name Blanche, or White, for

"she was lyk to torche bright
That every man may take of light
Ynogh, and hit hath never the lesse".

A court poet may well exaggerate when writing about his patrons, but Chaucer's account of Blanche's beauty and goodness of heart is echoed by all who knew her. Froissart, that very forthright chronicler said both of her and Queen Philippa who died at the same time, "I never saw two such noble dames, so good, so liberal and courteous as this lady and the late Queen of England, nor ever shall, were I to live a thousand years, which is impossible." She was buried with great pomp on the north side of the High Altar in Old St. Paul's where in his turn John of Gaunt, her husband was also laid. The tomb and the handsome monument raised there by their son Henry IV, were destroyed in the fire of London in 1666.

This royal marriage was to have political consequences which moulded the future not only of Europe, but of the whole world. Their youngest son was Henry Earl of Darby, that same Henry who landed at Ravenspur in 1399 and, taking the crown from his cousin Richard II, made himself King Henry IV. Two more kings, Henry V, hero of Agincourt and Henry VI, sprang from this marriage, and there might have been many more had not his son Edward Prince of Wales met his death at Tewkesbury in 1461, thus putting a tragic end to the House of Lancaster.

The marriage of Blanche's daughter Philippa had even more momentous consequences. In 1387 she married John I, King of Portugal, a union which brought the two countries closer together and made John I one of the few foreign knights of the Garter. Their daughter Isabella in marrying Philip the Good of Burgundy brought the Beaumonts into the maelstrom of European politics. Their son Charles the Bold was the ambitious duke who tried to set up an independent state in face of the enmity of Louis XI of France and fell in battle at Nancy. Philip left a daughter Mary who married the Emperor Maximilian of Hapsburg and through them the Beaumont line ran through the centuries - the Emperor Charles V, his son Philip of Spain and the whole Spanish line, the Ferdinands Maximilians and Josephs of the Austrian Hapsburg house up to times as recent as the end of the first World War.

Philippa's other surviving sons, Edward (named after his great-grandfather Edward III of England), Pedro and Henry were concerned with Portuguese affairs. Together they undertook a successful expedition to capture Ceuta in Morocco from the Moors, helped by a force of English men-at-arms sent by Henry V. Prince Henry of Portugal later became known as Henry the Navigator, the patron of explorers whose captains pushed as far as Sierra Leone on the hazardous expeditions to find a route to India by rounding the African continent. Thus from Philippa sprang a line of Portuguese kings, all firm allies of the English Crown.

John the elder son of Henry through his marriage to Eleanor, fifth daughter of Henry Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster again allied his family by marriage with the Royal line. Constable of England and Lord Attendant on Queen Philippa, he was summoned to Parliament on the death of his father by the old Latin family name - Johannes de Bellomonte. At that time Edward III was seeking the friendship of the Netherlands and John, who with his wife who was also in attendance on Queen Philippa, was in the Netherlands and was a signatory to the wedding contract between Edward Prince of Wales (then aged 9) and Joan, daughter of Duke John III of Brabant. He was reputed to have been one of the most gallant men of his day and was a commander-in-chief in the early campaigns of Edward III. His accidental death in a tournament in 1342 deprived England of one who might have been among the great champions in the French wars.

He left an infant son Henry, whose birth in 1340 in the Netherlands was the occasion of a unique royal pronouncement. In those days to be certain of succession it was necessary for a child to be born in England, therefore in the Close Rolls under the date of 1st December 1340 there appears a royal pronouncement noting that John and Eleanor had crossed to Brabant by royal command and the king, "because their stay was very grateful and desirable, as well on account of their service to him, as for the comfort of Queen Philippa", they were caused to stay in the Royal Court. Therefore, the announcement ended, the king "reputes Henry to be their (i.e. John and Eleanor's) true and legitimate son, and grants that, if he survive his father, he shall succeed him as his legitimate heir within the realm of England, notwithstanding that his birth was not in the realm." In the following year his mother, in consideration of her long attendance on Queen Philippa received an annual grant of £100 for life.

