

CHAPTER EIGHT

REGNAULT Twentieth in Ancestry

Section 1, Family of Regnault—Section 2, Contemporary History.

SECTION 1.

*20. REGNAULT, Count of Corbeil by courtesy, son of Guillaume, Chapter 7, Section 1, married a daughter of the nobility of Northumberland in England. The Toesnis and other Norman nobles had also found happy marriages in the same nobility. Robert de Toesni, subsequently known as Robert de Stafford and overlord of Peshall in Staffordshire, was the son of Elizabeth the daughter of Oswulf the son of Franc, who was the son of Oswulf I, Earl of Northumberland. The Albinis also married daughters of the royal house of Northumberland. Regnault was in Northumberland together with his wife and infant son when his father Werlac was banished from Normandy, and all his titles and estates were forfeited. Later Regnault returned to France and entered the service of the King of France, who recognized him as de Corbeil and upon the death of Werlac addressed him as Count de Corbeil. Children:—

1. *19. GILBERT DE CORBEIL, Chapter 9, Section 1.
2. Frederick de Corbeil.
3. Robert of Prestatyn surnamed Banastre or Banaster, resided County Flint, Wales. His descendants called themselves Banistre.
4. Godifu, who as a widow married Siward, Earl of Northumberland, as his second wife.

In a learned monograph on the Counts of Corbeil, which was issued by the local historical society of Corbeil, it is stated that not anything remarkable is known concerning this prince who succeeded his father in the title of Count of Corbeil, except that it is well established that he was one of the favorites of King Philip I of France and was a member of his court.

He affixed his seal to the act of dedication in 1067 of the new church of St. Martin des Champs. The charter of confirmation, made 1067, confirming the gifts made by kings Robert and Henry to the church of St. Martin des Champs and also to the letters of acquiescence by their heirs, carried as witnesses the seal of Regnault Count of Corbeil as well as of Frederick de Corbeil his son. He is there described as Regnaldus Comes Corbeiliensi, that is to say as one who should hold Corbeil, and his son as de Corbeil, i.e. of the ruling family of Corbeil. Regnault also held the manor of Banestere in Calabria, Italy, which his father had acquired from Robert Guiscard.

De la Barre was not able to find where Regnault had allied himself by marriage, nor if he left children, for the simple reason that they had remained in a place of safety in Northumberland, England, where there existed both a strong colony

of Norsemen, many of them his near kinsmen, and the greatest schools of the time.

Regnault before his death gave to his son Gilbert in Northumberland, England, the bulk of his fortune, whatever it may have been, much or little. Therefore Regnault said in his will that what is left is so little that it was not worth administering upon. [Society Historie & Archeologique de Corbeil de Etamps et du Huipoix, bulletins 10 & 5.]

He was buried in the church of the monks of Vincennes in a tomb of black marble which had been placed in the nave of the church of the convent.

This ended the line of our family as Counts of Corbeil. Bouchard II, who succeeded, is not related to Regnault as son or brother. This Bouchard was grandson of Bouchard I.

SECTION 2.

The death of Edward III, of the Saxon line of kings in England, precipitated a contest for the succession, which finally ended by William Duke of Normandy, son of Robert, Chapter 7, Section 2, becoming William I of the Norman kings of England. William had made peace with many of his nobles whom he had injured and banished. The Counts of Corbeil were not of this number. Mere personal advantage could not atone for an injury such as they had received. He therefore felt strong enough to advance himself as a candidate for the English throne. When Rollo came to Normandy he was, as we have seen, the beneficiary of many years of warfare by other Norman commanders who had preceded him in their depredations on the Seine country in France. Here again we are about to see the house of Rollo a beneficiary of the forces of Denmark and the other Northern Danish nations who attempted by warfare to settle this same succession. At this time William also made the most extravagant concessions to the clergy of the Catholic Church whereby he also secured their help and cooperation.

