THE CASTLE OF FOUGERES AND ITS LORDS.[1]

By J. BAIN, F.S.A. (Scot.)

Few places in Brittany have a more interesting history than the Castle of Fougères—literally "Ferns," such being the meaning of its name, and the heraldic device of its ancient lords. Already a great and important fortress in the days when the Kings of England were also Dukes of Normandy, it has seen at least two English monarchs and a King of Scotland in warlike array before its walls; it has been the scene of many stirring events in the middle ages, and nearer our own time it was one of the rallying points of the Chouans, those bold peasants who so gallantly maintained the cause of their Church and King against the armies of the Revolution. Balzac's genius has illuminated this page of its history in one of his inimitable romances, *Les Chouans en Bretague.* The traveller who leaves Normandy for Brittany, and who prefers to the usual track by St. Malo and Dinan, the road from Avranches by St. James de Beuvron to Rennes, will enter the old Armorican duchy under favouring auspices. By this road the Bretons used to invade Normandy till William the Conqueror planted the castle of St. James in their way and forced his turbulent neighbours to take the route by the mouth of the Couesnon, where the "Pas au Bœuf" below Pontorson, has engulfed many a plundering Breton. The road from Avranches to Fougères is highly picturesque. The trees in this part of France, perhaps owing to the nearness of Brittany, where nature is allowed more of her own way than elsewhere, are not ruthlessly cropped, and growing in clumps and hedgerows have more of a forest appearance than usual. The crimson stalks of

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the sarrazin or buckwheat, standing cut in the fields, glow in autumn with a novel charm for English eyes, contrasting finely with the changing hues of the forest timber. As we approach St. James, a deep narrow valley on the left, richly clothed with wood, marks the course of the little river Beuvron, on its way to join the Selune, which soon after loses itself among the treacherous sands of the bay of Mont St. Michel. St. James, once possessing a strong castle and a priory of Benedictines, is now a little open town. Only a few fragments of walls and towers on the edge of the ravine overhanging the river, remain to shew its former strength. Shortly after leaving it, the road enters Brittany, a fact made evident in many ways; the country becomes wilder, the road more tortuous, with stretches of gorse covered land, a plant much used by the natives in foddering their cattle, and instead of the tall, spare, Norman, the dark, long haired, and short Breton will be seen in autumn busy with his family or servants thrashing his crops with the primitive flail, on the smooth surface of his open farmyard.

Few things shew more clearly than their husbandry the conservative character of the Bretons. The road winds along, passing now a wood, in whose dark recesses one might almost suspect a wolf or two to be lurking, now an old mansion with its étang, or moat, and at last reaches the base of a tree-crowned hill, from which the old walls and houses of a town look forth. By many indications one can perceive that a place of some consequence is near at hand. The traveller is, indeed, close to Fougères, the chief place of the arrondissement, with a population of between 9,000 and 10,000 inhabitants. A strong smell of leather pervades the environs, revealing the principal trade to be "cordonnerie." The natives also carry on other industries, such as dyeing, tanning, glass blowing, and the making of sabots. The hill, on which the town stands, rises to the height of 440 feet, and an extensive view is gained from the platform, east, south, north, and west. In the last direction, a winding street runs through the market place by a steep declivity to the gateway of the castle. The town of Fougères in shape much resembles a pear, the broadest part being at the top of the ridge on which the visitor is standing, while the narrower part

tapers off downwards towards the castle, the old town walls bounding either edge of the declivity, and leaving little more space than the breadth of the street, and the houses and gardens on each side. To the east and south of its upper and broadest part, Fougères is now an open town, its gates and walls there having been long destroyed. It has burst its bounds in that direction towards the forest, and the road to Rennes. Elsewhere the walls still remain, no longer fit for defence, for houses have been built on them, and ivy creeps over all the old embrazures. On a spur projecting from the plateau towards the south, just outside the walls, stands the principal church of St. Leonards, a conspicuous object in the landscape, as the richly timbered ground slopes steeply away from its site northwards into the valley, where stands another church under the castle walls with an oddly deflected spire—that of St. Sulpice. Further to the north and west, an amphitheatre of low hills surrounds the castle, broken only by the road to Dol and St. Malo. In the valley between, the little stream of the Nançon winds around the town and castle, flowing gently to join the Couesnon, a mile or so further down. The town once possessed four gateways, only one of which, that of St. Sulpice, remains. Eight important highways intersected at this town. Fougères being one of the most ancient fiefs of the duchy, its early lords, who were of the same stock as the Dukes of Brittany, took precedence of all their other feudatories. Passing down the street already described, between old houses with arcaded fronts resting on heavy wooden pillars, we arrive at a moat, supplied by the Nançon, and crossing two successive drawbridges, no longer moveable, we enter under an archway into a court flanked by two towers of the 12th century, where doubtless in days of yore any stranger underwent a strict examination before obtaining permission to proceed further. But we may now go on unchallenged to the place d'armes or outer bailey of the fortress, large enough for a tournament, surrounded by many flanking towers, all bearing individual names indicative of historic incidents in the annals of the Castle and its owners. The donjon, or keep, has long been razed, though its three flanking towers remain, two of them bearing the romantic