Henry, the third Baron was too young to take part in the great victories of the reign and died in 1369 or 1370, before the troubles of Richard II's reign split the nobility into two factions. Had he lived he would doubtless have taken the king's part against Gloucester and the malcontents. In the last year of his life he presented Edward III with houses and gardens at Charing Cross and one of the witnesses to the deed of gift was William of Wykeham. To celebrate his illustrious ancestors he placed in the east window of the church of St. Mary, Barton-on-Humber four shields each with a Latin hexameter line beneath. Translated they ran:

"Jerusalem with Beaumont links her King (i.e. John de Brienne)
Beaumont and Boghan (Buchan) in alliance cling;
Beaumont again to Lancaster is bound" (His mother Eleanor)
----- and the last line refers to John's own marriage with Margaret,
daughter of John de Vere, Seventh Earl of Oxford.
"And Oxford's name is now with Beaumont found."

The window was still in existence in 1642 but was probably destroyed during the Puritan rule when so many beautiful church ornaments and memorials were wantonly smashed up. The Beaumont coat of arms is carved on the woodwork of this church, as it is in many other churches in the County of Lincoln.

John, the fourth Baron Beaumont, Lord of Folkingham and Knight of the Garter was the first of three generations to undertake active service, and was all his short life a strong partisan of Richard II. Though he did not take a great part in the stirring political events during the early years of the reign he was named in 1387 by the Appeals as one of the king's evil advisers and for a short time was expelled from court, but soon regained his position.

His chief service was in campaigns, most of them unfortunately lost through bad organisation and leadership. In 1383 he accompanied the expedition to Flanders led by the warlike Bishop Dispenser of Norwich with the aim of expelling Charles VI, the young king of France, taking part in the triumphal advance along the coast from Calais to the Flemish towns, and in the even more humiliating retreat and evacuation of the country before the Duke of Burgundy, leaving the Flemings isolated and helpless and their markets closed to English trade. Later he joined John of Gaunt in his disastrous campaign to win for himself the crown of Castile which he acquired at least in name by his marriage with Constance, the elder daughter of Pedro the Cruel.

Once back home again, Baron de Beaumont was loaded with honours by the king, who had by this time freed himself from the control of the baronial faction. In 1398 he became Lord High Admiral and a Privy Councillor. In March 1390 during the truce with France he joined the Earl of Huntingdon, Lord Clifford, Sir Peter Courtenay and others in answering the challenge of three young French knights who offered to joust for the country's honour at an appointed place between Boulogne and Calais. This was a splendid tournament, lasting a month at which were present Prince Henry (later Henry IV), Harry Percy (better known as Hotspur) and the cream of European chivalry. Later in the same year John entertained the king at his ancestral home at Beaumanoir. In 1392 he was made Warden of the Cinque Ports and in 1393 on the death of John Lord Devereux he was created eighty-fifth knight of the garter. His plate in the fifteenth stall of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, is charged with the Beaumont and Comyn arms. Three years later, Richard's first Queen having died, he was sent to France to seek the hand of the eight-year-old Prince Isabella.

John did not live to see the disastrous fall of his royal patron. He was killed at the siege of Stirling on September 9th, 1396. In his will he directed that his body should be buried "in Sempyrgham Church near the body of my most honoured Lord my father whom God assoile". John's son Henry, fifth Baron Beaumont was the last of four short-lived barons. His great-grandfather and grandfather had died in their twenties, his father at the age of 32. Of the three, two had been killed. In 1399 King Richard II was dead and his cousin Henry of Lancaster had made himself king. The support Henry of Beaumont's father had given to Richard did not prevent the son being admitted to the favour of the new monarch. In 1399 on his coronation, Henry IV created him a knight of the Bath, and in 1405 a Privy Councillor. The war with the French and the Scots, who were allies, was still going on and Henry joined Bishop Despenser in his last campaign in Flanders. Landing at Calais they took their former road to Dunkirk and Gravelines, capturing the district around. The campaign, however, came to nothing, and England was only saved from French assaults by the civil war which broke out between the Burgundians and the Armagnacs. Henry remained in the king's favour all his life. In the autumn of 1409 he was entertained to dinner with other members of the Court by Prince Henry (later Henry V) and in July he witnessed the royal Charter which made the king's brother Duke of Clarence. It was one of his last public acts of which we know. He died in 1414 leaving as his heir his son John, a boy three years of age. With him, England entered on a century first of glory, then of devastating civil war, ending with the benevolent despotism of Henry VII.