Tostig, the brother of Harold, the new English king, upon a pilgrimage to the Vatican had unfortunately threatened the Pope, and therefore the Catholic Church was not inclined to help the English king. Indeed it could be truthfully said that the Pope was hostile. This opened to William an opportunity of which he was not slow to avail himself. As a consequence we shall see this strange alignment of forces in the contest for the conquest of England: on the one side are the Pagan Norsemen, their leader, the offspring of a Danish heathen marriage, allied with the Catholics under the leadership of that Lanfranc who first divided the Bible into chapters. While on the other, Christian England stands alone and weakened, for now the English forces were greatly handicapped by the inclination of the clergy to follow the lead of the Holy Roman father.

The cause of William, Duke of the Normans, after some hesitation, was zealously taken up by his own people, while volunteers urged by the clergy of France flocked eagerly to his muster from the territories of all the neighboring princes. His undertaking received the highest religious sanctions in the blessing of the Roman Pontiff. Had the enterprise been one against Anjou or France, warfare would have begun long before the period of the year which we have now reached. But William's present warfare was aimed at a realm whose insular

position shielded it at least for a season. England could be reached only by sea, and the Normandy of those days had ceased to be a naval power. The army destined to undertake the conquest of England had to be carried across the channel. A vast fleet was therefore needed, and a fleet had to be created for the purpose. The creation of that fleet was the work of the summer of the great war, while King Harold of England was so carefully guarding his southern coasts. As soon as the undertaking was finally determined on, the woods of Normandy began to be felled, and the heavens of Normandy resounded with the axes and hammers of carpenters and ship-builders. A large proportion of the ships were the offerings of the great barons and prelates of the land. William Fitz-Osbern, who had been the first man in Normandy to pledge himself to the enterprise, now redeemed his pledge by the gift of sixty ships. The same large number was contributed by Roger of Montgomery, and by Roger de Beaumont, and also by Hugh of Avranches, a youth of very tender years, the future Earl of Chester, who for some reason or other must have been in ward to the Duke of Normandy. Fifty ships with sixty knights, formed the contingent of Hugh of Montfort. Two less famous men, Fulk the Lame and Gerald the Seneschal, contributed forty each. The gift of Walter Giffard was thirty ships with a hundred knights. The same number of ships, with their crews, were supplied by Vulgrin, the pious and peaceful Bishop of Le Mans. He, we are told, was specially zealous in the Duke's cause, looking on him as the champion of Rome and of Christendom. But greater even than these great contingents, were the gifts of the Duke's own kinsfolk, of the members of the ducal house no less than of those sons of his mother whom his bounty had so lavishly enriched. A hundred and twenty ships, the largest offering in the whole list, were the contribution of Robert the Count of Mortain. This was of course given out of the vast wealth that had been stolen from Werlac, Count of Corbeil, and given to Robert by William. A gift, second only to that of his brother, of a hundred ships, was the contribution of Odo, the Bishop of Bayeux. William of Evreux gave eighty, Robert of Eu sixty. The monk Nicholas, the son of Duke Richard the Third, now Abbot of the great house of Saint Ouen, gave twenty ships with a hundred knights. Others of less degree gave one ship or more, according to their means. And among these was another monk, of less lofty birth, but of higher personal renown, than the princely Abbot of Saint Ouens. A single ship with twenty knights was the offering of Remigius, then almoner of the house of Fecamp, but who was in aftertimes to be the last prelate of the ancient see of Dorchester, the first who placed his throne on the lordly steep of more famous Lincoln. But one gift, though the gift of a single ship only, had a value beyond all the others in the eyes of the Duke. The ship which was destined for his own use, the ship which was to bear William and his fortune, was the offering of the conjugal love of the Duchess Matilda. This chosen vessel bore the name of Mora, the ancient domain of his ancestor Rognvald. Either at its prow or at its stern it bore the likeness of a boy wrought in gold blowing an ivory horn. [The Norman Conquest, by Edward A. Freeman, vol. 3, page 253-260.]

