

## The Norman Conquest of Somerset.

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IN his Address as President of our Society in 1871, the late Professor Freeman said : " After the hill of Senlac and the vanished choir of Waltham we may fairly place the wooded hill of Montacute. No spot has more to tell us, none more directly suggests the memories of the great struggle which brought England for a moment under the yoke of the stranger."

Montacute, the old Saxon Leodgaresburgh was a sacred place in Saxon and even British history. Was it not here that St. Joseph of Arimathea was said to have been buried? Here also that the flint crucifix, together with other relics, such as a small cross, a bell, and a black text of the Gospels, was found by a carpenter, destined to be miraculously conveyed by Tofig's kine to Waltham Holy Cross in Essex. Harold accepted the tradition and added to the wealth of Waltham Abbey, and it was before the crucifix found on Montacute hill (*De Inventione Crucis de Waltham*) that he knelt in prayer on his march to Senlac and then received, so it was said, that mysterious warning from the bowing of the awful form wrought on the sacred stone. It was this cross which gave the Saxons their war-cry and it was in its name that Harold's men bore up against the rushes of the Norman host on the fatal field, and it was at the Abbey of Waltham Holy Cross,—the Cross of Leodgaresburgh or Montacute,—that Count Harold was destined to sleep his last long sleep.

The name of Leodgareshburgh was changed, perhaps of set purpose, when in the Norman Conquest of the west, Drogo de Montagu (monte acuto) of the Norman family of Montagu-les-bois, sub-tenants of Mesnil-Garnier, lords of a Cotentin Castle,<sup>1</sup> built or guarded it under Robert de Mortain, Count of Eu, King William's half-brother. In Domesday we read that the Earl had his chief residence and Castle there "*ibi castellum ejus est quod vocatur Montagud.*" Here, at this hill, this sacred Saxon place, bound up with Saxon traditions and forming part formerly of an old Athelney endowment, rose the stern Norman Keep as if to scorn and do despite to Saxon feelings. It was an administrative Norman centre to which the Romescot or Romefeoh, *i.e.*, the denarii due to the Pope, who had blessed King William's enterprise and, as Sir F. Palgrave emphasises (vol. iii, p. 483), had through his Legate formally given him his Crown (*c.* 1070), must perforce be paid. In a Wells document<sup>2</sup> we read: "Now King William commanded William de Courcelle to see that this tribute should be paid next Michaelmas, both from my men and also the *liberi* and *servi*. And make this known at Munt acuht and Bristoye (Bristol)," thus showing the importance of Montacute, as an administrative centre.

The lands and manors given to the Earl of Mortain in Somerset were great and lordly. With Montacute went Norton-sub-Hamdon, a classic place in Somerset annals, and it might have been thought that the Normans would have utilised this site, had not the hill of Montacute, with its steeper sides, offered a better and more impregnable position for a keep. Further, the Earl of Mortain held in his own hands Staple (Fitzpayne), about five miles south of Taunton, within the boundaries of Neroche Forest; also the adjoining manors and hamlets of Curland, Ashill and Bickenhall; also, Broadway and Broadway Street; being thus lord and master, not only

1. Sir F. Palgrave, *History of Normandy and England*, vol. iii.

2. Wells M.S.S., *Report of Commission*, p. 10.

of the Forest region, but also of the great highway through it. Far back in British days Broadway was said to have been a trackway and to this day its general course can be traced running from Hamdon Hill and Montacute through Watergore, Hurcott and Atherton, entering the fortifications of Neroche on the south point of the outer inclosure, where the opening may still be traced. In the Athelney Chartulary we read how Thomas de Montsorell gave the abbot a road in Broadway which stretches from the *Via Regia* to the Forest of Racche. Thus this trackway was in communication with the Roman Fosseway from Bath and Ilchester, joining it at South Petherton Bridge. Strategically, the fortress of Neroche was linked closely with Montacute and there is every reason to believe from the evidence afforded by recent excavations<sup>1</sup> that it was first occupied by the Normans. William of Worcester, describing the castles and keeps in this part of England, notices Neroche, or Castle Rach, as the next fortress after Rougemont Castle at Exeter. Probably the design of Neroche Castle was to guard the approach to Exeter from the vale of Taunton Deane, for the chief military object of King William was, as we know, to subdue Exeter. Historians, and amongst them Professor Freeman himself, have noticed that at Exeter a spirit of resistance existed in 1067 far more dangerous than the turbulence of the north. The citizens hated the Normans; their river opened an easy access to the Irish Danes, who never acknowledged King William; their Roman walls and defences, then amongst the most stately in England, gave them a means of resistance not possessed by other places. The siege of Exeter, which followed after and was dependent upon the Conquest of Somerset ended successfully for the Conqueror and gave him control of Devonshire and the West. The great Baldwin de Moeles was placed in command of the Castle of Rougemont.

1. *Proceedings Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xlix, pp. 50-53.