While some of the Beaumonts rose to prominence through their family connections, there were others who, like most younger sons at that time, relied on the services they could give to greater lords with their swords. Such a one was William de Bellomonte, the founder of a Yorkshire branch of the family. He appears to have been brought up to warfare, for we find him in 1191 accompanying Richard I on the Third Crusade and taking part in the siege of Acre. The family with which he found favour was that of de Lacy who in 1253 became Earls of Lincoln. Albert, the first of this family, having accompanied William in 1066 was granted extensive lands in the devastated West Riding of Yorkshire, and here he built the castle of Pontefract. William de Bellomonte held a parcel of land of the de Lacies, and in 1206 was granted by Roger de Laci twelve bovates (probably about 200 acres) of land in Huddersfield on condition that he supplied armed escorts for Roger's despatch-carriers whom he sent from time to time between Pontefract and his castle at Halton in Cheshire. In 1205 he went overseas

with the English army and took part in the campaign which resulted in the loss of Normandy. Like many other soldiers of fortune William seems to have been in financial straits, for we find King John sending an order to the Sheriff of York "to respite William de Bellomonte from the payment of ten marks (£6-6-8) which he owed to the Jews in that city, and to free him from the interest of the debt as long as he should remain beyond the sea with horses and arms. In 1185 his marriage was the subject of a breach of promise, for, having already contracted to the daughter of Ralph de Gedding he married the daughter of Maurice de Barsham. He was fined £23-6-8 and his father-in-law £40. The size of the fines show that William though not as yet a magnate, was certainly no ordinary commoner. The highest office he held was that of Constable of the Castle at Norwich which had been besieged and captured and the city plundered by the French under Louis, son of the French King who was in league with the Barons against King John.

About this time the Bellomontes of Yorkshire established themselves at Crosslandfoss in the Parish of Almondbury where they later occupied the hall. Through their services they also obtained lands in other parts of England. William's youngest son Godfrey possessed the lordships of Semer and Groton in Suffolk which were taken from him by the Abbot of Bury St. Edmunds. An action brought against the Abbot brought about a duel in which the Abbot's champion was killed. This, probably a trial by battle, was quite lawful in Norman times among the nobles and the higher orders of society, but in the wilder and more primitive lands north of the Trent they resorted only too often to ambushes and lawless killings.

The first William de Bellomonte was succeeded by his son William and he by his son Richard who died in 1293 without issue. Richard's brother William succeeded him and lived at Drayton Hall on the Norwich estates, giving the lands at Crosslandfoss, South Kirby and Meltham to Richard's son Robert shortly before he died in 1303 and settled Whitby on Robert and his wife Agnes.

Robert was summoned to Parliament in 1323. In the same year he was Coroner for the county of York but was removed from office because he was not thought to be well enough qualified.

Sir Robert is said to have met his death in one of the lawless episodes which were rife at that time. A neighbour of his named Exley had killed a nephew of Sir John of Eliand Hall. Sir John who was High Steward of the Earl of Warenne was an ambitious and overbearing man who was only too ready to pick a quarrel, in which his enemies Lockwood of Lockwood Hall and Sir Hugh Quarmby became involved on the side of Sir Robert. One night Sir John's men murdered both Quarmby and Lockwood and then made their way to Crossland Hall hoping to surprise Sir Robert. When they got there they found that the drawbridge was up and the house well guarded, so Sir John and his retinue hid themselves in the woods near by. Next morning the servant, all unknowing that the enemies were near, let down the drawbridge. Sir John's men took the house by storm, rushing across the bridge and through the rooms and passages to Sir Robert's chamber. He tried to defend himself but after a short struggle was dragged from his wife's presence into the hall and beheaded. These brutal murders formed the subject of a popular ballad composed by an unknown author about two centuries later.