While William was thus busily pressing his warlike preparations, he was no less characteristically largely occupied with ecclesiastical affairs. Indeed he had made himself the chosen champion of the saints and of their honor. Says one

historian, "The armed missionary who was setting forth to convert the stiff-necked islanders, from the error of their ways, was bound, more than ever, to show himself a faithful nursing-father to the church at home," which must strike the thoughtful student of this time with wonder that so great a Pagan should so suddenly and without apparent conversion become so devoted a Christian. On the other hand, the story of the conversion of England to Christianity is one of the most beautiful in all the history of the spread of Christ's teachings to the heathen in the uttermost parts of the earth. In the darkest ages, when all Europe was in the grip of the densest ignorance and even the Roman church was affected, the holy men of Northumbria kept the fires of religion burning and the lamp of knowledge well trimmed. All this time, yea even at this moment, the Normans were Pagans, while England was not only loyal and true to her Christian faith, but she had yielded unwilling obedience to the Pope in Rome as the head of her system of religion. At that time there were many churches in England who could trace an unbroken existence from the beginning of the seventh century. And in the north within the boundaries of the old Bernician Kingdom, of which English Northumbria had been part, could be found Christian settlements and churches which were in existence before the fifth century and who could trace through Ireland and its missionaries to the Apostolic Church at Tarshish, in Spain, and the Phoenician church at Damascus, whereby they had an ancestry to Apostolic times irrespective of the Roman Church. Yet now in the eleventh century we find the clergy of France, acting under the command of the Pope, supporting an invasion of England by the heathen Normans so as to convert the followers of the many century old English Christianity. As the story proceeds we shall see what this conversion meant to our ancestors, as well as to the people of England. If the Norman conquerors in their missionary efforts omitted the commission of any crime it was simply because the evil one had not then made it known to mankind.

The clergy, who were also the historians, take great pains to tell us that in a court or council which the Duke held at Bonneville in the month of June, two important ecclesiastical appointments were made. Two great Abbeys needed chiefs. The chair of Saint Evroul was void by the death of Abbot Osbern, and the new monastery of Saint Stephen was now far enough advanced towards perfection for the brotherhood to be regularly organized under an Abbot. The monks of Saint Evroul petitioned the duke for the appointment of a new head of their body. William, after consulting with the Diocesan Hugh of Lisieux, placed the pastoral staff in the hand of the Prior Mainer, who presently received the abbatial benediction from the Bishop. But, say the clergy, a greater than Mainer was on this same day advanced from the second to the highest rank in monastic dignity. It was at this court at Bonneville that the renowned Prior of Bec, the future Primate of Canterbury, the man whose acute and busy spirit made him well nigh the soul of his master's enterprise, became the first chief of his master's great foundation. The scruples of the great scholar and diplomatist had been overcome, and in the same hour in which Mainer received the staff of Saint Evroul, Lanfranc, one of the most masterly politicians of all time, also received the staff of the still more famous house of Saint Stephen. In order that

the faithful may appreciate the completeness of William's conversion, the clergy historians say the policy of pushing on the two great expiatory foundations at this particular moment is obvious. The new champion of the church must, as far as might be, wipe out all memory of his former sins. William must set out on his holy enterprise with perfectly clean hands, and Matilda must be able to lift up hands no less clean, as she prayed for his safety and victory before the altars which she had reared. Indeed, they go on to say even without this overwhelming motive, the eve of so great and hazardous an undertaking was a moment which specially called for works of devotion of every kind, and that it was so felt by others in Normandy besides the duke and duchess. At this time therefore, besides the organization of William's foundation under its first and greatest abbot, the material fabric of Matilda's foundation was so eagerly pressed on, that the unfinished minster was hallowed, three days after the appointment of the two abbots. As part of that great ceremony, the ducal pair offered on the altar of God an offering more costly than lands or building or jewelled ornaments. In a milder sense than that in which the words were used by the ancient prophet, they gave their first-born for their transgressions, the fruit of their bodies for the sin of their souls. The Duke's eldest daughter Cecily, now a child, but in after days to become a renowned abbess of her mother's foundation, was dedicated by her parents as a virgin set apart for God's service. It was not however till nine years later that her lips pronounced the irrevocable vows.