However, for its complete control and subjugation the County of Somerset needed more than Montacute Castle and the Fort of Neroche in the western parts. On the eastern side and below Selwood rose the stronghold of Castle Cary, so called from the river Cary which rises close to it. In the *Proceedings* of the Som. Arch. Soc. (1890) Mr. Buckle has remarked "There can be no doubt whatever that the footings disclosed" (in the excavations then made) "belong to a Norman Rectangular Keep. The plan consists of a square, 78 feet on each side, and there are only four larger than Cary, viz., those of Colchester, London, Dover, and Middleham." In Collins's "Peerage," under an account of the "Barony of Perceval, Lord Lovel and Holland" it is said that, at the time of writing (1779), "The vestiges of the old Castle could be traced upon the brow of the hill hanging over the town of Cary and consisted, according to the first construction of the Normans (like Windsor, Marlborough, Warwick, Tunbridge, etc.,) of a mount with a great tower or keep thereon, situate at one end or angle of a very extensive court, which was defended on the other parts by a great gateway, and several towers at proper distances round the said inclosure." Old inhabitants still hand down rumours of battles fought on Lodge Hill and on the eastern side.

How far this description tallies with the original plan and what his authority, the author of the "Peerage" does not state. It is certain that castles were erected at the time of the Conquest, as we may infer from this statement in the *A.S. Chronicle* for 1066-7, "Bishop Odo (of Bayeaux) and William the Earl (William Fitzosborne) remained behind,—i.e., when William the Conqueror returned for a time to Normandy,—and they built castles wide throughout the nation and distressed poor people." In the famous obituary notice of the Conqueror the charge of building these castles is repeated in the *Chronicle* with the further remark coupled with it: "Truly there was much trouble in these days and very great

distress." It is also noted how "the land of the Britons (*i.e.*, Wales) was under his sway and he built castles therein." Castle-building in Wales was certainly the policy of Fitz Hamon who is supposed to have built Cardiff, *i.e.*, the fortress on the river Taff, in 1091, and called by Giraldus Cambrensis "nobile castrum," and here Fitz Hamon held his courts of justice. The policy of castle-building was traditional amongst the Normans and was carried on by the de Courcy family in Ireland where John de Courcy built in Ulster the castles of Archen and Oniæht and Maincove (Dugdale's *Monasticon*, vi. 1123). It is probable that these castles were built more or less according to the same plan. Sir F. Palgrave in his history of Normandy and England (vol. iii, p. 393) writes as follows "William steadily pursued his system of overawing the country with castles ;—in proportion as his power extended, the square, tall donjon towers arose, all formed upon the same type, bespeaking their origin, palaces at once and castles, trophies at once of Royal thought and of unsparing power."

Sir F. Palgrave knew his Normandy well and it is only natural to suppose that the Normans reproduced a type of fortress with which they were familiar in Normandy itself. Viollet-le-Duc in his work on military architecture writes (p. 31) that the Norman castles which were erected in such numbers by those new Conquerors of the north-west of France and in England presented masses of buildings which defied all attempts at escalade. Their assault was rendered most difficult by the fact that they were placed upon hills. Professor Freeman, in his "Sketches and Travels in Normandy and Maine," undertaken from 1861-1892 and recently collected in one small volume (1897), evidently found that the remains of these Norman Keeps, temp. William the Conqueror, were scarce, and not easy to detect even by the eye skilled to appreciate differences in style. But at Domfront (p. 57) there was the shattered fragment of a keep ; Verneuil had a donjon (p. 174) : St. Susanne showed that unconquered donjon which Duke

William could never take: Beaumont-le-Vicomte, north of Le Mans, had part of the shell of its original castle: Saint Sauveur, like tall Falaise itself, showed signs of having been restored after the fashion of an older model. Freeman was pre-eminently a judge of masonry and architecture. Sometimes these Norman castles were built on low ground, commanding the approaches to the sea, such as the Castle of Eu. In West Somerset, Stoke Courcy Castle was built on low ground but was surrounded by a moat. Its neighbour, Nether Stowey Castle, was on a tump or tumulus with a dry moat round it, apparently a stronger site by nature. In Buck's "Views" (1733) Stoke Courcy Castle shows remnants of two circular towers or keeps, inside the moat, which may have been part of an original plan. Stowey Castle looks more like the typical "mota" or eminence, and the village of Stowey clustering around its base, with the mill just below and water accessible, reminds us much of Freeman's description of Tillieres. As at the Norman fortress of Beaumont-le-Roger (Freeman's "Sketches," p. 185), a Sainte Chapelle arose alongside, so on Stowey mount, the feudal seat of de Candos, a chapel of St. Michael was built. In Stoke Courcy Castle there was also a Chapel in the XII Century; so also at Bridgwater Castle later on (1202) served by the Hospital of St. John the Baptist.

A great many things had to be considered before the site of a Baronial Castle was fixed upon by the Norman builders. We might ask why Cannington Knoll, which many have identified with Kynwith or Cymwich Castle of King Alfred's time (A.D. 878) was not chosen instead of Stoke Courcy. The answer may be that there was a deficiency of water in Cannington Knoll (a fact Asser notices), or, that Stoke Courcy really was better placed for guarding the mouth of the Parret and the old "Botestall" at Stolford. What was wanted was not a temporary fort of occupation, such indeed as the Danes might often have seized, possibly at Danesborough itself on

the Quantocks, but a real "mota" which would become a *Caput Baronie* with water inside the fortification and a stream to drive the feudal mill, as at Stowey and Stoke Courcy, and Castle Cary. The military engineers would do the rest and the place could be secured with barbicans, towers and keeps. They were reproduced everywhere, and the towers of Stoke Courcy Castle were of a type which appeared in the building of Cardiff Castle where, as Sir R. Colt Hoare remarks, the Norman octagonal tower still stands as a survival of the masonry of those early Norman builders.

