

NORMAN BARONS

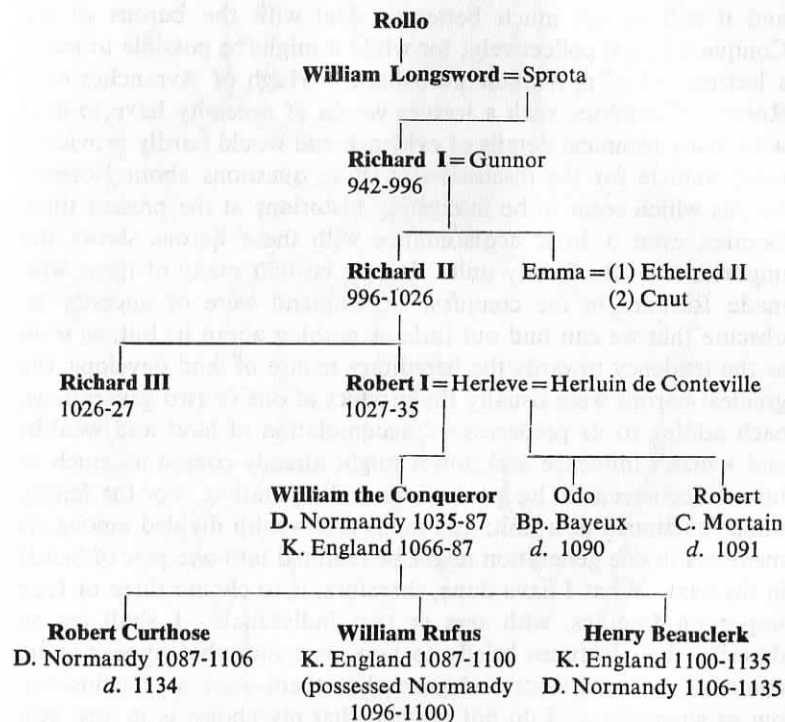
Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

WHEN you honoured me with an invitation to take part in your Commemorative Lectures, it was suggested that I should devote my lecture to one of the great barons, to correspond with Professor Southern's lecture on one of the great churchmen. It seemed then, and it still seems, much better to deal with the barons of the Conquest period collectively; for while it might be possible to make a lecture out of a William fitzOsbern, a Hugh of Avranches or a Robert of Bellême, such a lecture would of necessity have to deal with many technical details of evidence and would hardly provide a ready vehicle for the discussion of those questions about Norman barons which seem to be interesting historians at the present time. Besides, even a brief acquaintance with these barons shows the importance of the family unit. It may be that many of those who made fortunes in the conquest of England were of ancestry so obscure that we can find out little or nothing about it; but, as soon as the tendency towards the hereditary tenure of land develops, the greatest barons were usually the product of one or two generations, each adding to its predecessors' accumulation of land and wealth; and a man's influence and power might already consist as much in his connections as in his possessions and reputation. For the family often functioned as a unit; and lands and wealth divided among its members in one generation might be reunited into one pair of hands in the next. What I have done, therefore, is to choose three or four important families, with one or two individuals. I shall try to describe their fortunes briefly to you, pick out what appear to be common characteristics and generalize them—not as conclusions, but as suggestions. I do not pretend that my choice is in any way a properly controlled sample; the only principle of selection has been a negative one—to omit the families which made a name for themselves in Spain or in Italy or on the Crusade. Clearly, this cuts out a great part and a most interesting part of the Norman achievement; but families like Hauteville and Grandmesnil have been excluded partly because their inclusion would make the subject uncontrollably

large, and partly because, since it is the Norman Conquest of England that we are commemorating in this year 1966, the links which the Norman barons created between Northern France and Britain seem more relevant.

At the outset, there are two points in the history of the ducal and royal family which should be kept in mind, for they are very material to the argument of this lecture. First, the ducal consorts are important, since it was through them and their families that many

DUKES OF NORMANDY — KINGS OF ENGLAND



of the Conquest barons could claim kinship with the duke¹; and that, as we shall see, is often a significant element in their rise to pre-eminence. To avoid cluttering the genealogy, only those directly concerned with the families I have chosen have been included. Second, whatever his original intentions may have been, William the

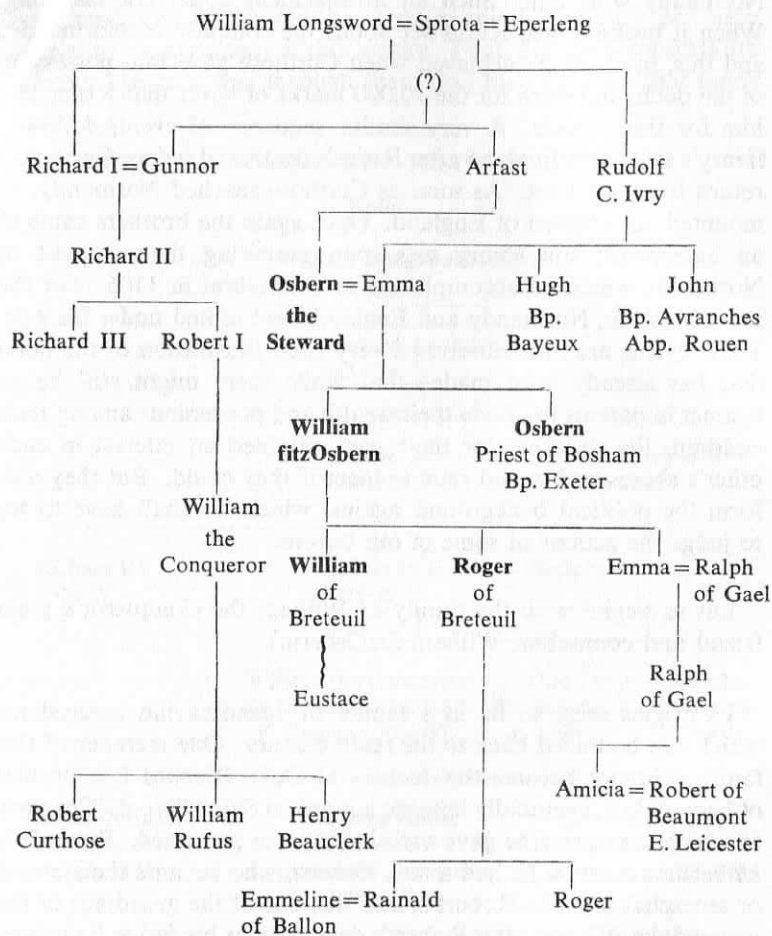
Conqueror in the end divided his wealth and his lands among his sons—but none of them accepted the division as permanent. Within a year of the Conqueror's death there was a movement to put Robert Curthose on the throne of England; and when Rufus had frustrated that, he forced Curthose virtually to share the government of Normandy with him. Such an arrangement could not last long. When it broke down, Rufus set about the conquest of Normandy; and this, in effect, he achieved when Curthose gave him possession of the duchy in return for the 10,000 marks of silver that Rufus lent him for the crusade. A very similar sequence of events followed Henry's seizure of England after Rufus's death and before Curthose's return from the East. As soon as Curthose reached Normandy, he mounted an invasion of England. Once again the brothers came to an agreement; but Henry was soon preparing the conquest of Normandy which he accomplished at Tinchebrai in 1106. For the rest of his life, Normandy and England were united under his rule. These events are in themselves a very good illustration of the point that has already been made—that while there might still be an instinct in parents to divide their wealth and possessions among their children, the children, for their part, retained an interest in each other's shares and would reunite them if they could. But they also form the political background against which we shall have to try to judge the actions of some of our barons.

