

## CHAPTER I

### THE EARLS OF CORBEIL TO ROBERT DE CORBEIL OR DE PESHALE, FIRST LORD OF PESHALE

ROBERT DE PESHALE, the first of that name, and the first Lord of Peshale, was the son of Guilbert, a younger son of Rainaud, the fifth Earl of Corbeil, Normandy.<sup>1</sup> This Guilbert de Corbeil accompanied William the Conqueror on his final expedition into England in 1066.<sup>2</sup> His son, Robert, who probably came over with him, was granted the Lordship of Peshale by Robert de Stafford about the time of the compilation of the Domesday Book, as will be shown later in Chapter II.

The Corbeils were a powerful Norman family descended, in common with the Dukes of Normandy, from Rollo, the Viking leader of the Danish founders of Normandy. The origin of Rollo is obscure, but Norse tradition, as given by Snorri Sturluson, makes Rollo to be one Hrólfr, son of Rögnvaldr, Earl of More, who led a Viking life in the West of Scandinavia, in the reign of Harfager, King of Norway.

According to various Sagas quoted by Du Chaillu in *The Viking Age*, Rögnvaldr was the son of Eystein Glumra, son of Ivar Uppland Jarl, son of Halfdan the Old. He assisted King Harald in the conquest of Norway, and

<sup>1</sup> Anderson's *Genealogical Tables*, 490.

<sup>2</sup> How and Holinshed's *Chronicle*, vol. i.

received in return for his services the two Maeris and Raumsdal. He married Ragnhildr, daughter of Hrólfr Nefja, by whom he had three sons, viz., Ivar, who fell in the Hebrides, whilst on an expedition with King Harald; Hrólfr, or Rollo as he was afterwards called by the French; and Thörir the Silent, who married King Harald's daughter Arbot, by whom he had a daughter, Bergljot, mother of Hakon Jarl the Great, the hero of the battle of Goms-viking.

Rollo, the second son, was expelled from Norway in the latter half of the ninth century for making a raid on the coast between Norway and Gothland, contrary to the King's commands. On being outlawed, he first retired with his ships among the islands of the Hebrides, whither the flower of the Norwegian nobility had fled on the conquest of the Kingdom by Harald. Those warriors readily accepted Rollo as their leader, and soon began reasserting their old habits of raid and plunder.