Mr. Horace Round criticises the views of Professors Freeman and Oman (*Archæologia*, vol. 58, pt. i, pp. 313-340), and maintains that the Castles of the Conquest were "moated mounds, i.e., mottes, crowned with a palisade and not rectangular keeps and donjons." It may be quite true that the Norman conquerors began hastily with wood and earthworks, but, presently, the inevitable stone fortress arose. At Pembroke the circular Norman keep still exists with its domed roof and five stages, 75 feet high, but we are told that it sprang out of the original "slender fortress with stakes and turf," set up by Arnulf de Montgomery, son of the great Roger. Such is the testimony of Giraldus Cambrensis, a good authority, writing in the reign of Henry II. There is a certain popular looseness in the use of the word "Castle" in our history and in our common talk. In Selwood there are such places as "Castle Orchard," "Ballands Castle," "Jacks Castle;" and, on the Quantocks, "Douseboro' or Danesborough Castle," "Rooks Castle," "Roborough Castle," (so called in the days of the Edwards): a Castle at Downend, Puriton, "Castle Close" at Cannington, a pre-Domesday Arx,—"Cow Castle" by the Barle, Exmoor, probably a cattle inclosure, like the Celtic Bodune, mentioned by Prof. Stokes in his "Anglo-Norman Church," and applied to Athlone Castle, and so on. But, in none of these cases, was there an important centre, i.e., "le chef lieu du fief." Giraldus in his "De Instructione Princi-

pum" (temp. Henry II) gives this explanation of a Saxon "Bury," that it was called a "castrum vel civitas." This would mean an inhabited place, not a mere hill or knoll fortified with a special military purpose. Some would draw a distinction between Castles and "Mottes." But here is a XV Century definition of a Motte when it is said of Nunney Castle: "And there was in the said manor a certain site of a Manor called a Motte which was valued at nothing beyond Reprises." (Som. Arch. *Proceedings*, vol. xxii, p. 80). In Du Cange's Glossary the word "Mota" or "Motte" is described as "Castellum, Donjo, turris; le chateau qui est bati sur la motte (eminence)," and for this interpretation Ordericus Vitalis, the contemporary of William the Conqueror, who knew Normandy and England, especially in the Severn valley and Saint Evroul, is quoted. It seems clear, however, that whatever meaning we attach more precisely to these words "Castella" and "mottes," the Norman keep was a new feature at the date of the Conquest. The Saxons knew the old Roman defence works and walls around cities as at Bath, Caerleon, Ilchester, Exeter, Chester and elsewhere; they knew the old Saxon forts such as King Alfred is said to have constructed at Borough Mump; or defences such as existed around Cynwith Castle (in this case a stone wall) and they must have known the fenced towns of Edward the Elder, but they did not know the Norman keep. Gundulph (a monk of Bec, a friend of Lanfranc and King's chaplain) when he built the Tower of London in 1067, gave an object lesson, and this example was speedily copied by Normans elsewhere. Sir F. Palgrave thought the original type came from Maine, but Professor Freeman thought it was particularly a Norman work and so far he seems to be at one with Viollet-le-Duc. Some have called Gundulph the inventor of the Norman keep.

In this connection it is worth considering for a moment what was the technical meaning in Saxon times of an "Arx." In King Edmund's Charter of Ham, in the Glastonbury Charters,



there is mention of special exemptions "praeter arcem, pontem et expeditionem" *i.e.*, the *trinoda necessitas*. But the *Arx* was not the Norman "*Castrum*" we may suppose. It may have been of wood. Hereward's Castle was a wooden fort in the marshes of Ely as Thierry reminds us. King Alfred's fortifications at Athelney were probably of turf and wood. Norman castles were more enduring. In Yorkshire, Alain built a strong castle and outworks near his principal manor (*motte*) called Ghilling, on a rocky hill encompassed by the rapid Swale, "*pro tuitione suorum contra infestationem Anglorum tunc ubique exhaeredatorum*," for protection against the disinherited English. This was Richmond Castle in Yorkshire.

In Somerset King William's plans included not only forts but suitable men to hold them. At Castle Cary was placed a trusty Fleming, Walter de Douai, called "*Walscinus de Duaco*" who is surely Walter the Fleming of the well-known Banwell Charter (1068)<sup>1</sup> He was given many manors along the Parret River, of which the Cary River (now canalised) was then a tributary, such as Brugie (called afterwards *Brugwalteri* or *Pons Walteri* after him or, probably, his son); a part of the manor of Hatwara, or headweir (Hadworthy); Doneham or Dunball at the end of Polden; the manors of Baudrip and along the Parret adjoining; Walpole and Paulet close to Dunball; Huntspill lower down the river; and Burnham at its mouth. Walter the Fleming was also given Weare on the Ax, not far from the old landing at Axwater, Brean at the mouth of the Ax and the old stronghold of Worle just above the present town of Weston-super-Mare. In fact Walter, a trustworthy compatriot, no doubt, of Queen Matilda of Flanders, was made riparian guardian of the Parret and, indeed, the Ax from source to mouth. From the hill above Castle Cary, Walter could look far westward and northward down to the waters of the Severn Sea and survey his charge.

1. *Proceedings Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xxiii, p. 57.