Let us begin² with the family of William the Conqueror's great friend and counsellor, William fitzOsbern.³

Its origins seem to lie in a family of Scandinavian antecedents which can be traced back to the tenth century. One member of this family, Gunnor became the duchess of Duke Richard I; a brother of hers, Arfast, eventually became a monk at Saint-Père-de-Chartres, to which monastery he gave such lands as he possessed. But before he became a monk he had a son, Osbern, who became the steward or seneschal of Duke Robert I, and was one of the guardians of the young duke William after Robert's death. Since his father had given his lands to the monastery to which he had retired, Osbern had to find his own fortune; and this he did by his marriage to a daughter of Rudolf, count of Ivry, a half-brother of Duke Richard I. The lands he acquired, so far as they can be traced, are so intermingled with ducal lands, that it is almost certain that they had been carved

out of the ducal domain, presumably as an endowment for Count Rudolf. The principal units were Paci, on the Eure, and the honour of Breteuil.

THE FAMILY OF WILLIAM FITZOSBERN



Osbern met his death in the disorders of Duke William's minority, apparently as he was defending the person of the young duke. He had two sons, William, who became a knight, and Osbern, who became a clerk. The young Osbern seems to have been one of the

chaplains whom Edward the Confessor brought to England, for he held the immensely valuable church of Bosham on Chichester Harbour before the Conquest. William, his brother, had evidently grown up in the household of Duke William, and first comes into the news as one of the leading young warriors, with Roger of Montgomery, in the campaign during which Duke William captured Domfront and Alençon; and a little later he received the custody of the duke's castle of Breteuil, built to counter the French castle at Tillières. He inherited Paci and the honour of Breteuil from his father, and strengthened his position by marrying a daughter of Roger of Tosny. Some time before the conquest of England, he was wealthy enough to found two monasteries in Normandy, Cormeilles and Lyre. He must always have been close to Duke William, becoming, like his father, the duke's seneschal. Tradition has it that he took the lead among those who advised Duke William to invade England; and, if his brother was in Edward the Confessor's household and possessed of the church of Bosham—the port from which Harold sailed in 1064, if the Bayeux Tapestry is to be believed—then William fitzOsbern's intelligence was probably very good and great weight would be given to his opinion.

He followed this up by taking a very prominent part in the Hastings campaign and in later operations. Before King William left England in March 1067 to enjoy his triumph in Normandy, he put fitzOsbern in command of the western part of the country already conquered, with possession of the Isle of Wight and with his chief base in the old West Saxon capital at Winchester.⁴ At the same time, it appears, King William gave him the earldom of Hereford, already partly organized as a frontier district against the Welsh by Ralph 'the Timid', King Edward's nephew, who had died in 1057. If this grant was indeed made in 1067, it can only have been as 'land to be conquered'; but somehow, in the very short time he had in which to do it, fitzOsbern began the organization of Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and perhaps Worcestershire as a military region on the Norman model, where he held enough land to settle his tenants around him in a compact group, and to begin the building of castles and the establishment of castleries.⁵ The purpose of this was quickly shown when he attacked the Welsh princes of Deheubarth and Morgannwg, captured the whole region of Gwent, planted castles at Monmouth and Chepstow, and finally took the prince of Deheubarth into his homage by granting him manors in England.⁶

How he managed to do all this with his other responsibilities it is very hard to say. While King William was in Normandy from March to December 1067, fitzOsbern no doubt continued the process of conquest and consolidation in southern England. Florence of Worcester says that the king ordered him to build castles in suitable places⁷; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that he carried out the order thoroughly⁸; while Orderic speaks of the way in which he oppressed the English and made himself enormously rich in the process.⁹ He may well have been with the king on the expedition to the South West early in 1068, though he spent much of that year in Normandy. In 1069 he was put in charge of the second castle at York; and in the next year he was sent across the Channel to assist Queen Matilda in the government and the defence of Normandy.

While he was in Normandy, an appeal was received from the widow of Count Baldwin VI of Flanders, King William's sister-in-law. She had two young sons to protect from the designs of their uncle, Robert le Frison; and to obtain help she offered herself in marriage to fitzOsbern who, according to some accounts, actually married her. The possibilities opened by this marriage were enormous; for here was a man with vast estates in Normandy, England and Wales, who was offered the chance of making himself, effectively, count of Flanders, already the richest principality in France. He hastily fitted out an expedition, only to be killed at the Battle of Cassel in February 1071. His body was carried home to his monastery of Corneilles in Normandy; his (first) wife had been buried at his other foundation of Lyre; both monasteries had been liberally endowed from his acquisitions in England.

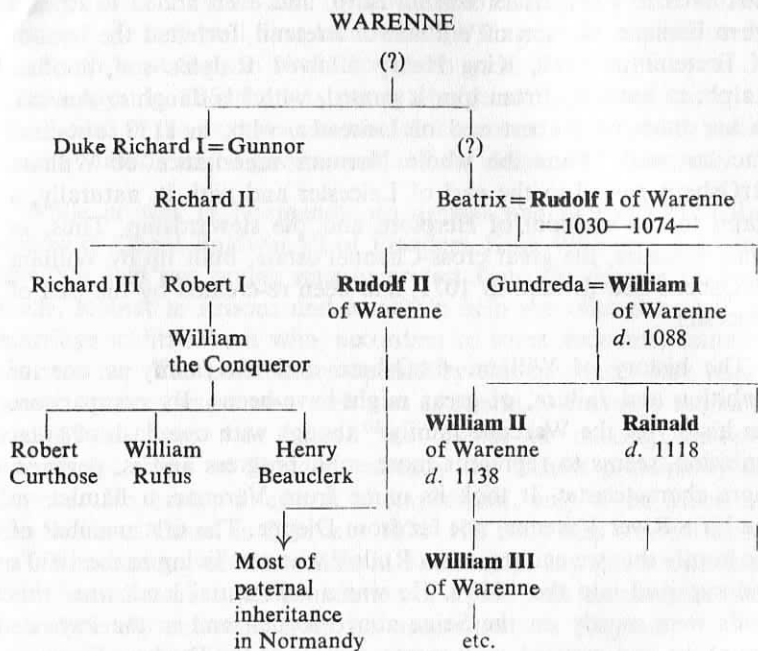
FitzOsbern was succeeded in his Norman lands by his elder son William of Breteuil, and in his English and Welsh lands by his younger son Roger of Breteuil. William, with some lapses, was a loyal vassal of Duke Robert Curthose. The most interesting incident in his career came in 1100 when, being in the hunting party in the New Forest when Rufus was killed, he rode to Winchester and urged the claims of his absent lord, Duke Robert, against those of Henry. He died in 1102, leaving only an illegitimate son Eustace. Roger is better known, for he was involved in the tragic conspiracy of 1075, in spite of Lanfranc's fatherly advice. His punishment was imprisonment for life. His estates were confiscated and ceased to exist as an entity.

