

CHAPTER THREE

ROLLO, CONQUEROR AND DUKE OF NORMANDY

Twenty-fifth in Ancestry

Section 1, Rollo, His Family and History also of Rolf Thurstaïn and of Malehuc—Section 2, Genealogy of Einar, Earl of the Orkneys.

SECTION 1.

*25. ROLLO, conqueror of Normandy, Duke of Normandy, son of Rognvald, Earl of Mere, Chapter 2, Section 1.

The genuine name is Hrolfr, i.e. Rolf, in various spellings. The French form is Rou, sometimes Rous (whence an odd Latin form Rosus); the Latin is Rollo, like Cnuto, Svenno, &c. The strangest form is Rodla which occurs in a late manuscript of the English Chronicles (a. 876. Thorp's ed.). This was clearly meant to be an English form of Rollo. The English masculine ending 'a' was substituted for the Latin 'o', just as Giso, and Odo are in English Gisa and Oda. The writer also clearly thought that Rollo was a name of the same type as Robert and others, and he fancied that by putting in a 'd' he was restoring it to its genuine Teutonic shape. On account of his great stature, which prevented any horse from carrying him, he was known as Gaungo Hrolfr, or "the walking Rollo." He was one of the most famous vikings of his age. He married first, *More Danico*, Poppa, daughter of Count Berenger, count de Senlis. He married second; Gisela, Gesilda, or Oegidia, daughter of Charles the Simple, King of France, although his first wife was living and he was not divorced from her. [The Norman Conquest, by Edward A. Freeman, vol. 1, page 110-111.]

It will be well to keep in mind that the historians of the time were all members of the established Christian Church, and being intensely partisan, they could not see current events, except from the standpoint of the church. They were dogmatic in their opinions, and therefore they could not understand the sanctity of marriage unless celebrated according to the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. Hence, the priest was perfectly willing to marry Rollo to the king's daughter, although he had a living wife obtained by a pagan ceremony, as thereby he accomplished the condemnation by Rollo of the old alliance, and at the same time bound to France, this strong soldier by ties stronger than those of the treaty by which he had acquired his domain. The Sea-king had so little faith in the new religion that perhaps he felt the new ceremony could do him no harm, and yet please his new friends. It is to his everlasting credit that he nevertheless respected the old marital alliance with Poppa.

These clerical historians assert that Rollo was converted to Christianity in 912. While Prof. A. W. Kerkaldy, after a most careful research, says it is doubtful if the conversion of Rollo ever took place. In this connection he says it is important to note that no Christian name was mentioned for Rollo in the refer-



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ences to him in the documents of 918. It was in this year that he was married to his old wife Poppa, according to the rites of the church. The Historian adding:—He was already married to her mere Danico, and this marriage rendered legitimate in the eyes of his Christian subjects, the two children he had had by her. It is doubtful in view of the subsequent history of Normandy whether a majority of his subjects were Christians. The fact that Rollo yielded to a second marriage only indicates that under him the Church had gained mightily in Normandy, until even the reigning Duke yielded to her desires. Perhaps it was his old age that made him weak, but modern thought will never yield to the statement that the presence of a priest, and the sancity of a church, are necessary to make a marriage legitimate, that has been entered into according to the requirements of the laws of the land in force at the time of its performance. Their children were:—

1. *24. GUILLAUME, or WILLIAM, surnamed LONGUE-ÉPÉE, i. e. LONG SWORD, DUKE OF NORMANDY, Chapter 4, Section 1.
2. Gerloc or Garletta, who received the name of Adele at her baptism, who became the wife of William surnamed tete d' e' toupe, Count of Piton and Duke de Guilme.

Rollo married, as we have stated, according to the rites of the Church, Gisla de France, daughter of King Charles the Simple. The first wife was still living, and historians claim that he never lived with this lady. Nevertheless, this unjoyful union, it is said, was attended with all the discomforts of love and jealousy. There were no children by this marriage. [Leicester Lit. & Phil. Soc. Trans. 1910, No. 14, page 63.]

The following chart will prove helpful to the reader.