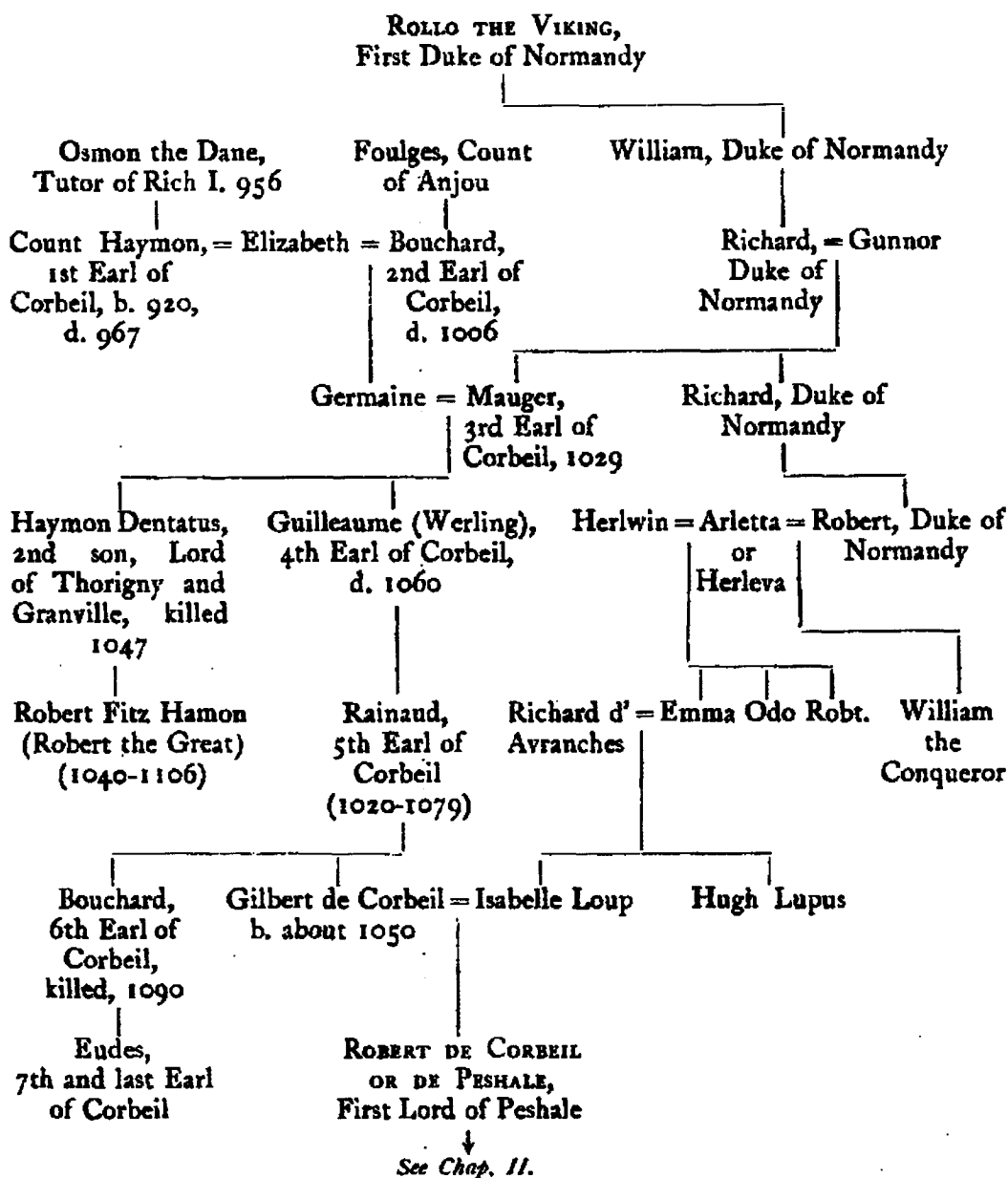
Towards the end of the ninth century, Rollo and his followers made several attacks on French coastal towns, culminating in the siege of Paris of 886 when the City was successfully defended by Count Odo. In 911, however, Charles the Simple, then King of France, saved the country from further attacks by the Northmen by the Treaty of Clair-sur-Epte. By that Treaty, the district of the Lower Seine, now called Normandy, was given to Rollo and his followers, who rapidly adopted the French language, manners, and religion, and came to be known as the Normans.

Duke Rollo appears to have been baptized into the Christian faith in the year 912, and in 919, he was married to his old love Popei, daughter of Beringer, Earl of Bessin and Bayeux, whom he had taken captive at the fall of Bayeux in 890. He was already married to her '*more Danico*,' but this Christian marriage rendered legitimate, in the eyes of his Christian subjects, the two children he had

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had by her, namely, William and Gerloc or Gerletta, who received the name of Adela at her baptism, and afterwards became the wife of William, Duke of Aquitaine and Poitiers.

In 926, Rollo, owing to his extreme age, handed over the cares of government to his son William, and on his death some five years afterwards, was buried at Rouen. A tomb with inscription erected to his memory, several hundreds of years afterwards, is to be seen there still.

Dean Spence in his *Homes of the Norman Dukes*, writes of Rollo as follows :

‘The thirty wild years as a rover by land and sea, thirty years of rapine and of cruel deeds done to well-nigh defenceless cities, villages, and monasteries, would seem a strange preparation for one who was to organize an important nation, who was to weld together men of various races, who was to lay the strong ground stories of a mighty realm, destined in a few short years powerfully to influence the history of the world. Yet this is what Rollo the Viking, the wild Northman freebooter, did in Rouen and Bayeux, between A.D. 911 and A.D. 927. The first of the seven mighty Dukes of Normandy must have been more than sixty years old when he began his curious, but enduring work. For enduring it indeed was. What he began his six successors went on with and developed—the strong and firm government, the respect for the Christian faith, law and order, the gradual restoration of the old ruined religious houses and their great educational and other works, the curious welding together of Dane and Frenchman which produced the Norman,—all these changes were the care of the old freebooter Rollo the Viking, his children and children’s children for six generations, so that in less than a century and a half after the grim old Dane was laid in his tomb in the Rouen Minster that he had restored, his Norman land was famous for its new school of architecture, for its lovely minsters, its vast monasteries, its flourishing