This is not quite the end of the story. Roger of Breteuil had two sons, Rainald and Roger, who apparently served King Henry I well though without the reward they expected. Rainald, however, married into the Ballon family; and as a result he and his successors recovered at least an interest in the Welsh March. His sister Emma married Ralph, lord of Gael in Brittany and earl of Norfolk. Though Ralph lost his earldom, also in the revolt of 1075, he continued to hold his Breton lordship, and even added to it; and when Eustace, the son of William of Breteuil, forfeited the honour of Breteuil in 1119, King Henry allowed Ralph's son, another Ralph, to have it. From him it passed, with his daughter Amicia, to her husband Robert earl of Leicester, who, in 1153, obtained Paci as well. Thus the whole Norman inheritance of William fitzOsbern passed to the earl of Leicester and with it, naturally, a claim to the earldom of Hereford and the stewardship. Thus, in some measure, the great cross-Channel estate, built up by William fitzOsbern and divided in 1071, had been re-created by the earl of Leicester.

The history of William fitzOsbern and his family is one of ambition and failure, of great might-have-beens. By comparison, the history of the Warenne family,¹⁰ though with one flash of great ambition, seems to represent more solid progress and is, perhaps, more characteristic. It took its name from Varenne, a hamlet on the little River Varenne, not far from Dieppe. The first member of the family that we can trace is a Rudolf who was living in the 1030's and survived into the 1070's. He was a substantial landowner (his lands were mostly on the Seine above Rouen and in the Pays de Caux); he had married, so it seems, a niece of the Duchess Gunnor; and he is described as a knight.

He had two sons, Rudolf and William. Rudolf, the elder, evidently inherited his father's estates, leaving William, the younger, to make his own fortune. He began, like William fitzOsbern, by attaching himself as a young warrior to Duke William. As far as our information goes, he first distinguished himself in the Mortemer campaign of 1054; and as a result Duke William gave him the castle of Mortemer, forfeited by his kinsman Roger of Mortemer, and other lands in the neighbourhood, including Bellencombre which became the centre and head of the Warenne estate in Normandy. He was thus established: a new man, with a new estate, firmly attached to his duke and leader.

William of Warenne took a leading part in the anxious meetings in Normandy that preceded the invasion of England; he is one of the few men of whom we can be sure that he took a personal part in the Hastings campaign¹¹; and he was also one of the small band left to consolidate and continue the conquest of southern England under William fitzOsbern and Bishop Odo, while King William was celebrating his triumph in Normandy in 1067. Among the vast lands



he ultimately received in England was the rape of Lewes, a block of territory upon which he could settle his tenants in a compact group, and this he could well have obtained within a year or so of Hastings; and having thus established himself in England he settled down to that life of movement which seems to have been the lot of Norman barons after 1066. Thus he was in Rouen for a family gathering with his father and his elder brother in 1074; in the next year he took a very prominent part in the suppression of the revolt of the earls in England; and in the early 1080's he was fighting in Maine where he was wounded at the siege of Sainte-Suzanne. In the troubles that followed King William's death he supported Rufus—possibly

he had been bought by the creation of an earldom, later known as the earldom of Surrey, in his favour; for he clearly had to be offered some compensation for the lands in Normandy which he might well lose by his loyalty to Rufus. And it was at the siege of Pevensey, in 1088, that he received the wound from which he died.

Before his death he had amassed a huge estate in England, third in value after those of members of the royal family. In 1086 it stretched over 13 counties; but the chief blocks were in Sussex (most of the rape of Lewes), Yorkshire (the vast compact estate of Conisburgh, probably a fairly late acquisition), and in Norfolk. The Norfolk lands centred on Castle Acre; part of them had been given to him in exchange for a portion of the rape of Lewes, part he had inherited from his brother-in-law Frederick, killed by the followers of Hereward the Wake in 1070. He had married Gundreda, a Flemish lady, sister of Frederick and of that Gerbod who was briefly earl of Chester—you may still see her memorial in Southover Church by Lewes. Together they founded the great monastery of St. Pancras near William's castle at Lewes (this they gave to the great Burgundian monastery of Cluny, though the reasons for the gift are now less clear than they once seemed to be), and the priory of Castle Acre within his castle there, dependent directly upon Lewes and therefore indirectly upon Cluny again.