At the same time Castle Cary, in the original plan of feudal administration, was subordinate to Montacute and traces of it long survived the destruction of Montacute Castle itself, and the splitting up of the great Mortain Fee. Henry Lovel, (9 John), held Castle Cary by the service of finding four knights, two for the Honor of Mortain and two for Castle Cary. In 38 Henry III, Richard Lovel of Castle Cary answered for 11½ Knight Fees of the Fee of Mortain. There were two Parks at Castle Cary which, perhaps, added to its importance, as old Gerard reminds us: "The more ancient lords had a fair demeasue here and two Parks whereof one remains unto this day and stored with deere; the other being a mile off at Almsford and leased out." Robert the Constable of the Castle held Crowcombe and other great Manors at Domesday, and "Duo portarii de Montagud" were given Stert near Babcary. In more than one case, *i.e.*, in that of Crowcombe and Bishopstone itself at Montacute, Church property was disturbed for the sake of the short-lived Castle of Montacute. But the Fee of Mortain long remains as evidence of the old arrangements.

Many Flemish followers settled, no doubt, along the Parret. Maurice de Gant or Ghent, a descendant of Robert de Gant (Collinson i, 185) was a very early colonist at Huntspill, Walter de Douai's Manor, and there is a place "Gant's Farm" still so called, close by, and wrongly associated by tradition with John of Gaunt. Stockland-Gaunts was also the old name of Stockland Bristol, attached to Gaunt's Hospital at Bristol. In an old Eton College Charter (Stoke Courcy) and dated 1135-1160, Hugh de Turnay or Tournai, close to Douai, and called "Archdeacon of beyond Perret" appears as a signatory. Robert, Bishop of Bath (1134) has been described by Florence of Worcester as "*Flandrensis genere sed natus in partibus Angliæ.*" A certain Theodoricus or Terricus Teutonicus, figures in the very early annals of North Petherton Park and may have come from the Low

Countries. The Furneaux family, of Kilve and Ashington, were of Furnes in Flanders. This Flemish strain is worth noticing as it must have contributed largely to the population and we learn from Giraldus Cambrensis that the Flemish contingent was furnished by Baldwin, Count of Flanders, to Duke William for 200 marcs per annum.

Afterwards, when a quarrel arose between Robert, Count of Flanders, and Henry I, a colony of Flemings was transplanted from England and possibly from Somerset, to Rossia in S. Wales, a province of Demetia, by Henry I, "*intercessionem matris suae Matildis.*" Sir F. Palgrave makes much of the presence of the Flandrenses and notices their position in Scotland as "the stem-fathers of the Scottish feudal nobility," and thinks that "our Anglo-Norman literature was forwarded and improved by the influence of the Romane-speaking or Walloon population." In Somerset we feel sure that the valley of the Parret attracted many of Walter de Douai's followers, and they were celebrated even then, as Giraldus says, as "*gens lanificiis et gens mercimoniis usitatissima.*" Centuries afterwards, when the Walloons were planted at Glastonbury by the great Protector as weavers, they exhibited the same industrial skill as their forefathers of Arras and of Bruges.

Gerard, in his "Particular Description of Somerset" (1630), says that Castle Cary was long since demolished, but where it stood was the "*Caput Baroniae* owned first by Lovel." This latter statement is surely incorrect, as it is stated in the Bath Chartulary<sup>1</sup> that in 1090 Cary Church, as well as that of Brugie (Bridgwater), was given by the wife of Walter de Douai to the monks of Bath. It is true that a Lovel does appear in the very early annals of Castle Cary as the successor of Walter de Douai in the Barony of Cary, probably by marriage.

1. Somerset Record Society, vol. vii.

In connection with the Norman keep of Castle Cary must be considered Richmonte Castle in East Harptree, the Manor at Domesday (1086), of the warlike Geoffrey, Bishop of Coutances, and held under him by Azelin Gouel de Percheval. Azelin, or Ascelin, was one of the Conqueror's followers and was called "Lupus" or wolf, from his ferocious disposition. He died in 1120, being succeeded by "Lupellus" or the little wolf. In 1138 the lords of Castle Cary and Richmonte, both of the Percheval family, were found amongst the Confederate Barons in arms against King Stephen and in favour of the Empress Matilda. The sieges of both these Castles are described in the English Chronicles of the day. But the mere fact of their being strong places in 1138 points to their early origin and against any theory of their being simply adulterine Castles.

The strategic object of Richmonte Castle at East Harptree would appear to be to guard the line of the Mendips and the Fosseway to the East. In one of the early Bath Charters (Somerset Record Society) a Radulphus de Storton appears, and for many generations this family held Chilcompton, eleven miles west of Bath on the road to Wells. In Kirby's "Quest" (1286) a Radulphus de Stourton held under the Barony of Castle Cary, which is instructive, as it probably shows that the Stourtons were in the first instance placed under Castle Cary and Walter de Douai. We can guess also by what route the Normans approached Castle Cary and the east of Somerset, although the Fosseway may not have been the only approach to Ilchester. There was the route, of course, through Sherborne.

In the *Proceedings* of the Som. Arch. Soc. (vol. xxv), and under the title of "Vestiges of the Norman Conquest," the late Rev. J. A. Bennett has traced the Conqueror's probable marches into Somerset by the ravages committed and the lowered value of the manors between the time of Edward the Confessor and the great survey of 1086.