cities ; was (still more remarkable) famous for its matchless schools, and even for the wealth and beauty of its "Romance" or French literature. For three generations, that is during the reigns of the first three Dukes, a period of some ninety eventful years, the old Norsk religion—in which Thor and Odin were worshipped, and the wild banqueting hall of Valhalla looked to as the glorious goal of the unconquered fighting hero—struggled with Christianity in the hearts of the great Norman Dukes and their faithful companions in arms. Rollo and his two successors were more than nominal Christians, as we shall see ; nay, at times his son and grandson were even fervent devotees to the Christian faith ; yet ever and anon the spirit of the old loved Paganism of their fathers influenced them and their followers. This was especially noticeable in their marriages. The aversion of these brilliant and successful men to the Christian marriage tie is remarkable, and the first three Dukes made no concealment of their dislike to the princesses to whom, mainly for political reasons, they were united by Christian rites. Their love and affection all belonged to the partners whom they had chosen for themselves, and to whom some Pagan rite loosely bound them, and not to those high-born women, whom, without pretending to love, they had married with all the ceremony of the Christian Church.'

Rollo's son William, surnamed Longsword, is said to have been a man of culture and refinement, as well as a warrior unrivalled in horsemanship and the use of arms. He was a strong Churchman, and during his reign rebuilt the Abbey of Jumièges. With all his zeal for the new faith, however, he did not appreciate the Church's teaching of the sanctity of marriage, and, like his father, contracted a 'Danish' marriage with one Espriota<sup>1</sup> (daughter of Herbert, Earl of Senlis, and sister of Bernard the Dane), by whom he had a son Richard his successor. Soon after the birth of Richard, William was persuaded by one of his Counsellors to enter

<sup>1</sup> St. Alleis, Guillaume de Jumièges.

into a Christian marriage with one Luitgard, daughter of Herbert Count of Vermandois, but there was no issue of this marriage.

In 936, Duke William, accompanied by Hugh the Great, Herbert Count of Vermandois, and others, received at Boulogne, on his landing from England, Louis d'Outremer, the new King of France, son of Charles the Simple, who acquired his nickname by having been educated at the English Court. William conducted him to Laon and assisted at his coronation. Three years afterwards, however, he quarrelled with him and entered into a formal league against him with Hugh the Great and Herbert of Vermandois. The remainder of his life was occupied in invasions and political disturbances, and he was assassinated in the year 942,<sup>1</sup> after a reign of less than twenty years.

Upon William's assassination, Bernard the Dane, the brother of Espriota, fetched from Bayeux William's only child Richard, then barely ten years old, in order that he might be solemnly invested with the ducal sword and mantle and to receive the homage of the Normans. Dean Spence describes the scene as follows :

'The Norman chieftains gathered round William Longsword's coffin. They included old grey-headed companions of Rollo, with their sons and grandsons, men who were the ancestors of the future conquerors of Italy and Sicily ; men, whose children's children fought and won on the stricken field of Hastings ; men, whose descendants became the foremost Crusaders, the fathers of the proudest Houses of the mighty Anglo-Norman kingdom, and in their midst, standing by his murdered father's coffin, the little fair-haired boy with ruddy cheeks, whom they had fetched from Danish Bayeux. One grey-headed chieftain held the ducal coronet on the boy's head, one kissed the little hand, and the others swore eternal allegiance and fidelity to their child Duke Richard, who in sorrow and perplexity stood gazing on his

<sup>1</sup> Anselme and Guillaume de Jumièges.

father's coffin. It was the last great service Rollo's son could do his people and the land, this welding together by his coffin the varied interests of his mighty chieftains. In this solemn moment the Norman Dane and the Norman Frenchmen forgot their jealousies, their antipathies, the conflicting interests of the old religion and the new, in their stern resolve to avenge their master's death by raising the throne of their master's son higher than the thrones of any of the Princes of France.'

Acknowledged by the Norman chiefs, Richard next received a formal investiture from the French King. Louis, however, under the pretence of educating the young Duke at his own court, persuaded the Normans to allow Richard to accompany him back to France. Soon after, Richard was imprisoned at Montleon, and Louis sought to recover Normandy for himself. A Norman esquire, Osmund or Osmon the Dane, had been allowed to accompany Richard to Montleon as his tutor however, and with his help he escaped and joined his Uncle Bernard. Thereupon Louis, with the aid of Hugh the Great, in the year 945, made war upon the Normans. Bernard called to his assistance the King of Denmark, and Louis was defeated. Peace was concluded, and Richard received a further grant of territory. Osmon then skilfully arranged a marriage between the young Duke and Esmé, daughter of Hugh the Great, then Count of Paris and the most powerful man in France.