26. ROGNVALD Earl of More—Ragnhilda, dau. of Hrolf the Beaked					
Ivar	Thorir	Heldina	Poppa (More—25. ROLLO—Gisela dau. of Charles Danico) dau. of Count Berenger	1st Duke of Normandy	the Simple, King of France second wife
The brothers of Rollo by slave mothers were Hrollauf, King of Iceland and Eyner Earl of the Orkneys					
Gerloc or Garletta rec. name of Adele at bapt.—William, Count of Piton and Duke de Guilme	24. WILLIAM LONGSWORD—Duke of Normandy		Esporta de Senlis dau. of Herbert Count of Senlis	No children	
Gunnor, sister of—23. RICHARD I. Duke of Normandy—(1) Esme or Emma, sec. dau. of Herfaste, a Dane Surnamed The Grand & The Fearless			Hugh, Duke de France & Bourgoyne, Count of Paris & Orleans		

Guillaume, the son of Rollo and Poppa, was brought up by the clergy, who having as they thought, thereby secured a controlling influence on him, were willing to accept him as the lawful heir of his father. It was a period of change from pagan to Christian customs, and one had not yet lost its sanctity nor had the other obtained the full force of absolute control. It was not until after the conquest that it could be said that the Danish customs had succumbed to the French laws. Judged by the standard of the times, the Danish marriage was the most conservative and in every way the most binding ceremony, except in the opinion of the priests whose interests led them to decree otherwise. The priest-

hood however was not yet strongly enough entrenched to execute their decree against a marriage made according to the law of the land but contrary to the canons of the Church.

Very little is said in the Sagas of Göngu Hrolf, the first jarl of Normandy, for he, like all those who left their country to settle in foreign lands, was forgotten by the scalds at home, as these did not take part in their expeditions. The sagas confirm each other in regard to him. But the little we have concerning him is extremely interesting, as his descendants conquered England and part of France. All the different Sagas agree in calling him a son of Rognvald jarl of Norway. [The Viking Age, by Paul B. Du Challeau, vol. 2, page 452.] For example one saga says:

“Rögnvald Maera jarl was a very great friend of King Harald, and was much valued by him. Rognvald was married to Hrolf Nefja’s daughter Hild, and had by her sons Hrolf and Thorir. . .” The Battle song of Einar, Earl of Orkney, fixes their relationship so beautifully that it will bear repetition:—

Where is the spear of Hrollaug, where is
Stout Rolf Ganger’s bloody spear?
I see them not, yet never fear,
For Einar will not vengeance spare
Against his father’s murderers though
Hrollaug and Rolf are somewhat slow
And silent Thorir sits and dreams
At home, beside the mead-bowl’s stream.

There have been quite a few historians of Rollo and his times, beginning with Dudo. They have, however, all failed to distinguish between Rollo and the Norman adventurers who preceded him.

It is important therefore to have an accurate chronology of events contemporary with the time of Rollo and his conquest of Normandy. The following is the chronology as accepted in Norway, and it can be depended on as being accurate in sequence and time of events, to wit:—853. Is the year of Harald Haarfager’s birth. 863. Harald succeeded to his father Halfdan the Black. 864. One Gardar went to Iceland, which had been discovered in 861 by Nadodd. 867. Flakke went to Iceland. 875. Ingulf went as a colonist to occupy Iceland. 885. The battle in Hafursfjord, by which Harald Haargafer became supreme king of Norway. 895. Harald Haarfager’s expedition to Orkney. The banishment of Rolf Ganger from Norway is placed in this year. 898. Eric Bloodyaxe was born. 923. Hakon, called afterwards Athelstan’s foster-son, born. 931. Hakon sent to England. 936. Death of Harald Haarfager. 937. Hakon, Athelstan’s foster-son, king. 941. Athelstan king of England, died. 963. Hakon, Athelstan’s foster-son, killed in battle. [The Chronicles of the Kings of Norway, vol. 1, Ed. 1844, with notes by Lang, page 384.]

Rollo was the beneficiary of a large number of Norman expeditions which had harassed France, particularly the expeditions of his near cousins Halfdan and Gorm, and as the Norman historians wanted to make Rollo appear as a great shining light, they attributed to him events that happened before he was born. The result is there are two Rollos; one a mythical personage who represents all

the Norman exploits in France; the other the real Rollo who, after being banished from Norway, and wandering from place to place, finally settled in Normandy where he founded that dynasty of Norman Dukes which figures so largely in the French history of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The Norman historians, including Dudo, credit all the Norman ventures to Rollo, specially the siege of Paris. If Rollo had really been present at the siege of Paris, from 885 to 889, it was incredible that the fact should be unknown to people on the spot, and yet the people on the spot did not mention the name of Rollo as a leader of the expedition. They mentioned one leader only, a man named Siegfried. Taking the narrative of Dudo point by point, it will be found to be quite uncorroborated by other evidence. At the time of this siege Rollo was in the good graces of King Harold Fairhair in Norway, and had every reason to believe that he would by a happy marriage, as well as by conquest, acquire great wealth in the land of his birth. It is not until the very end of the ninth century that Rollo can possibly appear in French History as an emigrant from Norway. Rollo could, of course, have been a subordinate commander under Siegfried, but even this is quite unlikely.