There is one other sub-tenant of Walter de Douai who ought to be mentioned and that is Radulphus de Conteville, who held Chapel-Allerton under him ; also Renewald de Conteville, his brother, who held Bawdrip under the same Baron, both of whom appear as signatories in a very early Bath Charter.<sup>1</sup> After the death of the Conqueror's father, Duke Robert, his mother married, as we know, Herlouin de Conteville, and gave birth to the two celebrated sons, Odo Bishop of Bayeaux (Count Palatine of Kent), and Robert de Mortain who figures at Montacute and the West of England. Radulphus and Renewald de Conteville would be, presumably, of the same stem.

So far, therefore, for the two great land fortresses built by the Conqueror, which towered at each end of Somerset, each with an auxiliary keep. But it was necessary to secure the north coast of Somerset and the shores of the Severn sea. Dangers also might arise from the forest tracts of North Petherton and the hiding-places formerly of King Alfred. One of Harold's latest conquests had been that of South Wales and the noted anchorage of Portskeweth had fallen into his hands when, in 1065, he had erected a palace and "thought to have Edward the Confessor there for hunting." Again, there was the oversea danger from the Irish Danes and Ireland, whither Harold's sons had fled, and not only from these but all other Danes for, as Sir F. Palgrave writes, (vol. iii, p. 384) "When it was first heard in Denmark how William had invaded England, the news excited the most hostile and angry feelings. William's enterprise was regarded as an invasion, not upon Harold, but upon their own inheritance. There was no longer any sympathy between Northmen and the Normans settled in France, now French in language and customs." The Danish king said:—"Let William render homage and tribute for his kingdom of England : if he refuses let him expect that I will deprive him of Crown and Kingdom."

1. Somerset Record Society.

If help did come across the Severn sea to North Somerset and the valley of the Parret it would simply have been a piece of strategy which was repeated centuries later in the Civil Wars when Welsh Loyalists were brought across the Channel to Minehead to aid the plans of the Cavalier captains, in the county of Somerset.<sup>1</sup>

To guard against these dangers which were very real the Conqueror or his lieutenants caused the Norman Castles of Dunster and of Stoke (Courcy) to be built along the shore, one at the mouth of the Parret and the other overlooking and guarding Minehead, Dunster Anchorage, Blue Anchor, Watchet and all other possible landing-places. The foreshore, with its *wreccum maris* and other rights between the Parret mouth and Minehead, was divided between the two Baronies of Dunster and Stoke (Courcy) at a point a little to the east of Lilstock and still existing as a real boundary. Of the keep at Dunster, Professor Freeman has written in his "Norman Sketches" (p. 127), "We feel that Falaise, looking up to the great keep and to the tower of Talbot is merely a magnificent Dunster." At Dunster King William set up the celebrated William de Mohun or Moion who is said to have brought over thirty-seven knights of distinction from Normandy. He was one of the greatest Barons of the Cotentin.

In the "Gesta Stephani" there is an early description of Dunster Castle which William de Moion "*pulchrum et inexpugnabile fecerat*," chiefly through the fact that the tide flowed close up to it. Dunster was a landing-place in 1222. In the wars of Stephen, William de Moion "ravaged all that region with fire and sword, turning peace into discord and rebellion, mourning and woe." Like the Barons of Cary, Richmonte and Stoke, the Mohuns sided with the Empress Matilda.

According to an old list of the principal castles in England<sup>2</sup>

1. "Dunster and its Lords," by Sir H. Maxwell Lyte.
2. Ashmolean MSS., 860—Bodleian.

there were nine in Somerset ; Somerton, Bridgwater, Dunster, Nunney, Farley, Castle Cary, Richmonte, Taunton, Roche. The most ancient of all were those of Somerton and Taunton ; that of Bridgwater was built in King John's reign ; Nunney Delamare arose in Edward II's reign ; Farley Hungerford in Edward III's reign ; the others began as Norman keeps. The general strategy of King William resembled that of the Marquis of Hertford and the Royalists in 1642-1645, which was "to erect a line of fortresses with garrisons over the isthmus of ground between the South Sea and Severn by way of Bridgwater, Taunton, Lyme and Langport, it being from Bridgwater to Lyme little more than twenty miles by which the Counties of Devon and Cornwall were blocked."

In the Castle of Stoke (Courcy) King William placed a kinsman, William de Falaise, descended, so Gerard has handed down, from an uncle of the Conqueror. Elsewhere, Sybil de Falaise, who married Baldwin de Bullers of Rougemont Castle, has been described as niece of the Conqueror, or great-niece. For Vitalis Engaine held Badmundefeld in Suffolk of the King in chief without service because Henry I gave the manor to his ancestor, Baldwin de Bullers in free marriage with his niece Sybil Falaise (*Inq. p.m.*) According to an entry in Domesday Serlo de Burci, a Norman follower of William the Conqueror, gave William of Falaise the manor of Worspring (the site of what became afterwards Woodspring Priory) together with his daughter in marriage "*concessu regis.*" From an old Stoke (Courcy) document the daughter's name was Geva. Serlo de Burci figures as a signatory in the Banwell Charter and he was a Domesday holder in Somerset.