names of the "Tour de Mélusine" and the "Tour de Gobelin." The third, at the extreme north-west angle, bears the name of "Clisson," the constable of Brittany, and contain a prison chamber at its base, accessible only by a ladder. The only light is a small slit in the 12 or 13 ft. wall. Near the latter, a postern, once communicating with the keep by a covered way, opened on the high road, many feet above its level, affording access by a ladder or otherwise without passing through the main entrance next the town. The fortress, like the solid rock on which it stands, resembles an irregular triangle, the apex being next the town. The great height of its walls, seemingly from 30 to 40 feet, added to that of its rocky foundation, protected it on the south and north-west. To the north-east, a moat in addition protected it. Notwithstanding this, it was carried by escalade on a memorable occasion in the 15th century. It is said to have been founded in the 11th century, but little of it probably dates earlier than the end of the 12th. Two of the largest towers which cap the angles of the walls to the south-west bear the names of "Raoul" and "Surienne," and seem, (or possibly the superstructure only) to be of the 14th or 15th century. These, with a square tower called the "Tour de Cadran," front the church of St. Sulpice, and command the road from Dol and St. Malo, which enters the town by the already named gate of St. Sulpice, whose tower is still entire, and shews the grooves for working the chains of the drawbridge. Closely adjoining is the last of the castle towers on this side, the "Tour de Plesguen," joined by a curtain to the gateway, through which nothing could enter the town save by permission of the Lords of Fougères. Having thus given an imperfect outline of their fortress and bourg, let us see what manner of men and women held high state in these deserted halls and towers, now in the peaceful occupation of a large manufacturer of dyed wool. The origin of the Lords of Fougères is lost in the mists of Breton antiquity. The first their historian traces was Meen or Maino, the younger son of Juhel Berenger, count of Rennes, who, in the 10th century, received the lordship in appanage from his father. The Counts of Rennes were of the stock of the old Breton princes, derived from

the British leader Conan, who is said, early in the 5th century, flying from the tyranny of the stranger, to have led a body of his countrymen to a new Britain beyond the sea, then known as Armorica. In a later day, the descendants of these men swelled the army of William the Conqueror, and received wide lands in the country that their forefathers had abandoned to the Saxon and Angle. For two centuries and a half the male descendants of Maino held the foremost place among the nobles of Brittany. They allied themselves with the Dukes of Brittany, the Earls of Chester, the De Rohans, and other great houses. They founded, after the manner of their times, abbeys and churches, and sometimes retired to these sanctuaries. They also made war on not unequal terms with crowned heads. Those who wish full details of their history will find it in the works of the learned Benedictines, Fathers Lobineau and Morice, and the Sieur d'Argentré. The third baron, Maino, and his wife Adelaidis, appear in a deed granted by their relative Maino, bishop of Rennes in 1050, of two churches to Mont St. Michel, and it is added in the record, that "their young son Juhel present in his mother's arms, and crying, was pacified by a monk with twelve pennies," an interesting and graphic touch of nature in a dry legal document. This Maino was a munificent benefactor to the Abbey of Marmoutiers, and after his death, Adelaidis his widow, and her surviving son, Raoul I., in 1104 granted to the same house the church of St. Sulpice in the valley below the castle, till then known as the chapel of Notre Dame de Marais, with all rights of baptism and burial over the inhabitants of the castle of Fougères, reserving only to the lord of Fougères the right to hear mass in his own chapel of St. Mary within its walls. This Raoul, besides making the pilgrimage to Rome, was himself a great church benefactor. He was endowed by the Conqueror with many lands in Normandy and England for his services at the Conquest, and in 1112, with consent of his wife Avicia, and their four sons, he founded the celebrated Cistercian abbey of Savigny across the Norman border, conferring on it valuable possessions, an example followed by many other Briton and Norman nobles. Scarce a stone remains of this great abbey, the

mother house of Furness, Kirkstall, Byland, and many others still splendid in ruins, whose riches are commemorated in the Norman proverb—

"De quel côte que le vent vente
L'Abbaye de Savigny a rente."