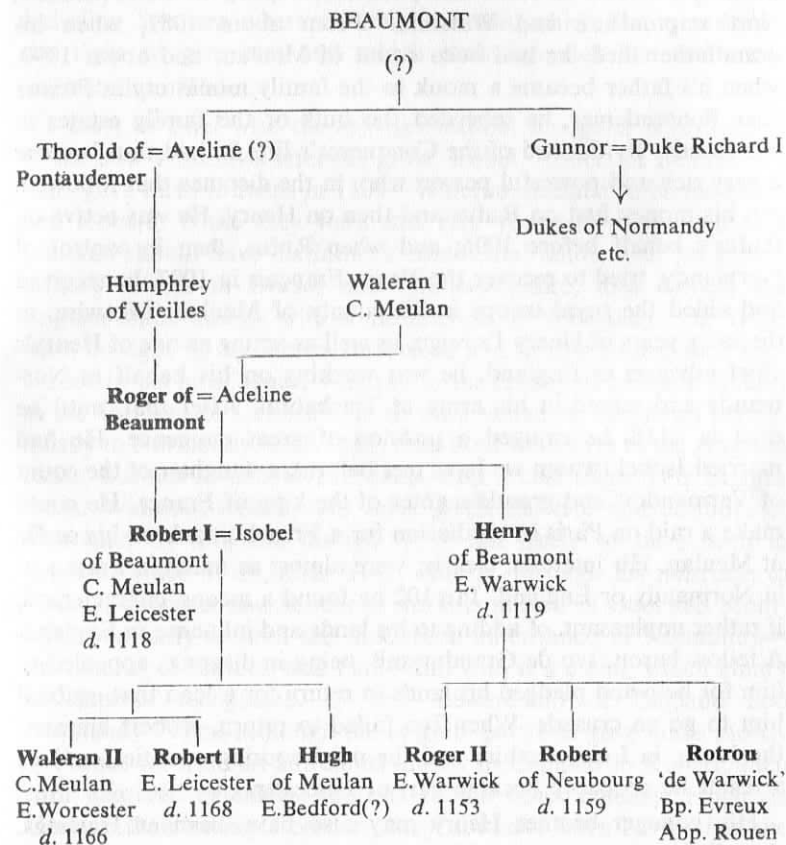
Like his father, William de Warenne left two sons: William, the elder (whom we may call William II), and Rainald the younger. The immediate descent of his lands is not certain; but it looks as though Rainald got whatever Gundreda may have held in Flanders and possibly some of the Norman lands; while William inherited the English estates and eventually, if not immediately, his father's lands in Normandy as well. Rainald's career is obscure. He supported Rufus against Robert in 1090, but he was fighting for Robert against Henry in 1105, on both occasions in Normandy. William II of Warenne was a different kettle of fish. He was enormously ambitious. In the 1090's he was trying to marry Edith-Matilda, a daughter of the king of Scots who eventually became King Henry's queen; later, it seems, King Henry was prepared to give him one of his own illegitimate daughters until Archbishop Anselm objected on grounds of consanguinity (an important piece of evidence that the Warennes were ultimately connected with the family of the Norman dukes). Finally he married the earl of Leicester's widow Isobel, who was a granddaughter of King Henry I

of France. So he won a royal bride in the end, if not one who could have influenced his career in quite the way that the other possibilities might have done. All the same, he added to his father's accumulation of estates both in England and Normandy—in England with the vast manor of Wakefield, adjacent to his honour of Conisburgh in Yorkshire; in Normandy with the castle of Saint-Saens.

From charter evidence, something that almost amounts to an itinerary of his life from about 1100 can be compiled.¹² It shows him as one of King Henry's counsellors, judges and generals (he commanded a division both at Tinchebrai in 1106 and at Brémule in 1119), almost ceaselessly journeying between England and Normandy; and we may be sure that he was looking after his own interests in the two countries as well as the business of the king- duke. There was a moment, in 1101-3, when he flirted with Robert Curthose; and Henry promptly confiscated his English estates. But this did not last long. He was one of those who were present at Henry's deathbed in 1135 at Lyons-la-Forêt, and also one of those who promptly accepted Stephen, whatever undertakings he may have given to Henry. For this he was put in charge of Rouen and the Pays de Caux (where the chief of his Norman lands lay) during the critical year when Stephen was establishing himself; but he was back in England again in 1136. He died probably in May 1138, and was buried with his father and mother in the family monastery at Lewes—to which he himself had been generous. His pious gifts had been well distributed: to the Norman monasteries at Saint-Evroul, Saint-Amand-de-Rouen, Longueville and Bellencombre; to the English house at Lewes, Castle Acre and the new foundation at Luffield in Northamptonshire.

Another family that acquired great power and influence by the steady accumulation of lands and offices, and by contriving to be on the right side in the political troubles or at least to accommodate themselves to both sides, was that of the Beaumonts¹³—that, at any rate, is what we may call them for convenience, whatever they called themselves. The furthest ancestor we can trace is Thorold of Pontaudemer who, it seems, married Aveline, a sister of the Duchess Gunnor. His son was Humphrey of Vieilles, who inherited his father's lands and added to them Vieilles, Beaumont and Beaumontel, all in the valley of the Risle, and much of them taken from

the original endowment of the abbey of Bernay. Humphrey was a follower of Duke Robert I; and it was the duke, no doubt, who persuaded the abbey to give up those lands. Humphrey's son Roger built a castle at Beaumont (still called Beaumont-le-Roger after him), established himself and, about 1088, founded a collegiate church there. He took no part in the conquest of England, being one of those left by William to watch over the security of the duchy; though by the time of Domesday he had possessions—not of any



great extent—in Dorset and Gloucestershire. Besides fastening his control upon the valley of the Risle, his great contribution to the family's fortunes was his marriage to Adeline, daughter and heiress of the count of Meulan. Since Meulan was in the Vexin Français—a

district then in dispute between the duke of Normandy and the king of France, though the king was winning—this marriage soon gave him an interest outside Normandy towards Paris; and his father-in-law is said to have had some connection with the ducal family of Normandy. It was thus, in all respects, a most profitable match.

Roger of Beaumont had two sons, Robert and Henry. Robert, the elder, fought in the Hastings campaign and acquired thereby, possibly in 1068 or soon after, extensive lands in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Wiltshire. From about 1081, when his grandfather died, he had been count of Meulan; and about 1090, when his father became a monk in the family monastery at Préaux near Pontaudemer, he inherited the bulk of the family estates in Normandy. By the end of the Conqueror's life, he had thus become a very rich and powerful person who, in the disputes that followed, put his money first on Rufus and then on Henry. He was active on Rufus's behalf before 1096; and when Rufus, then in control of Normandy, tried to recover the Vexin Français in 1097, he received and aided the royal troops in his county of Meulan. Likewise, in the early years of Henry I's reign, as well as acting as one of Henry's chief advisers in England, he was working on his behalf in Normandy and served in his army at Tinchebrai. After that, until he died in 1118, he enjoyed a position of great eminence. He had married Isobel (whom we have met before), a daughter of the count of Vermandois and granddaughter of the king of France. He could make a raid on Paris in retaliation for a French attack on his castle at Meulan. His interests, clearly, were almost as much in France as in Normandy or England. In 1102 he found a means, characteristic if rather unpleasant, of adding to his lands and influence in England. A fellow baron, Ivo de Grandmesnil, being in disgrace, appealed to him for help and pledged his lands in return for a loan that enabled him to go on crusade. When Ivo failed to return, Robert annexed the lands, in Leicestershire and the neighbouring counties; and as a result he probably became earl of Leicester.

His younger brother Henry may also have been at Hastings, though there is no direct evidence in his case. At some date (Orderic implies that it was in 1068)¹⁴ he was made constable of Warwick Castle; but he can be shown to have been in Normandy and Maine on many occasions during the later part of William's reign. Like his brother he supported Rufus against Robert Curthose, and, as

inducement or reward, was given the earldom of Warwick with extensive lands in the county (this was in 1088, and the lands included the extensive estate of an Anglo-Saxon landowner, Turchil of Arden, who had not yet been dispossessed). When his father died in 1094, he inherited the Norman barony of Annebecq; so that he, like his brother, now had important lands on both sides of the Channel. He was present at Winchester in 1100, and took a leading part in securing the succession to England for Henry. This service, and his continuing loyalty, earned for him the Gower peninsula, including Swansea where he built a castle, which Henry assumed the right to give him and which thus extended the Beaumont interests into Wales.