These ecclesiastical ceremonies are the last Norman events of a peaceful kind during this year of wonders. They answer to the ecclesiastical events which happened in England at a time a little earlier. The establishment of Lanfranc at Saint Stephen's, the consecration of the minster of the Trinity, answers to King Harold's renewed gifts to Waltham, to his labors for ecclesiastical reformation at Ely. On each side of the Channel the rival princes and their subjects were striving to win the favor of Heaven's vicar by acts of special devotion. But Harold, while already a Christian, was an Englishman with an Englishman's love of liberty. Hence he would not hesitate to stand against the Holy Father should the interests of his subjects require it. As a consequence his offerings brought no response from Rome. William, on the contrary, was a Pagan with a contempt for the Christian religion and its teachings as is evidenced by all the acts of his eventful life. In the last analysis William's expedition had not even the excuse of his ancestor Rollo in coming to Normandy—that he and his followers were without a home land. It was purely a war of conquest, against a nation of at least equal civilization, and his ally and friend. In which contest the Latin church at large was arrayed against its own English division, and in which the forces of the invaders, although Christians, had by alliance with the pagan Scandinavians secured the weight of arms and the overpowering force of numbers. Even then the plans of the Normans would have failed, through their perfidy in not going to England at the same time as their Danish allies, had Harold not been so anxious to fulfill his kingly duties and, against the advice of his counsellors, rashly risked his crown upon the outcome of a single battle. Whereas the harassing of the Normans by a series of indecisive battles would have destroyed their reserves, and brought upon them the great reserve force of all England.

At last in the course of the month of August, 1066, the Norman fleet was ready to set sail on its great enterprise. William was now to be occupied with war, and with war alone. He entrusted the government of the duchy to Matilda, his wife, daughter of Baldwin, Count of Flanders, with the help of a council of wise men, at whose head stood the famous Roger of Beaumont. The Duke himself hastened to the spot which had been chosen for the embarkation. William gave as an excuse for his delay in coming to the help of his northern allies that there was no favorable wind to waft his ships across the English channel.

The south wind, for which William so eagerly waited, was as slow in coming as the east wind which was so eagerly looked for when a later William was waiting to set forth for the shores of England on a widely different errand. The fleet was detained for a whole month at the mouth of the Dive, and the panegyrist of William grows eloquent on the wonderful good order and peaceable demeanor of the host which was, no doubt most unwillingly, subjected to this untoward delay. All of which is very well as a statement of history, but the truth is that William was waiting to see what would happen to the much larger force approaching England from the north, and was watching for excuses to cover his own delay. In fact he was waiting to see how the wind of events would blow in England before he ventured to cross the Channel.

In the meantime, in the month of August, relying upon the active help of William of Normandy, Harold, king of Norway, and Tostig, brother of King Harold of England, with a powerful fleet set sail over the wide sea, and, steering for England with a favorable apartic, or north wind, landed in Yorkshire, which was the first object of their invasion. Meanwhile, Harold, of England, having intelligence of the descent of the Norwegians, withdraw his ships and troops from Hastings and Pevensey, and the other seaports on the coast lying opposite to Normandy, which he had carefully guarded with a powerful armament during the whole of the year, and threw himself unexpectedly, with a strong force by hasty marches on his enemies from the north. A hard-fought battle ensued, in which there was great effusion of blood on both sides, vast numbers being slain with brutal rage. At last the furious attacks of the English secured them the victory, and the king of Norway, as well as Tostig, with their whole army, were slain. Neither the English nor the Norman historians lay any stress upon William's faithlessness to his Scandinavian allies. When Normandy was hard pressed by the King of France, the Northmen came to its rescue, and although they conquered the land, they handed it back to the Norman Duke and nobility. Not only once did this happen, but twice, and possibly thrice, yet William stood looking over the sea while they were being defeated, waiting for a favorable wind to carry him only a few miles across the English Channel. [Ecclesiastical History of England & Normandy, by Ordericus Vitalis, vol. 1.]