William of Falaise (apparently the first Baron) gave to the monks of the Norman Abbey Lonley not only the Church and Tithes of Stoke (Courcy), but also Tientone and Treigru in South Wales, for the soul of Henry I (1100-1135) and others, proving that he made Stoke (Courcy) and the Parret the base of his operations against South Wales, just as afterwards John

de Courcy made it a base against Ireland and Ulster. The importance of Stoke Courcy Castle has been underrated in the past. In 1168, William de Courcy, descended from William of Falaise,<sup>1</sup> accounted for twenty-nine knights' fees as his grandfather before him, on the occasion of the marriage of Henry II's daughter. In the reign of Henry III, Stoke Courcy Castle was held by Falk de Breaute, together with Plympton Castle, near Plymouth. In 1233 Hugh de Neville, a great State officer, was told to guard the castle and port "personaliter." The port in question was Stolford, or Stoverd, where there was an ancient Chapel of St. Michaels and a "Botestall," *i.e.*, an anchorage for ships about to ascend the Parret with the "bore." Under Stoke Courcy Castle came the ancient castle of Cymwich, the manor of Rodway, and the parish of Cannington, the most likely scene of the famous Battle of Cymwich (878) in the Alfred campaigns already mentioned.

Although the order went forth from King John at Sherborne that Stoke Courcy Castle should be utterly destroyed (*penitus dirui*), in more troublous times when Falk de Breaute was owner of it, the order does not appear to have been carried out. It was surrendered by Falk de Breaute's lieutenant, Henry de Verney, and at de Breaute's express command. The real destruction of the castle took place in the Wars of the Roses, when Lord Bonville is said to have taken it. Since then the old castle has lain in ruins, subject to gradual and inevitable decay, but the ancient bridge over the moat, the form of the original drawbridge, the entrance itself, the rounded basements of the two towers on either side of the entrance, fragments of the stone steps that led in circular fashion to the battlements above, a very ancient oven and hearth all survive and tell their tale. In former days the mill was close to the entrance and driven by water from the "Bailey brook," which filled the moat at the same time. On the east, in an orchard, the vestiges of

1. Eton College documents, Stoke Courcy.



the outer bailey can be seen, and the eye wanders to "War Meadow" and the "Lager" (Dutch *Laager*?) Field, redolent of former strife.

With Stoke (Courcy) Castle must be associated the neighbouring and subsidiary fort at Nether Stowey, the *Caput Baronie* first of Alured de Hispania and then Robert de Candos, who married, apparently, the heiress of Alured. Nether Stowey Mount still shows the plan of a rectangular Norman keep and is within sight of its greater neighbour of Stoke Courcy, and only a little farther removed from the Parret and commanding the old trackway (still traceable) that led from Combwich Passage to the Quantock Hills. Otterhampton on the Parret, where the Stowey brook finds its way, was a portion of the Domesday Barony. Farther up, Bur or Bower; Woolmersdon and Dunweer in North Petherton Hundred belonged to it and, presently, the two Parret manors of Woolavington and Puriton were added.

Robert de Candos is said to have accompanied King William from Normandy and has been described as "a man of warlike disposition" also "avaricious of military glory" and to have crossed the Severn sea and won the land of *Caer Leon* from the Welsh *Owen Wan*. We find him giving Monksilver and Nether Stowey Churches to Goldcliff, in Monmouth, an appanage to the alien Priory of Bec in Normandy. Both William de Falaise and Robert de Candos illustrate by their actions a peculiar and distinctive result of the Norman Conquest of Somerset, namely, an expansion oversea of the Norman influence into South Wales and, presently, under their successors, (especially under John de Courcy), an expansion from the same coasts into Ireland and Ulster. Both the Barons, it will be noted, helped to endow alien priories, an act which had important religious consequences and inaugurated an abuse which it took some time to remedy.

In ancient documents and in the "Hundred Rolls" we read of a *Bedelleria* or *Bailiwick* of East Parret and also of West

Parret, *e.g.*, in 22 Edward III a Philip de Welleslegh held the serjeanty of the Bailiwick of East Parret, an office which, apparently, got to be hereditary. The same may be said of the Bailiwick of West Parret held in the reign of Edward I by William le Bret living at Bicknoller. His successor was a John de la Lynde who held it "dono regis." The question naturally arises whether these Bailiwicks were military or not. In the days of King Alfred (894) troops were collected (*A.S. Chronicle*) "from every town east of the Parret as well as west of Selwood." One of the last allusions to the serjeanty east of Parret occurs in 13 Henry VI when it was held by a John Hille or Hulle of Spaxton.

On the subject of sea and coastal defence and naval co-operation in North Somerset Sir Francis Palgrave suggests that a certain Brian, commonly called Fitz-Count, son of Eudo, Count of Porthoet, one of the co-Regents of Brittany, entered warmly into Duke William's projects and "passed over and occupied some position on the coast of Somerset or Devon."<sup>1</sup> The only place the writer can think of in Somerset is Brean Down and Uphill at the mouth of the Ax. Collinson says that the family of Bryan, Brien or Brian, took their name from Brean Manor (vol. i, p. 179), and this place and port may have been well known to the sailors of Brittany who traded up the Ax and anchored at Axwater, the old Glastonbury landing-place. Sampford-Bret perpetuates the name and presence in West Somerset of a Breton. But, possibly, Bryan Fitz-Count may have helped King William by blocking the Exe mouth during the siege of Exeter and the scene of his operations may have been South Devon rather than North Somerset. Nevertheless, the family of Bryan figures considerably in Somerset annals.