I must be brief with the next generation, though it is instructive to see how a family's interests grow. Isobel, Robert of Beaumont's wife, gave birth to twins in 1104—Waleran, deemed to be the elder, and Robert. While they were still very young it was settled that Waleran should have his father's continental lands, with his grandfather's estates in Dorset and Gloucestershire, and Robert the English lands though with some interest in Normandy. The twins were brought up by Henry Beauclerk and in due course each succeeded to his inheritance, Waleran to the county of Meulan, Robert to the earldom of Leicester. Both were active on Stephen's behalf, mostly in Normandy, until 1141; then both went over to the Angevin cause, but not so actively, it seems, that it cost them their English lands. Waleran, indeed, had been given the city and earldom of Worcester by Stephen, though he is not likely to have been in England much at all, after 1142; Robert, through his marriage to Amicia, daughter and heiress of the Breton lord of Gael and Montfort, eventually secured the fitzOsbern inheritance in Normandy—the honour of Breteuil and Paci—and with it a claim, which Henry fitzEmpress recognized, to the 'stewardship of England and Normandy'. Thus, although the original partition gave lands mostly in France to Waleran and lands mostly in England to Robert, each twin acquired extensive interests in the other country. Hugh de Meulan, their younger brother, may not have been born when the settlement was made, and no provision was ever made for him by the family. The kindly Stephen, as Professor Barlow would have it, did his best to make him earl of Bedford; but after the Battle of Lincoln this failed, and Hugh sank back into the obscurity from which he had only briefly emerged.

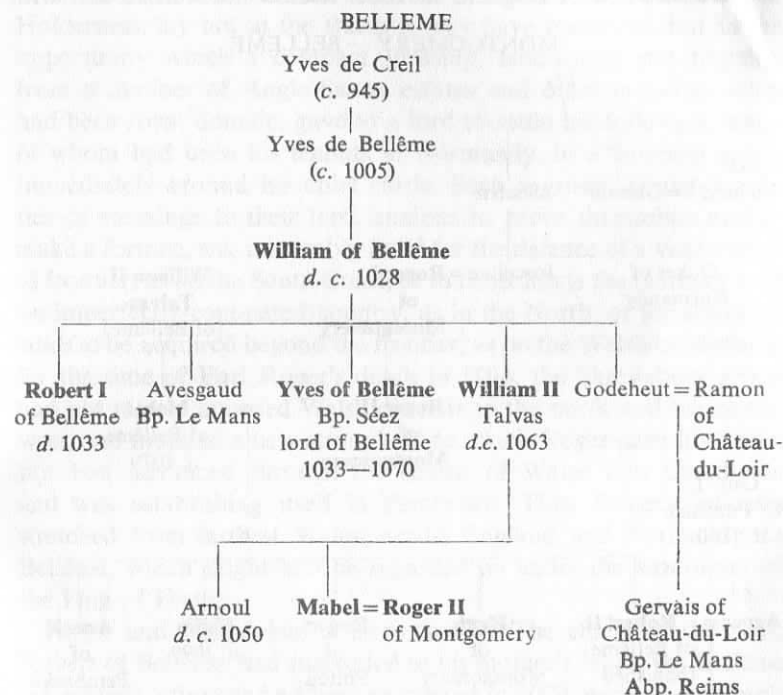
On the Warwick side, the eldest son of Henry of Beaumont, Roger, was under age when his father died, but obtained the earldom in 1123. Like his cousins he supported Stephen until 1141, and returned to him after only a brief flirtation with the Angevins. Indeed, he allowed Warwick Castle to be garrisoned by Stephen's troops; and he was so upset when the castle surrendered to Henry that he died, though it had been no fault of his. Of his brothers, Robert of Neubourg seems to have spent most of his life in Normandy, where he had succeeded to his father's lands and where he became a justiciar, eventually the seneschal-justiciar; Rotrau,¹⁵ the youngest, inevitably a priest, became successively bishop of Evreux and archbishop of Rouen. He is known to French historians, somewhat oddly, as 'Rotrou de Warwick'. While he in turn was the seneschal-justiciar of Henry fitzEmpress in Normandy, his cousin, Robert earl of Leicester, was his justiciar in England.

The influence of such a family must have been enormous. In addition to the offices they held, Waleran II of Meulan had estates from Gournay-sur-Marne, to the east of Paris, with property in Paris itself (for all of which he was, of course, the vassal of the king of France), through to Worcestershire on the borderland of Wales. He had been on pilgrimage to Compostella, and he joined the crusade of 1147 when things were rather difficult in England and Normandy. Robert of Leicester had property in England, Normandy and Brittany; Roger of Warwick, though mainly concerned with his Midland earldom, had for brothers an important baron and officer in Normandy and a bishop of Evreux destined to much higher things. The outlook of such people cannot have been confined to England or to Normandy.

The Bellême-Montgomery family, the last to be described in this way, is better known than most, for the chronicler Orderic Vitalis knew it well and wrote a good deal about its picturesque and often very violent members. It had a double origin as I have indicated by the hyphenated name.

The Bellême root¹⁶ may have originated in the Beauvaisis, that is in France, and its earliest possessions around Bellême were certainly held of the king of France. Though most of his lands may already have been held by his father, the real founder of the family's greatness seems to have been William of Bellême, who constructed a huge lordship on the axis Bellême-Alençon-Domfront, with castles in all three places, partly in France, partly in Normandy and partly