The Norman expedition crossed the sea on the night of the third of the calends of October (29th September), which the Catholic church observes as the feast of St. Michael the archangel, and, meeting with no resistance, and landing safely on the coast of England, took possession of Pevensey and Hastings, the defence of which was entrusted to a chosen body of soldiers, to cover a retreat and guard the fleet.

Meanwhile King Harold, after having put to the sword his brother Tostig, and his royal enemy, King Harold of Norway, and slaughtered their immense army, returned in triumph to London. Harold's rejoicings for his bloody victory were soon darkened by the threatening clouds of a still heavier storm. Nor was he suffered long to enjoy the security procured by his brother's death; for a hasty messenger brought him the intelligence that the Normans had embarked. Learning soon afterwards that they had actually landed, he made preparations for a fresh conflict. For his intrepidity was dauntless, and his conduct of affairs admirable, while his personal strength was great, his presence commanding, and he had the arts of a persuasive eloquence, and of a courtesy which endeared him to his supporters. Still his mother Githa, who was much afflicted by the death of her son Tostig, and his other faithful friends, dissuaded him from engaging in battle with the Normans.

Harold was very indignant at this and for six days he sent forth the summons to call the people to arms from all quarters, and, having assembled vast numbers of the English, he led them by forced marches against the enemy. It was his design to take them unawares, and crush them at once by a night attack, or, at least, by a sudden onset, and, that they might not escape by sea, he caused a fleet of seventy ships, full of soldiers, to guard the coast. Duke William, having intelligence of Harold's approach, ordered his troops to take to their arms on the morning of Saturday. The battle commenced at the third hour of the ides (14th) of October, and was fought desperately the whole day, with the loss of many thousand men on both sides. The Norman duke drew up his light troops, consisting of archers and men armed with cross-bows, in the first line; the infantry in armour formed the second rank; and in the third were placed the cavalry, in the centre of which the duke stationed himself with the flower of his troops, so as to be able to issue his commands, and give support to every part of the army.

On the other side, the English troops, assembled from all parts of the neighborhood, took post at a place which was anciently called Senlac, many of them personally devoted to the cause of Harold, and all to that of their country, which they were resolved to defend against the foreigners. Dismounting from their horses, on which it was determined not to rely, they formed a solid column of infantry, and thus stood firm in the position they had taken. It is easy to see that this is the Norman account. They lay great stress upon the fact that Harold is supposed to have sworn that William should be the King of England. It seems strange that no historian has a word to say concerning the English people and their choice in the matter.

Turstin, descended from Horllauf brother of Rollo, bore the standard of Normandy. The sound of the trumpets in both armies was the terrible signal for beginning the battle. The Normans made the first attack with ardour and gallantry, their infantry rushing forward to provoke the English, and spreading wounds and death through their ranks, by showers of arrows and bolts. The English, on their side, made a stout resistance, each man straining his powers to the utmost. The battle raged for some time with the utmost violence between both parties. At length the indomitable bravery of the English threw the Bretons, both horse and foot, and the other auxiliary troops composing the left

wing into confusion, and, in their rout, they drew with them almost all the rest of the duke's army, who, in their panic, believed that he was slain. The duke, perceiving that large bodies from the enemy had broken their ranks in pursuit of his flying troops, rode up to the fugitives and checked their retreat, loudly threatening them, and striking with his lance. Taking off his helmet, and exposing his naked head, he shouted: "See, I am here; I am still living, and, by God's help, shall yet have the victory." Suddenly the courage of the fugitives was restored by these bold words of the duke; and, intercepting some thousands of their pursuers, they cut them down in a moment. In this manner, the Normans, twice again pretending to retreat, and, when they were followed by the English, suddenly wheeling their horses, cut their pursuers off from the main body, surrounded and slew them. The ranks of the English were much thinned by these dangerous feints, through which they fell separated from each other; so that, when thousands were thus slaughtered, the Normans attacked the survivors with still greater vigor. They were charged home by the troops of Maine, France, Brittany, and Aquitaine, and great numbers of them miserably perished.