Before Exeter fell Gytha, the mother of Harold, and her Saxon ladies effected their escape from the beleaguered city,

1. "History of England and Normandy," vol. iii, p. 419.

first to the Flat Holm, where they tarried for a time and then to St. Omer. But if they had not been stopped at Exmouth and along the south coast their most obvious course would have been to fly to St. Omer *direct*. We wonder by what route the forlorn Gytha reached the Holms in the Severn Sea from Exeter! Was it across Dartmoor and by Hartland where she had founded an abbey in honour of St. Nectarus? Or, more probably, did she quit Exeter and fly straight north, up the valley of the Exe, past Dulverton, till she reached Minehead and Porlock and so by boat to the "Flat Holm," the choice of this solitary refuge proving that the mainland and the Mendips were scarcely safe, being already held by King William's officers (1067). This is one of the most interesting and pathetic incidents in the Norman Conquest of Somerset.

After the flight of Gytha and during the same year (1067) the *A.S. Chronicle* describes how "one of the sons of Harold came with a fleet from Ireland unexpectedly into the mouth of the river Avon, and plundered all that neighbourhood." They tried to storm Bristol but failed, and then, taking their booty, "went up the country." Ednoth, (or Eadnoth) their father's own master of the horse fought against them and was slain together with many good men on both sides; and "those who were left departed thence" (1067). These notices are interesting but, unfortunately, we have no real clue as to the locality of the battle where Ednoth was killed nor the landing-place. It must have been west of Bristol and, very probably, up the River Parret. The descent itself must have shown how important it was to guard the mouth of the Parret (always a famous landing-place) by means of a castle at Stoke Courcy. Guesses have been made at the ravaged manors in Somerset which of course lost in value.<sup>1</sup> The wretched Saxons of Somerset, plundered by Harold's own son and subjected at the

1. *Proceedings Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xxv, ii, 28.

same time to the stern Normans, must have been "between the upper and nether millstone."

There is one obscure point about the Conquest of Somerset, amongst others, on which we should have liked some information, and that is the share of the cities and boroughs of Hampshire and of Somerset had in the great Norman plan of campaign. The idea broached by Sir Francis Palgrave and endorsed by Professor Freeman that these chartered places were powerful enough to form a kind of civil confederacy under the hegemony of the ancient West Country capital of Exeter is very interesting. Ilchester, or the old *Castrum* of the Ivel, at the sources of the Parret and lying along the line of march from Bath or from Milborne Port—whichever route was chosen—was a powerful borough with a Saxon mint, and was still surrounded by the old Roman walls and showed signs of a grandeur we can hardly now imagine as we look upon its grass-grown streets and deserted appearance. The old burgesses, however, were men of mettle, and in the reign of King Rufus (1088) local tradition has it that they withstood a fierce onslaught by Odo, Bishop of Bayeaux, Robert, Earl of Mortain, and Eustace, Count of Boulogne, and other Barons who wished to depose King Rufus and to place his brother, Robert, Duke of Normandy, upon the throne. At any rate, their bold and, as it turned out, successful opposition strengthens the idea that these old Saxon Boroughs were important factors to be considered in the subjugation of the West. Nor was Ilchester the only place. For there was Somerton with its ancient port of Langport, Axbridge under Mendip, a Royal Saxon Burgh, and Milborne Port close to Sherborne itself, to say nothing of the Dorset towns of Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Wareham, and such Devon Boroughs as Barnstaple.

As the heir of Edward the Confessor, Duke William inherited many a rood of Somerset Crown Demesne. He inherited the forests of Somerset, although not actually mentioned by name in the great Survey, in Mendip, Exmoor,

Selwood, N. Petherton and Neroche. We wonder if he ever thought of hunting where the Saxon princes had hunted. Did he sweep the woods of North Petherton or pursue the deer in the Park of Royal Somerton? We do not know, but when, under the Domesday Barony of Hunfridus Camerarius, or Humphrey the Chamberlain, we find that Robert de Odburville the forester, Anschetill the park-keeper, John the door-keeper, Ansgar the cook, and the wife of Manasses the cook, Ansgar the hearth-keeper, and others held manors in North Petherton and the valley of the Parret, we wonder if King William ever held a hunting court or any kind of *curia* in Somerset. Mr. Eyton thinks that there is presumptive evidence that he did, (before he enlarged the forest of Ychene and made the New Forest), but history is silent.

The last supreme act of the Norman Conquest of Somerset was rehearsed at Montacute. This tall hill, once a sacred place in their history, famed in their legends, but become the seat of the tax-gatherers and the impregnable castle of their bitterest enemies, who had shown at the earliest possible date after Senlac the grinding heel of oppression, was assailed by the men of Somerset and Dorset in a last despairing effort. Freeman has noted how "it was around the walls of the Castle on the peaked hill that Englishmen dealt the last blow for freedom in the western shires. It was then that the last patriotic rising was crushed by the heavy hand of Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances by the help, one blushes to say, of the English forces of the shires and cities already conquered. The doom of the vanquished was dreadful."

As if to cover up the truculence of those days, and to spread the mild garb of religion over a war-wasted place, the Priory of Montacute arose and traces of it still survive. The castle was converted into a beautiful chapel "roofed with stone, covered very artificially, dedicated to St. Michael, vaulted within and with stairs of stone from the foot of the hill to the top." In Leland's days (1538) the chapel was still standing. In 1724

Dr. Stukeley saw "a pleasant view of Montacute hill, a copped round eminence encompassed at the bottom with a broad verge of wood, so that it looks like a high-crowned hat with a fringed hat-band." The great Honor of Mortain, forfeited by the Count of Mortain, who took part with Robert Curthose against Henry I, was divided up and helped to form the Baronies of Hatch Beauchamp and Odcombe, and others. Presently Montacute gave a name to a William, Earl of Salisbury.

