

GUNDRADA DE WARENNE.

By E. CHESTER WATERS.

POSTSCRIPT.¹

I return, after an interval of nearly two years to the vexed question of Gundrada de Warenne's parentage, for the purpose of making some small corrections.

It was not altogether without misgivings that I ventured in the first instance to impugn the conclusion of every modern writer who has handled the subject ; for those who maintain that Gundrada was the daughter of William the Conqueror are agreed with those who contend that she was only his stepdaughter or his goddaughter, in accepting without question the charters of Lewes Priory as reliable evidence. It has been therefore a great satisfaction to find that my distrust of the charters is shared by those who are best qualified to pronounce judgment, and that the highest authorities are now contented to believe that Gundrada was *not* the daughter of Queen Matilda by William the Conqueror or anyone else, but was the sister of Gherbod the Flemish Earl of Chester, as Dugdale stated in his Baronage two hundred years ago on the authority of Orderic Vitalis.²

There are however still those who refuse to be convinced, and one of the most notable of my critics, Sir George Duckett, has examined the charters from Clugni Abbey preserved in the National Library at Paris, and has since contributed to the Yorkshire Archæological Journal³ a Paper, in which he insists more confidently than ever that Gundrada was the Conqueror's daughter and Earl Gherbod's foster sister. This is the more remarkable, because (so far as I can see) the only fresh evidence which he has found tends rather to negative this conclusion. His researches have brought to light the original charter of William the Conqueror, confirming to the monks of Clugni the grant by William de Warenne and his wife Gundrada of the Cell and its endowments, which subsequently developed into the great Clugniac Priory at Lewes. The grant was limited to the church of St. Pancras at Lewes with its appurtenances in the vicinity, viz. : land for six ploughs, two at Swanborough, one at a place not named, and three at Falmar ; and the date of this confirmation must be fixed in 1076 or early in 1077, for the witness, Robert de Beaumont (afterwards Count of Meulan) is never found signing charters without the title of Count after July, 1077.⁴ Sir George has

¹ See Archæological Journal, vol. xli, p. 300.

² Dugdale's Baronage, vol. i, p. 74.

³ Yorkshire Archæological and Topographical Journal, vol. ix, pp. 421-437.

⁴ Robert de Beaumont signed in 1077 as Robert Count of Meulan (*Comes de*

Mellent) the Conqueror's charter in favour of St. Stephen's, Caen, (*Gallia Christiana*, vol. xi. Instr. 68) and this charter must have been executed before the month of July, for it is witnessed by, among others, Hugh Bishop of Lisieux, who died on 17 July, 1077.

printed for the first time *in extenso*¹ this interesting charter, which was attested by six Barons and Maurice the Chancellor, and was subscribed by—

William, King of the English. Mathildis, Queen of the English.

Earl William the King's son (*Comes filius regis*).

William de Warenne. Gundrede wife of W. de Warenne.

It is significant that Gundrada does not sign herself "The Countess," as the king's daughter would have done, although her supposed brother the king's son William styles himself *Comes*; whilst the text of the charter makes no reference whatever to any relationship between the king and the benefactors, whose grant he was confirming, although there are two distinct passages, in which we might expect to find the relationship mentioned if it existed. But such considerations had no weight with Sir George Duckett, who almost ridicules the notion of accepting what he calls "Orderic's uncorroborated statement, in disproof of Gundrada's royal parentage." I fear that I have assisted to mislead him by repeating at p. 7 the received error that Orderic is "the only ancient historian who mentions Gundrada's name"; for, as Sir George justly remarks, Orderic is by no means infallible. The fact is however that Orderic is not the sole authority for our knowledge of Gundrada's relationship to Earl Gherbod, for he is corroborated by the independent testimony of a contemporary chronicle of the highest character, viz.: **THE BOOK OF HYDE ABBEY** which was published in 1866 amongst the *Chronicles of the Rolls Series*.