Although the battle was fought with the greatest fury from nine o'clock in the morning, King Harold was slain in the first onset, and his brother Earl Leofwin fell some time afterwards, and it was this fact which decided the fate of England, as it removed the defender of the crown and there could be no succession by inheritance, Harold having been elected King of England. Towards evening, the English finding that their king and the chief nobles of the realm, with a great part of their army, had fallen, while the Normans still showed a bold front, and made desperate attacks on all who made any resistance, they had recourse to flight as expeditiously as they could. Various were the fortunes which attended their retreat; some recovering their horses, some on foot, attempted to escape by the highways; more sought to save themselves by striking across the country. The Normans, finding the English completely routed, pursued them vigorously all Sunday night, but not without suffering a great loss; for, galloping onward in hot pursuit, they fell unawares, horses and armour, into an ancient trench, overgrown and concealed by rank grass, and men in their armour and horses rolling over each other, were crushed and smothered. This accident restored confidence to the routed English, for, perceiving the advantage given them by the mouldering rampart and a succession of ditches, they rallied in a body, and, making a sudden stand, caused the Normans severe loss. At this place Eugenulf, lord of Laigle, and many others fell, the number of the Normans who perished being, as reported by some who were present, nearly fifteen thousand. Duke William, perceiving the English troops suddenly rally, did not halt; and when he found Count Eustace with fifty men-at-arms retreating, and the count wished him to have the signal sounded for recalling the pursuers, he commanded him with a loud voice to stand firm. The victory being secured, the duke returned to the field of battle, where he viewed the dreadful carnage; the flower of the youth and nobility of England covered the ground far and near stained with blood. Harold could not be discovered by his features, but was recognized by other tokens, and his corpse, being borne to the duke's camp, was, by order of the

conqueror, delivered to William Mallet for interment near the seashore, which had long been guarded by his arms.

After that Harold was slain, Stigand, archbishop of Canterbury, and the great earls Edwin and Morcar, with the other English nobles, who were not engaged in the battle of Senlac, declared Edgar Etheling, son of Edward king of Hungary, son of Edmund Ironside, king, and gave out that they were resolved to fight bravely under that prince, for their country and their nation, against foreign enemies. Meanwhile duke William, having intelligence that they were assembling in increasing numbers, marched with a strong force, and encamping near London, detached fifty knights and men-at-arms in advance, who compelled the troops which issued from the city to oppose them, to retreat within the walls, after losing many of their number, to the great sorrow of the citizens, who lamented their sons and friends. Fire also was added to the calamities inflicted on them, all the buildings on that side of the river being burnt. Whereupon the duke crossed the Thames and marched to Wallingford.

Stigand, the archbishop, and other English nobles, met him there, and, abandoning the cause of Edgar, came to terms with William, to whom they did homage, and being received with favor were secured in all their honors and estates. The Londoners, also being better advised, now transferred their allegiance to the duke, and delivered to him such and so many hostages as he required. Edgar Etheling therefore, who had been declared king by the English, having no means of resistance, humbly surrendered his person and his kingdom to William. This young prince was of mild and ingenuous disposition, and being a kinsman of king Edward the Great, as his nephew's son, the duke affectionately embraced him, and treated him all his life with the regard due to a son. [Ecclesiastical History of England & Normandy, by Ordericus Vitalis, vol. 1.]