Montacute teaches us a lesson (not to be forgotten) that England was divided against itself and therefore England could not stand. It looks as if Somerset were divided against itself when Ednoth, Harold's own Staller, (the great ancestor of the Fitz-Harding and Berkeley family) fought against Harold's sons, who should have appeared in the light of liberators from the Norman rule. There must have been much local patriotism to the old Saxon line in Somerset and Dorset. Had not Edward the Confessor been chosen by the Witan at Gillingham? Were not the descendants of the House of Cerdic well known as owners of many a lordly manor and many a rood of forest land? Then there was the Saxon Stigand who held at the time of the Conquest not only the Archbishopric of Canterbury but the Bishopric of Winchester. As Bishop of Winchester he was lord of the manor of Taunton. We do not find that Taunton Castle played any part in the Norman Conquest of Somerset. King William suspected the Saxon Stigand and kept him by his person. In 1069, shortly after the last desperate assault on Montacute, Stigand was deprived of the smallest semblance of his powers as Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop of Winchester, to die presently in the prison of the Castle of Winchester. Stigand, the former chaplain of Edward the Confessor, had to yield to Lanfranc the monk, and King William's chaplain. The change underlying this transference of spiritual powers was greater than appears on the surface. King William crushed not only the Saxon nobles but he crushed their faith and church, often adding needless insult

to injury, as at Montacute's holy hill. After the Conquest, King William returned to Normandy, and during the Paschal Feast at Fecamp made a triumphal display of the "*spolia opima*." Amongst these was the "Banner of Harold," won on the bloody field of Senlac, which he gave to Pope Alexander. This in return for the consecrated banner, the Gonfalon of St. Peter and the precious ring, in which a relic of the chief of the Apostles was inclosed, presented to the Conqueror when sailing on his momentous errand. As M. Thierry has noted in his "*Norman Conquest*": "All that had been anciently venerated in England was by the new comers looked upon as vile and contemptible." In Eadmer's history it is said "*Pæne cuncta quæ ab Anglis antiquitus quasi sacro sancta celebrabantur, nunc vix postremæ auctoritatis habentur.*" Religion amongst the Anglo-Saxons had sometimes consisted in the bright reflection of patriotism, and certain English saints were venerated for the bravery they displayed in meeting the pagan hosts of the Danes, like St. Edmund. But their tombs were broken open and their bones scattered (William of Malmesbury). Lanfranc and the foreign priests declared that the Saxon Saints were no real saints, Saxon martyrs no real martyrs. Lanfranc did violence to Saxon feelings and Saxon convictions. But the Saxons cherished their old life, and the name of "Aedgar Ethelinge Engelondes dereling," was invoked as meaning a popular cry and a popular protest against the overweening Norman.

Saxon England became "Continentalised" in more senses than one, and, when the Somerset Barons, William de Falaise at Stoke Courcy and Robert de Candos at Stowey, endowed the Norman Priors of Lonley and Bec with English tithes—just as King William himself endowed St. Stephens at Caen with Crewkerne—they thought they were doing good service to their Church. But time proved the fallacy of this benefit as well as many others and, presently, the distinctive English life re-asserted itself with its marvellous vitality. In many ways,

the Norman, Flemish and Breton strain helped and braced the Anglo-Saxon life. Norman architecture abides with us in Somerset and is a speaking evidence of Norman power. There might have been something in the charge that the Saxons had become slothful, careless and addicted to luxury, and needed the "cleansing fires"—which were severe indeed.

To sum up. The Norman conquest of Somerset, introductory as it was to the siege of Exeter, is a very distinct study in itself, and is really more interesting than that of most shires. It is peculiar in the fact that it was a sea and land campaign. The four castles of Cary and Montacute by land, with Dunster and Stoke Courcy by sea, seem to form a kind of "Somerset Quadrilateral." In conjunction with them must be considered Castle Neroche, and Richmond Castle, and Nether Stowey Castle. The Conqueror's Somerset agents and officers were men of note, and bound to him either by blood ties or by personal service. Robert, Earl of Mortain, William de Falaise, William de Mohun, the Flemish Walter of Douai, Ralph de Conteville, the fierce Lupus and his son Lupellus, ancestors of the Lovels, William of Corcelle, father of Roger, who held eighty-seven manors in Somerset and, last not least, the warlike Geoffrey, Bishop of Coutances, and the overlord of Ascelin of Richmond, all helped to consolidate his power. To begin with, some Saxon chiefs like Brixi, and Brictric who, together with others, appear as signatories in the early (1068) Banwell Charter of King William, may have espoused his cause, but, as a rule the transference of Somerset manors from Saxon to Norman is complete and thorough by 1086. Had Saxons been prepared and had they been united from York to Exeter the tale might have been different. But there was no scheme of defence, no real plan, and so they were beaten in detail. Surely after all these years the lesson of being prepared still remains. Somerset has known the ravages of war from the day when Vespasian made his camp at Selwood, and the lessons of war written in blood should be permanent. "*Si vis pacem, para bellum.*"