The testimony of this Chronicle carries special weight, because the text contains several particulars of Gundrada's husband William de Warenne, which are not recorded elsewhere. For instance, we know from Domesday that William de Warenne had a brother Frederic, who had lands in Norfolk and Cambridgeshire² which had passed to his brother before the Survey was compiled. This chronicle tells us³ that Frederic was treacherously slain in his own house one night by Hereward the outlaw, who had established himself with a band of brigands in the marshes of the Isle of Ely, and for a long time carried on a guerilla war against William de Warenne. The paragraph ends with a notice of the fate of "*Gherbod Earl of Chester the brother of the Countess Gundrada*, who was entrapped by his enemies on his arrival in Flanders, and found there a miserable death."⁴ We learn from this same chronicle⁵ that the Earldom of Surrey (which is mis-described or mis-copied *Asarum* in the MS.) was bestowed by William Rufus on William de Warenne in reward for his faithful counsel and good service in the great revolt of the Barons in the spring of 1088, and that the Earl received his death wound at the siege of Pevensey Castle from an arrow which struck him in the leg.⁶ He was carried home to Lewes, where he lingered for some time; and when he felt his end approaching he divided his estates between his sons, making William

¹ Yorkshire Journal, vol. ix, pp. 433-4.

² Domesday Book, vol. ii, fo. 150-160 and vol. i, fo. 196 b.

³ Liber Monasterii de Hyda, edited by Edward Edwards for the Master of the Rolls, 1866, p. 296.

⁴ Idem p. 296 "*Comes Cestrensis*

decessit Gherbodo, frater Gondrade Comitisse, Flandriamque veniens, inimicorum præventus insidiis miserabiliter perit."

⁵ Idem p. 298.

⁶ Idem p. 299.

his heir in England and Reginald his heir in Flanders. The fact that the younger son's inheritance was in Flanders raises a strong presumption that his mother was a Fleming; although I am bound to admit that these Flemish estates might have been derived from his uncle Frederic, who was undoubtedly connected with Flanders. For his name is attached to a charter¹ of Guy, Count of Ponthieu in favour of the abbey of St. Ricquier, which was made in 1067 in the presence of the King of France, and the Count of Flanders, with the consent of the nobles of the province.² The County of Ponthieu was within the Flemish territory, but bordered on Normandy, and was in close vicinity to the river Warenne, which falls into the river Dieppe below the castle of Arques, and gave name to the family whose castle stood on its left bank. Frederic's high rank amongst the subscribing nobles is proved by his place in the list of witnesses, for his name stands next to that of the young Count of Flanders, and it is significant that he occurs in connexion with the same district as his brother's wife Gundrada, who was the sister of the hereditary advocate of St. Bertin's Abbey at St. Omer. *The Book of Hyde* was printed for the first time in 1866, and was unknown to Stapleton, who published his well known Paper on the family of de Warenne in 1846,³ or that great genealogist would not have fallen into the mistake of asserting (as he did) that Frederic was not the brother of William de Warenne but of Gundrada.

Stapleton, however, is not the only writer who would have been saved from error by acquaintance with the text of this chronicle; for if I had read it sooner, I should not have denied (as I have done at p. 15), that William de Warenne was created Earl of Surrey by William Rufus. Orderic gives us two conflicting accounts of the date of the Earl's creation, for he says in one passage,⁴ that the Earldom was given to him by William the Conqueror; and in another,⁵ that it was bestowed on him shortly before his death by William Rufus. There can be little doubt, however, that the latter date is the true one, since the silence of Domesday, in which William is never styled an Earl, is corroborated by the circumstantial narrative of the Book of Hyde. It is not, however, impossible to explain how it came to pass that William de Warenne is styled an Earl in 1076 and 1086 in the cartulary of Battle Abbey,⁶ although he was not created Earl of Surrey until the next reign. For it may be accounted for in this way. The dignity of an Earl in England was personal and official, and was not necessarily connected with any particular country or place.⁷ Moreover, it was the English custom that Earls and only Earls were entrusted with viceregal powers. Now it was the settled policy of the Conqueror to affect the character of a constitutional sovereign, so that when he went back to Normandy in the spring of 1067, and left two Normans to govern England as viceroys during his absence, he qualified them for office in accordance with English usage by creating them both Earls. As time went on, the Conqueror recognised the

¹ Quoted from Acherii Spicilegium by Stapleton in the *Archæological Journal*, vol. iii, p. 4.