We are now ready to return to Norway and take up the thread of its history so far as it relates to Rollo. The tragic fate of Halfdan at the hands of Einar in 894, as it became known in Norway, aroused the resentment of Harald and his family. To recall what has already been stated, the brothers of the murdered prince would have immediately equipped an expedition to the isles to chastise the cruel Einar; but Harald reserved this vengeance for his own hand. He fitted out a fleet and set sail for the west. Einar, who was apprised of the king's design, fled to Caithness in Scotland. Harald pursued him thither, but was persuaded to forego his revenge, and to accept 'the price of blood' in the shape of a tribute of sixty marks of gold, to be paid by the inhabitants of Caithness, who had given aid and succour to Einar, as some accounts have it; other accounts say the fine was levied on the inhabitants of the Orkneys. As these poor people were unable to raise this sum, Einar paid it for them, upon condition that they should concede to him certain feudal rights in the country, where, it appears, he had already established some sort of jurisdiction. Thus, by a single incident, this expedition of Harald, designed to inflict a signal vengeance upon Einar, became the means of confirming and strengthening his dominion. [History of the Northmen, by Henry Wheaton, London, 1831.]

Whilst this deadly feud still raged between the families of king Harald and Rognvald, Jarl of Maere, the latter's son, Rollo, returned from one of his distant sea-roving expeditions, and made himself obnoxious, much to the resentment of the incensed king of Norway. Like many others of the Scandinavian youth of high birth, he had become a sea-king and roamed the seas in search of subsistence, and adventures. Among other practices connected with piracy, Harald had prohibited, under the severest penalties, the Strand-hug, or impressement of provisions, which the sea-rovers were in the habit of exercising.

Rollo was noted for the success with which he followed the old northern practice of "Strand-Hug," or seizing by force from off the sea-coast lands anything which he or his crews might want, and then going off to sea again with the booty.

Rollo, who did not know of the death of his father and the disgrace of his family, landed on the island Vigin and began his old habit of using Strand-Hug, he was seized by orders of the king, who caused him to be brought before the Thing, and to be condemned as an outlaw. Rollo's mother and friends offered large sums of money to appease his anger. When Hrolf's mother Hild heard that he was to be banished, she went to the king to ask pardon for Hrolf, but the king was so angry that her prayers were of no avail. Then she sang:—

Disgrace not Hefga's namesake
Nor drive the wolf from the land,
The wise kinsman of Höld,
Why dealest thou thus with him King?

It is bad to worry
Such a wolf of Ygg's
He will not be gentle toward
The King's herds if he runs
Into the woods.

[Heimskringla, Preliminary Dissertation by Laign, chapt. 3, page 110.]

or as another translator makes it read:—

Then Hildo spake these lines—
"Thinkest thou, King Harald, in thy anger
To drive away my brave Rolf Ganger,
Like a mad wolf, from out the land?
Why, Harald, raise thy mighty hand?
Why banish Naefias gallant name-son,
Thy brother of brave udal-men?
Why is thy cruelty so fell?
Bethink thee, monarch, it is ill
With such a wolf at wolf to play,
Who, driven to the wide woods away,
May make the king's best deer his prey."

Seeing that Harald would not pardon him or allow him to remain in Norway, Rollo set forth in search of a home elsewhere.

Europe holds no memorials of ancient historical events which have been attended by such great results in our times, as some rude excavations in the shore-banks of the island of Vigr, in Möre,—which are pointed out by the finger of tradition as the dry rocks in which the vessels of Rolf Ganger, from whom the fifth in descent was William the Conqueror, were drawn up in winter, and from whence he launched them, and set out from Norway on the expedition in which he conquered Normandy. Vigroe, the isle of Vigr, is situated in Haram parish, in the bailiwick of Soud More. Rollo having collected on this island a band of adventurers, some of them, like himself, fugitives from their native country, they started out as vikings, over whom he was sea-king. Says the Saga, Göngu Hrolf then went westward across the sea to the Sudrey-jar (Hebrides), and thence west to Valland, and made war there, and got a large jarl's realm, where he induced many Northmen to settle down. It was afterwards called Normandi. Says the Saga, Göngu Hrolf's son 'William' (Vilhjalm) was father of Richard