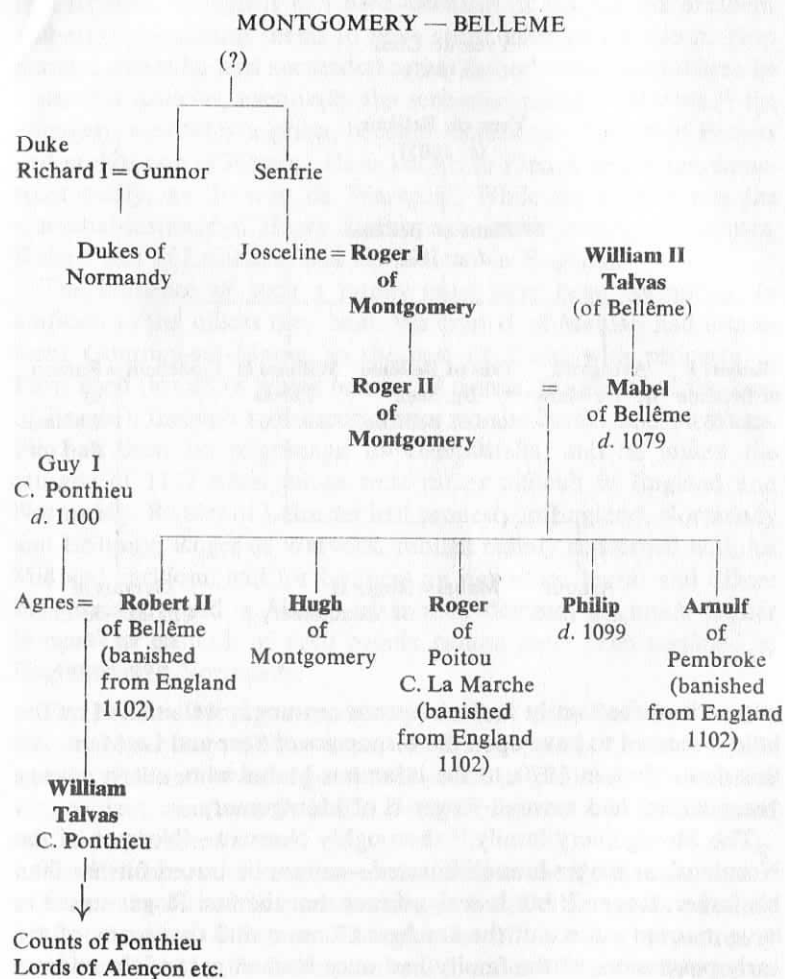
in Maine. It lay mostly in the almost inaccessible highlands to the south of Normandy, and controlled many of the important routes between Normandy and Anjou. It thus had great strategic potential; and, as a frontier lordship in such a situation, with divided allegiance it could almost aspire to independence. The power and



influence of the family in the eleventh century is well shown by the hold it seemed to have upon the bishoprics of Séez and Le Mans. All this descended, in 1070, to the infamous Mabel who, nearly twenty years earlier, had married Roger II of Montgomery.

The Montgomery family,¹⁷ thoroughly Norman—'Norman of the Normans', as Roger himself boasted—cannot be traced further than his father, Roger I; but it is significant that the first Roger seems to have married a niece of the Duchess Gunnor, and that many of the early possessions of the family had once formed part of the endowment of the ducal monasteries of Bernay, Jumièges and Fécamp. Roger I was lord of Montgomery and vicomte of the Hiémois, and his son succeeded him in his properties and honours. Roger II, like

William of Warenne, attached himself as a young warrior to Duke William and enjoyed the duke's friendship. He was already wealthy enough, in the 1050's, to found the monasteries of Saint-Martin-de-Troarn and Saint-Martin-de-Séez, and to restore Almenèches as a convent of nuns. Though intimately involved in the preparations for the invasion of England in 1066, he did not himself sail with



his duke, but was one of those who were detailed to assist the Duchess Matilda in the government of Normandy. However, he came to England with William in December 1067 and was

immediately given the compact lordship which became the rapes of Arundel and Chichester; later, in 1074 or before, he received the earldom of Shrewsbury. In both cases the significance of the grant, as also with William of Warenne's rape of Lewes, William fitzOsbern's earldom of Hereford or Hugh of Avranches' earldom of Chester, or the northern honours of Richmond, Pontefract or Holderness, lay not in the status it may have conveyed, but in the opportunity which a compact lordship, laboriously put together from a number of Anglo-Saxon estates and often including what had been royal domain, gave to a lord to settle his followers, many of whom had been his tenants in Normandy, in a compact group immediately around his chief castle. Such a group, bound by the ties of vassalage to their lord, anxious to prove themselves and to make a fortune, was admirably fitted for the defence of a vital stretch of frontier, as on the South Coast, or to consolidate the Norman hold on imperfectly-conquered country, as in the North, or for attacking lands to be acquired beyond the frontier, as on the Welsh borderland. By the time of Earl Roger's death in 1094, the Shrewsbury group had not merely annexed Welsh districts to the north and the north-west, and founded a new stronghold to which Roger gave his name, but had advanced through the centre of Wales into Ceredigion and was establishing itself in Pembroke. Thus Roger's interests stretched from farthest Wales, across England and Normandy, to Bellême, which might still be regarded as under the suzerainty of the king of France.

Roger and Mabel had a large family. The eldest of the sons, Robert of Bellême, had succeeded to his mother's lands, the Bellême inheritance, after she had been murdered in 1079, and to his father's lands in Normandy when he died in 1094. The English lands and at least some of the conquests in Wales, as sometimes happened at this time, were destined for the second son Hugh, who nevertheless seems to have spent most of his time, until he entered into his inheritance, in Normandy. He is best known for his co-operation with Earl Hugh of Chester in the great expedition of 1098, which was intended to recover the hold that his father, with the earl of Chester and his men, had once fastened on North Wales and which had been seriously threatened by the Welsh. King William Rufus, in two expeditions, had failed to restore the position. In their conflict with the Welsh, the two earls were successful; but they happened upon King Magnus Barefoot of Norway, who was doing some raiding on his own account; and in the battle that followed Earl

Hugh was killed. This was, as it turned out, a major setback for the Normans in North Wales.

Besides this, the death of Earl Hugh had another result. Though he had younger brothers, it was his elder brother, Robert of Bellême, already lord of the huge Bellême and Montgomery inheritance in Normandy, who now succeeded to Arundel, Shrewsbury and the other English and Welsh lands of his father; to which he added the great honour of Blyth in Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire and, through his marriage with Agnes of Ponthieu, the county of Ponthieu after the death of his father-in-law in 1100. This made him an enormously powerful baron, from the estuary of the Somme, where he could be virtually independent, through southern and central Normandy, southern and western England, to North Wales; and if we treat the family as a unit, as potentially it always was, we must take into account the possessions of his younger brothers as well. Of these Roger¹⁸ held what is now Lancashire, together with enormous estates in the West Riding, in Suffolk, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. He had married the heiress of the count of La Marche, in far-away Poitou (hence he is known to history as Roger of Poitou, or le Poitevin), and in 1091 he actually succeeded to the county. Yet when he founded Lancaster Priory he made it a cell of the family monastery of Saint-Martin-de-Séez in Normandy. The youngest brother, Arnulf, was lord of his father's conquests in Pembroke and of Holderness in Yorkshire; he, likewise, gave the priory he founded in Pembroke Castle to Saint-Martin-de-Séez. The second youngest, Philip, was that rare bird in the eleventh century, a literate knight, who joined Duke Robert Curthose and represented the family in the First Crusade. After fighting valiantly, he died in Jerusalem.