With the celebration of this marriage commences the history of the Earldom of Corbeil. The occasion is described by Le Paire, in his book on the *History of the Town of Corbeil*, published in Paris in 1901. Referring to the marriage of Richard and Esmé, this author states that the betrothal ceremonies were carried out at Paris in 956. All the nobility of Normandy were present at this festivity, amongst them being Haymon, son of Osmon, a young man of much promise, 'beloved and made much of by the ladies.' In the French Court was a lady equally prominent by name, Elizabeth, a

near relative of Avoye, wife of Hugh the Great and sister of the Emperor Othon. These young people fell in love with each other, and the match being approved by the statesmen on both sides, Elizabeth was married to Haymon in the following year, viz. 957. As a wedding gift, Hugh the Great gave Haymon the Earldom of Corbeil and the Manor of Gournay on the Marne. At this time Hugh the Great was at enmity with the Emperor Othon, and hoped by these intermarriages to keep the support of Normandy.

This marriage of the young Duke with a daughter of Hugh the Great was not pleasing to Louis, and shortly afterwards he allied himself to Othon of Germany, and attacked Normandy. Othon and Louis penetrated as far as Rouen, where Hugh the Great had withdrawn with Richard, Duke of Normandy, now his son-in-law. Here they were repulsed in battle by the two princes and compelled to retreat.

Haymon, the first Earl of Corbeil, was naturally a strong supporter of Richard, and it is recorded that he and his followers greatly distinguished themselves at this battle. After depositing his booty in his castle at Corbeil, Haymon set out to avenge himself on certain nobles who, under cover of the foreign invasion, had offended him. Amongst these was the Count of Pallnau,—Pallnau being a small castle situated at the junction of the rivers Etamples and Essonne, above the bridge of Gomiers. In this castle were preserved the relics of two patron saints, St. Exupere or St. Spire and St. Leu, both Bishops of Bayeux. Haymon took the castle by storm and slaughtered the defenders. The relics he retained as his own portion of the booty, and resolved to build a church at Corbeil in which to place them.

The booty taken during the war and the ransom of his prisoners provided funds for the building of the church, and these were supplemented by property left him by his father, Osmon. The church was built and the relics installed

therein, and provision was also made for the upkeep of four priests to celebrate Holy Mass daily in the church. According to the Abbé Lebœuf, the building was completed in the year 963.

About the same time the relics of St. Guenault, Abbé of Landevenne, were brought from Courcouronne to the Castle of Corbeil, and placed in the care of Count Haymon. It is recorded that the Count received them with great ceremony, and later placed them in a chapel situated in St. Jacques, just outside the town. This chapel, with its grounds, he gave to the monks, and we find that the Priory of St. Guenault was enjoying this heritage as late as the year 1630.

According to Dom Guillaume Morin, the old bridge of Corbeil was also built by Count Haymon. This bridge spanned the Seine, thus connecting Old Corbeil on the right bank with New Corbeil on the left bank, which included Count Haymon's castle and the church.

Louis d'Outremer died in 956, and Hugh the Great shortly afterwards. Their sons and heirs, Lothaire and Hugh Capet respectively, were on friendly terms, and Count Haymon took advantage of the peace to go on a pilgrimage to Rome. He died, however, on the road, not far from Corbeil, on the way home from Italy. The Countess Elizabeth had the body brought to Corbeil, where it was buried in the Church of St. Spire. There is no contemporary inscription giving the date of the death of Count Haymon, but La Barre estimates that he died in 967, ten years after his marriage. For some time afterwards, the anniversary of his death was solemnly observed on the 28th of May in the Church of St. Spire, but the exact date of his death is uncertain. A tomb, raised to his memory, still exists in the church, and is of great interest on account of its antiquity.

A good description of the church and of Count Haymon's tomb is given by M. Pinard, member of the Société

Française (for the preservation of historical monuments), in his *Monograph on the Church of St. Spire, Corbeil*. St. Spire, or St. Exupere as he should be called, was, says M. Pinard, a missionary sent from Rome to preach the faith to the Gauls. Nothing is known of his life, except that he was the first bishop of Bayeux, and that he died towards the end of the fourth century. He was buried, it is said, in the Church of St. Jean at Bayeux, and it is not known how his remains came to be transferred to Pallnau. The second patron saint of Corbeil, St. Leu, commonly called St. Louis, is said to have been the third bishop of Bayeux. He died at the end of the fifth century. As related above, the relics of this saint were brought to Corbeil by Count Haymon, together with those of St. Spire. M. Pinard is of the opinion that Count Haymon died before the completion of the church, and that it was Count Bouchard, his successor, who actually performed the pious duties of depositing the precious relics in the church. The church constructed by Haymon, however, did not exist long, for it was burned about the year 1019, and was afterwards rebuilt on the same site. This new building was also burned down between the years 1137 and 1144. The Cartulary of the Church of Notre Dame in the same town preserves contemporary evidence of this disaster. Some parts of the present edifice were certainly constructed at this time, but considerable additions have been made since then. The reconstruction must have been slow, since the consecration did not take place until October 10th, 1437. The powder factories established at Essonnes in 1688 caused much damage to the churches in Corbeil, more particularly to St. Spire, which was the nearest to them. The violent shocks produced by the frequent explosions had most serious effects, and the iron bands, which it was found necessary to place round the pillars, still exist in the present edifice.