"To Quarmby Hall they came by night,
And there the lord they slew,
At that time Hugh of Quarmby hight -
Before the country knew.

To Lockwood then the selfsame night
They came, and there they slew
Lockwood of Lockwood, that wiley wight,
That stirr'd the strife anew

When they had slain thus suddenly
Sir Robert Beaumont's aide
To Crossland they came craftily
Of nought they were afraid.

The ballad goes on to describe the assault and murder of Sir Robert:

The lady cry'd, and shriek'd withal,
When as from her they led
Her dearest knight into the hall
And there cut off his head."

Sir Robert and his band of murderers then tried to force the two sons of Sir Robert to sit with them at breakfast but Adam, the younger son refused. In the ballad Elland has a premonition of what Adam may one day do:

"See how this boy", said Elland, "see,
His father's death can take,
If any be, it will be he
That will revengement wrike".

Fifteen years later Sir John's foreboding came true. By that time the sons of Lockwood, Quarby and Robert had grown up and they, with Thomas de Laci who had also had a quarrel with Sir John joined together in a plan to waylay him in Cromwell bottom Wood. As Sir John approached on horseback, Adam de Beaumont seized the bridle and threw the horse back on its haunches. Sir John leapt off, drew his sword but stood not a chance against four young men and was soon left dead in the wood. Some years later the four determined to pursue the feud to the bitter end by killing Sir John's son and heir. On a Palm Sunday they lay in wait for him as he was passing over Elland Mill dam on his way to church with his wife and family. After shooting him with an arrow they fled into a wood, pursued by the Elland family retainers. In the fray which followed Quarby was killed but Lockwood and Adam escaped. The rest of his short life Adam spent in wars in defence of the faith fighting with the Knights of St. John in the Aegean and in Hungary where he gained a great reputation for strength and courage. Later he joined the expedition of the Black Prince to Spain where he was killed in 1367.

In sharp contrast with the Barons Beaumont, the marriages of this branch of the family were confined mainly to the local gentry. Sir Robert who was murdered in 1341 married first, Gracia, daughter of Sir Edward Crossland and secondly Agnes, daughter of John de Quarby who lived only a few miles away to the west of Huddersfield. His second son Thomas, brother of Adam was in the royal army at the siege of Calais in 1346 and in 1355 was taken prisoner by the French. John, his elder brother and heir to his father's estate is believed to have married Margaret, grand-daughter of Richard Radclyffe of Radclyffe Tower near Bury, Lancashire no more than twenty-five miles away. His son and heir, another John married Alicia, daughter of Adam de Hopton of Mirfield and it may have been his grandson, yet another John who married Johanna, daughter and co-heiress of John Lascelis of Lascelis Hall. His son Henry was the founder of the Lascelis Hall branch of the family.

In a pleasant park overlooking the wooded lands below and the distant river Calder which wound its way from Mirfield to Dewsbury, until it was pulled down in 1952 stood the Beaumont mansion of Whitley Hall. Even today, though nothing remains of the old building, the place is still known by the name of Whitley Beaumont. Here, before Tudor times the first mansion was built and in later years altered and enlarged and here the Beaumont family lived until late in the last century. Far from the royal court and high political intrigue, they lived as solid country gentry, took their places in Parliament, on the justice's bench, in the Church and in the armed forces. As such, they remained relatively unknown except in their immediate neighbourhood, but the local churches are studied with their memorials and the historical documents relating to the family form a sound basis for the social and local history of the district in which they lived.

NOTES

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