Indeed, it was their loyalty to Duke Robert, not quite uninterupted though whole-hearted in the end, that brought the Montgomery family to ruin. Roger II of Montgomery himself seems to have managed, yet successfully, to sit on the fence in 1088; but Robert of Bellême (whose interests at that time lay wholly in Normandy and who seems to have supported Robert already in his revolts against his father King William)¹⁹ and Roger of Poitou sided definitely with Robert Curthose. In 1101, Robert of Bellême was among those who were foremost in urging Curthose to invade England. He himself took part in the invasion and his brothers

joined him. All this not unnaturally brought King Henry to the conclusion that the family must be crushed, or at least driven out of England and Wales. A little war followed and Robert of Bellême was forced to retire to Normandy where, after one unsuccessful attempt to come to terms with Henry, he threw himself energetically into the defence of Normandy on Curthose's behalf and fought for him at Tinchebrai. When Curthose had been taken prisoner, Robert made his peace with Henry so far as his Norman possessions were concerned, though he recovered nothing in England; but as soon as the claims of Curthose's son William Clito were taken up by the king of France and the count of Anjou he returned to his old allegiance. In 1112 the king of France sent him on an embassy to Henry, who treacherously arrested him and kept him in close confinement for the rest of his life. His brothers had, perhaps, been more fortunate. Roger had retired to his county of La Marche after 1102, where he and his heirs continued to hold that county for half-a-century or so; and Arnulf very nearly got himself a kingdom in Ireland.²⁰ Indeed, the family of Montgomery-Bellême, was not quite finished; for the son of Robert of Bellême, William Talvas, and his descendants, continued as counts of Ponthieu and lords of Alençon in Normandy. But the enormous potential of the year 1100 was gone.

These brief family sketches seem to show something that almost amounts to a consistent pattern—though they have been chosen, not quite at random it is true, but with no special axe to grind. Even from what has already been said, however, you must be drawing certain conclusions for yourselves; but I shall now venture on one or two generalizations, as suggestions rather than conclusions, for my conclusion would simply be that what has been attempted superficially in this lecture could profitably be extended and deepened.

One quality of these Norman barons must have impressed itself upon you very clearly—what one might call their 'empire-building' proclivities, their ambition and their insatiable lust for possession. Now this is characteristic of a new social group that has risen very quickly; and there is good evidence that the Norman aristocracy which supported William in his great venture, and did so well out of it, was indeed a 'new' aristocracy.²¹ You will have noticed in the family histories that we can rarely, if ever, trace the ancestors of the

barons of 1066 further than two or three generations. By itself, though it may be suggestive, this proves little, for Norman documents of a date earlier than the year 1000 are rare indeed. But there is a considerable amount of positive evidence as well. Many of these families could claim some family relationship with Duke William. This is true of William fitzOsbern's family, of the Warennes, the Beaumonts and the Montgomerys. The highest rank in the Norman nobility, the counts, were almost all closely related to the duke.²² You may have noticed, also, that many of the lands possessed by the ancestors of these barons had in all probability formed part of the ducal lands originally (fitzOsbern again); and it is difficult to imagine that they had been acquired otherwise than by deliberate ducal gift. Some, also, had belonged to monasteries under ducal patronage (Beaumont, Montgomery); and again one must suppose that it was ducal pressure that induced the monasteries to part with their lands. Another element in the rise of a Norman family was personal service to the duke (Warrenne, Beaumont, Montgomery); and this might take the form of a young man training himself to arms by joining the ducal troop. Such service might be directly rewarded with a gift of property, as it clearly was in the case of William of Warrenne—indeed, you could say that the foundations of his fortune were laid by his service in the Mortemer campaign of 1054. And you will remember, too, that all this is happening just at the time when castles were becoming an instrument of military and political power. One of William fitzOsbern's earliest responsibilities was to keep the ducal castle of Breteuil; and while it was his son, not he, who converted it into a private castle, the custody of a ducal castle in itself offered possibilities of advancement, and in times of difficulty the distinction between custody and possession might not have much practical significance.

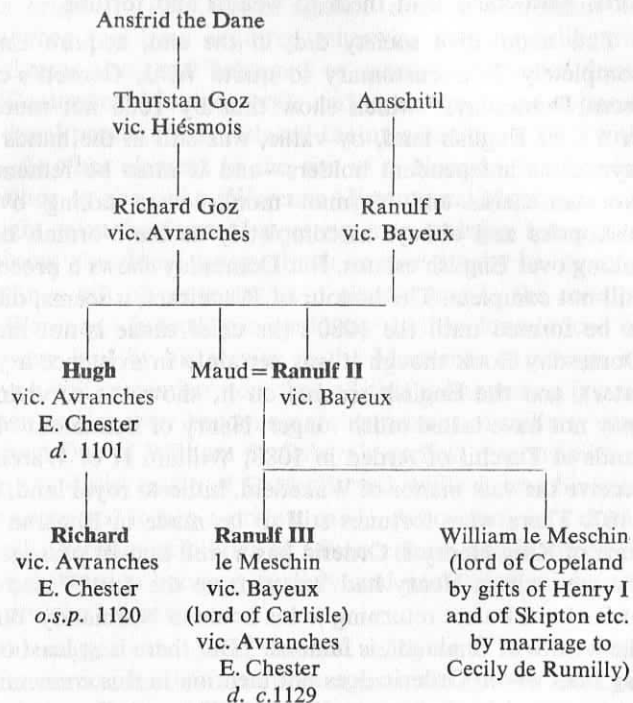
Now all this suggests that these families really were new, in their wealth and eminence, in 1066. It also suggests, though we must be careful how we use the word, that aristocratic society in early eleventh-century Normandy was becoming feudal; it even suggests that the duke himself was deliberately building up this feudal society as an instrument to establish and to maintain his power within his duchy and to hold his own with neighbouring rulers who were doing the same thing; and one of the principal characteristics of such early feudalism is precisely this aggressiveness and acquisitiveness; for vassals had to be rewarded in order that they might be held, and

lords, to hold their position in the world, were competing for vassals. Indeed, this competition for vassals, and for the land and wealth with which to hold them, is, if you like, the sociological explanation of the Norman conquest of England. These conclusions are further reinforced by the evidence that many of the families that were coming to the top in Normandy had been brought in from outside the duchy, from France (e.g. Bellême), from Brittany (e.g. Giroy),²³ even from Germany (e.g. Baldric the German).²⁴ A successful leader whom, as Orderic put it, 'the divine hand protected',²⁵ could attract adherents from far afield; for men on the make were looking for lords who could lead them to wealth and fortune.