² "Annuentibus Proceribus mære provincie in præsentia Regis, etc."

³ *Archæological Journal*, vol. iii, pp. 1-26.

⁴ Orderic Vitalis, lib. iv, cap. 7.

⁵ Idem, lib. viii, cap. 9.

⁶ *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. iii, p. 245.

⁷ 3rd Report of the Lords on the Dignity of the Peerage, p. 121.

danger of increasing the number of Earldoms, but those great officers of state who exercised viceregal power during the Sovereign's absence were always reputed Earls in popular estimation, and probably kept that rank for the rest of their lives without ever being Earls by formal creation. William de Warenne was one of the King's viceregents in 1074,¹ and we can readily believe that from that time forward he ranked amongst Earls, although it was not until fourteen years afterwards that he was actually invested with the hereditary Earldom of Surrey. His colleague in 1074 was Richard, son of Earl Gilbert, the ancestor of the Earls of Clare and Hertford, who similarly ranked amongst Earls without being so styled in Domesday.

It will be observed that throughout this postscript the name of Gundrada's husband is spelt Warenne. This correction has been made advisedly, for the little river in upper Normandy, from which the family took their name, has always been known as Varenne or Guarenne. It has its source in the commune of Omonville-sur-Varenne, and falls into the canal of Dieppe just below the ruins of the Castle of Arques. The chief seat of the family stood on its left bank higher up the stream, and was raised on a mound, which bore the name of Bellencombe (*Bellus Cumulus*). This is now the chef-lieu of a canton in the arrondissement of Dieppe, department of La Seine Inferieure. The family name was commonly spelt in the middle ages with a double *r*, but this was a corruption of English origin and of later date. In Gundrada's time and for several generations afterwards the name was spelt in the French fashion, and all the ancient authorities are agreed in writing it with a single *r*, as Sir George Duckett has set me the example.

I submit these corrections to my critics with the assurance that they do me a favour when they convict me of error, but I must take leave to protest against the assertion that my disbelief in the contents of these Lewes Charters has arisen from any desire "to bolster up an ingenious theory" of my own.² The simple fact is, that this is one of those cases in which the truth has to be deduced from conflicting evidence. We have on the one side the judicial declaration of Archbishop Anselm that Gundrada was *not* the King's daughter, and the independent testimony of two contemporary chronicles that she was the sister of Gherbod the Fleming, sometime Earl of Chester. On the other side we find it stated that she was the daughter of King William or Queen Matilda by three separate documents in a cartulary of Lewes Priory, which was compiled in 1417,³ a period as far removed from the time in which Gundrada lived, as we are now from the reign of Henry VIII. When two sets of witnesses flatly contradict each other, one or the other must be disbelieved; and it appears to me from internal evidence that the first of these Lewes documents has been tampered with, that the second has been falsified by an interpolation,

¹ Orderic Vitalis, lib. ix, cap. 14.

² Notes and Queries, 20 Feb., 1886, p. 157.

³ The cartulary in the Cotton MSS. was compiled, as I have said at p. 14,

in 1444, but Sir George Duckett found at Paris a copy dated 6 Sept. 1417, which was made by direction of Prior Nelond after the suppression of the alien Priors.

and that the third is one of those forged deeds of confirmation, which are familiar to every student of monastic cartularies. I can explain their contents in no other way; but, however this may be, it cannot fairly be described as "an ingenious theory," that I am contented to rely on the solemn testimony of St. Anselm when he is corroborated by the only two contemporary chronicles, in which Gundrada is mentioned.

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