A Charter of 1029 refers to the 'Castellum Sancti

Exuperii,'<sup>1</sup> and one hundred and fifty years later we find it designated 'Sanctus Exuperius de sub castro forti,'<sup>2</sup> but in recent times the name has come to be abbreviated to St. Spire.

In describing the monuments, M. Pinard points out that whereas Count Haymon's tomb is now in a side chapel, it was originally in the cenotaph. This monument is believed to have been erected to his memory at the commencement of the fourteenth century, that is, nearly 350 years after his death. The statue is in the form of an armed man lying prostrate; it is of stone of a very fine grain, while the head, neck and hands are of white marble. The veins and muscles are reproduced in a remarkably fine manner. The body is clothed in a coat of mail, over which there is a cloak edged with fur. The baldrick is large and of an unusual form, and on it is represented, alternately, the head of an angel or child, and a griffin with two heads. Although coats of arms were not much worn before the Crusades, yet his shield has on it a coat of arms consisting of a lion salient on a red background. The costume, likewise, is somewhat of an anachronism. 'Gules, a lion salient,' were the arms of the later Earls of Corbeil, and it is probable that these were chosen for that reason. At the foot of the statue is a dragon with two heads, which, tradition says, represents a monster much feared in the country, and from which Haymon delivered it. In a street of Corbeil, namely, the Trou-Patrix, there is an old covered drain entering into the river Essonne, and, according to tradition, this place was the den of the dragon. The legend doubtless indicates that Count Haymon did much to better the health of the town and to rid it of disease. In the base of the monument was at one time a black marble panel with the following inscription beautifully inlaid in white marble mosaic: 'Cy gist le cors de hault et noble homme, le comte Hémon, jadis comte de

<sup>1</sup> 'Church of St. Exuperius.'

<sup>2</sup> 'St. Exuperius near to the castle.'

Corbeuil, qui fonda cette église et plusieurs autres. Dieu ait l'ame de luy. Amen.'<sup>1</sup>

Returning to Le Paire's *History of Count Haymon*, the writer states that Thibauld, at first Abbé of Cormery in Touraine, and later Abbé of St. Maur, is generally considered to have been a son of Count Haymon, but it is difficult to believe that, if Haymon had an heir, he should have persuaded him to enter in his youth the monastery of Cluny, as did Thibauld.

However this may be, Haymon's actual successor was Bouchard,<sup>2</sup> son of Foulques the Good, Count of Anjou. Bouchard received the Earldom on his marriage with Elizabeth, Haymon's widow, who was still comparatively young, and is said to have been very beautiful at this time. From his youth, Bouchard had been brought up in the royal house, together with Hugh Capet, son of Hugh the Great. He naturally became his friend and confidant, and was later invested by him with many titles and honours. At the news of the death of Count Haymon, Hugh immediately thought of marrying his widow to his favourite Bouchard, and, succeeding in his designs, he invested Bouchard with the Castellanies of Corbeil and Gournay-sur-Marne. The Count later received also the Earldom of Paris, but by right of office only, as it was by this title and position that the Capets had succeeded to absolute royalty.

In 982, Bouchard went to Arras to demand in the name of the King, from Count Arnould, the relics of the saints which he had taken from the monks. He succeeded in his mission, and acquired great popularity in Flanders, and renown for holiness. The Abbé Lebœuf writes: 'A Charter of this Count, given in favour of the Abbey des

<sup>1</sup> Here lies the body of the high and noble man, the Count Hémon, formerly Count of Corbeil, who built this church and many others. May God receive his soul. Amen.

<sup>2</sup> See *Life of Bouchard, Count of Melun and Corbeil*, by Endes, a monk of the Abbey of St. Maur des Fosses.