This acquisitive society did, in the end, acquire England very completely. It is customary to quote W. J. Corbett's calculations from Domesday,²⁶ which show that by 1086 not more than 5% or 6% of English land, by value, was still in the hands of English laymen as independent holders—and it must be remembered that Norman clerks and Norman monks were taking over English bishoprics and abbeys as completely as the Norman barons were taking over English estates. But Domesday shows a process that was still not complete. The honour of Pontefract, it seems, did not begin to be formed until the 1080's (its chief castle is not mentioned in Domesday Book though it was certainly in existence a year or two later), and the English tenants on it, shown as surviving in 1086, may not have lasted much longer. Henry of Beaumont obtained the lands of Turchil of Arden in 1088; William II of Warrenne did not receive the vast manor of Wakefield, hitherto royal land, until about 1107. There were fortunes still to be made in England during the time of King Henry I. Orderic has a well-known passage describing the men whom Henry had 'raised from the dust',²⁷ and his picture of Richard Basset returning to his home in Normandy 'bursting with the wealth of England', is famous.²⁸ But there is at least one interesting man whom Orderic does not mention in this connection, though he too owed his fortune to Henry I. This was Ranulf le Meschin,²⁹ who fits very nicely into the pattern. The origin of his family goes back to an Anschitil whose son, Ranulf I de Briquessart, married a daughter of Duke Richard III, was vicomte of Bayeux and one of the principal leaders in the great revolt against Duke William in 1047. He was certainly pardoned; but his son, Ranulf II, though he may conceivably have taken part in the conquest of England, certainly got nothing out of it. However, he married Maud, the

sister of Hugh of Avranches, earl of Chester and vicomte of Avranches; and their son, Ranulf le Meschin, was taken up by Henry and put in charge of the Normans whom William Rufus had established in and around Carlisle. When young Richard, who had inherited the earldom of Chester and the vicomté of Avranches from his father Earl Hugh, was lost in the White Ship disaster of 1120, leaving no heir, his cousin Ranulf le Meschin was allowed to succeed to Chester and Avranches, and though he gave up Carlisle

THE ANCESTRY OF RANULF LE MESCHIN



he kept Bayeux; and he thus formed, at this late date, yet another of those great cross-Channel estates that are so characteristic of the time, and one that survived intact until the French conquest of Normandy in 1204.

But if there were Normans who found their fortunes late in England, there were others who apparently had no share whatever in this vast new source of wealth. The vicomtes of the Cotentin,³⁰ who

can be traced back to a Roger living in the time of Duke Richard I, belonged to an illustrious family second to none, on the evidence, in their service to the dukes at least until about 1040. But Nigel II took a lead, with Ranulf I of Bayeux, in the rebellion of 1047, although, like Ranulf, he was certainly pardoned and his lands were eventually restored to him. Yet it is almost certain that neither he nor his family took any part in the campaigns in England, nor did they get anything out of the Conquest. It does not seem that this was due to his rebellion twenty years before Hastings, for there were others, for instance Roger of Mortemer, who had rebelled at some time and obtained pardon and whose sons or grandsons profited from the Conquest; even Eustace of Boulogne, who attempted an invasion of England on his own account in 1067, subsequently obtained an enormous estate in a desirable part of England. Yet the vicomtes of the Cotentin got nothing. Why?

To complete the spectrum, I must quote the case of Gilbert d'Auffay.³¹ Orderic tells us that Gilbert was a kinsman of Duke William, and fought by his side in all the major engagements of the 'English War' 'with his men around him'—a useful literary indication, incidentally, of the social and military units that settled down in the great compact fiefs on the frontiers of England. He had, therefore, at least two of the essential qualifications for substantial advancement. Yet, when William offered him ample estates in England he refused, saying that he would not share in the fruits of brigandage. He would be content with his own lands in Normandy; and to them he returned. That, at least, is Orderic's story, and there seems to be a moral in it.

Another point which seems to stand out from the family histories is that these Norman barons were not simply men of Norman origin who came and settled in England. There were, of course, Bretons, Manceaux, Picards, Flemings and others among them; but that is not the point. All the more important of them, at any rate, were men who retained interests in Normandy (or France), and were clearly concerned to maintain those interests, as well as to acquire new interests in England or beyond. Even when there had been a family partition, with the Norman lands going to one branch and the English lands to another, the division was not always exactly on the line of the Channel (the Beaumonts provide a good example of this) and, in any case, each branch retained an interest in the other's

barons a most illuminating discussion of the dilemma of 1088.³⁵ Under William the Conqueror, they said, they had crossed the sea, subdued the English and seized their lands and wealth. But now William had been succeeded by two youths, and the government of Normandy and England was divided. How could they serve two masters? If they adhered to Robert they would lose their great possessions in England which they had won with their blood; if they kept faith with Rufus they would lose their patrimonial estates in Normandy. The only solution was to depose Rufus and to make Robert ruler of both England and Normandy, since he was the elder, the more easily led, and they had sworn fealty to him while his father was living. Hence the rising against Rufus. Some barons, faced with this problem, supported the brother in whose dominions the greater part of their estates lay; some may have acted on personal considerations or momentary calculation of interest; but one must not assume that a man like Robert of Bellême, for example, evil as he may have been, supported Robert Curthose out of sheer perversity, or that there was something inherently reprehensible in choosing Robert rather than Rufus or Henry. Both before and after the conquest of England, William had called upon his barons to do homage and swear fealty to Robert Curthose, apparently as heir to all his dominions³⁶; and men might reasonably feel that they should not go back upon their oath simply because William had changed his mind. There is even a suggestion of principle behind the actions of Robert of Bellême; for the one occasion on which he served Rufus actively was in the campaigns the king led into the Vexin and into Maine. This was between 1097 and 1099, when Rufus was in lawful possession of Normandy and bound to defend the duchy and its interests. Otherwise Robert of Bellême and his family supported Robert Curthose quite consistently, save in so far as they tried, as any man would do, to be on good terms with both brothers, whether Rufus and Curthose or Henry and Curthose.

My conclusion is rather presumptuous. If what I have been trying to do in this lecture in an elementary way (and those of you who have studied the Norman Conquest will know that I have not had to dig very deep for the matter I have put before you) could be done in a big way, that is a comparative, almost a sociological study of the Norman families, and above all done in the context, not simply of England, but of the whole Norman 'empire', I am sure we should

find that there is a good deal still to be learnt about the Norman conquest and colonization of this country. Take the simple questions raised in this lecture: Why did some families do so well out of the Conquest while others only profited later or not at all? What precisely were the conditions that governed the rise and fall of families? Can we get any nearer to a chronology of the Norman colonization of England—and if we could, should we see anything of the conditions under which it was carried out, whether King William was always completely in control or whether he had to respond to pressure from below? All this is the very stuff of eleventh century politics. The work has already been begun by Professor Douglas in this country and by Monsieur Musset in Normandy; Dr. Wightman and others are showing the way; and all the vast distinterested labour of the great English genealogists—Sir Charles Clay, Mr. G. H. White, Lewis Loyd, William Farrer, J. H. Round and many others—is waiting to be used, and is there for anyone to use. We have studied the constitutional and the political, the administrative, military, economic and ecclesiastical effects of the Norman Conquest upon England; but the subject still awaits its Namier.³⁷

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