Henry, his son, the next lord, gave additional lands to Savigny, and ended his days there as a monk. His son, Raoul II., was the most distinguished of the line. With the air of a sovereign prince, he styled himself in his charters "Radulfus, Dei gracia Filgeriarum Dominus." During the struggle for the succession to the Duchy, between Eudon, viscount of Porhoët, the second husband of Bertha, daughter and heiress of Conan the Great, and his stepson, Conan earl of Richmond, Raoul sided with Eudon, and in 1162 seized the castles of Dol and Combourg. Conan obtained the aid of Eleonora of Aquitaine, Queen of England. Raoul, foreseeing trouble, took the cross in 1164, hoping to obtain the protection of the Holy See. But Henry II. descended that year upon Brittany, and Raoul, in place of departing for the crusade, had to defend his castle. Henry sat down with an army before it. The siege was long and severe, and, as we are told by the chronicler, proved the courage and skill of Raoul. But in 1166, both town and castle were taken by assault, and dismantled by Henry. William the Lyon, King of Scotland (whose sister was the wife of Conan), is known to have been with the besiegers. Such losses would have been enough to arouse the resentment of Raoul, but another motive animated it. Henry, by marrying his young son Geoffry, to Constance, the youthful daughter of Conan, imagined that he had quietly secured the ducal throne. The proud Bretons disgusted with Conan's thus bringing them under the yoke of a stranger in preference to one of the princes of his own sovereign house, of which the warlike Raoul was a scion, formed a league, with Raoul at its head, against the foreigner. Conan, called "the Little," to distinguish him from his grandfather, had died young in 1170 (he was only 31) perhaps of chagrin. Raoul seized the castles of St. James and Le Tilleul, defended by Henry's Brabançon mercenaries, and burned them. He restored his own castle in 1173, and also prepared a singular subterranean retreat, in which to conceal

his treasures, the "celliers of Landean," still existing in the forest, a few miles from the town. Unluckily for him Henry's soldiers captured the convoy on its way to this place of safety. Raoul, however, again seized Dol and Combourg, and met the English force in a pitched battle on the plain of Dol. He lost nearly all his allies in the battle, and had barely time to take refuge in Dol when Henry, hurrying from Rouen, made him and the Earl of Chester prisoners. Raoul regained his liberty by giving his sons, William and Juhel, as hostages. Henry at last made peace with him, and in 1185 Raoul, as Seneschal of the Duchy, "an officer," says the chronicler, "of the first dignity, which he merited by his high birth and rare valour," assisted at the assize of Geoffry Plantagenet, Duke of Brittany. In 1190 he carried out his long cherished design, and departing for the Holy Land, is said to have died there in 1194. Like his ancestors he was a munificent benefactor to the Church, and founded the Abbey of Rillé, between Fougères and Rennes. It was by this active and turbulent noble that the following curious act of homage was performed to the Abbot of Mont St. Michel, for the land held of that religious house by the lord of Fougères. In the chartulary of the abbey it is related that in the year 1188 Raoul de Fougères rendered his homage on the fête of St. Michael in October, St. Michael de Monte Tomba (on the 16th of that month), by ringing the bell for vespers and matins until the abbey servants took the cord from his hands, when he was bound to give them a cask of wine; in the evening there was brought to him a habit, similar to that of the monks, and one "bote"; he might sleep if he choose in one of the chambers of the abbey, and after the High Mass on the fête he, with three or four of his knights, sat at meat on the Abbot's right hand in the refectory, while the rest of his retinue took their repast elsewhere, or in the town. If the seigneur of Fougères slept in the town of the Mount, the seigneur of Maçé, a neighbouring manor, was bound by his tenure to awake him and conduct him with a lantern to the monastery before matins.

William the son of Raoul, died before his father, and Geoffry his grandson, was one of the chief opponents of

King John, when that unprincipled monarch attempted to seize the possessions of his murdered nephew, Arthur of Brittany. In 1202 John laid siege to Fougères, but retired without attacking it, and revenged himself by laying waste the country to the gates of Dol. His Brabançon routiers desecrated that cathedral, and even set fire to its roof, as is still remembered there and related by the local historian. The distaff succeeded to the sword, and the grand-daughter of Geoffry, Jeanne de Fougères, carried the inheritance into the family of Lusignan, renowned in history and romance. It is probable that to her husband, Hugh XII, count of La Marche and Angoulesme, may be attributed the building of the 13th century tower, bearing the name of his ancestress, the fairy Melusina. "Thus," says an eminent writer, M. Leopold Delisle, "ended the House of Fougères which, during two centuries, had played so brilliant a part in the annals of Brittany, Normandy and England." Yet the castle was destined in other hands to witness important events. Guy de Lusignan was forfeited by Philip le Bel in 1307, who united La Marche and Angoulesme to the crown of France, giving his sister Yolande the lordship of Fougères, which she held till her death in 1314. It passed to the house of Alençon, and after being captured by the celebrated Du Guesclin became the property of the Dukes of Brittany in 1415.

In May 1444 a truce for five years was signed between France and England, including Brittany. Francis I. of Brittany, however, had seized and imprisoned his brother Gilles on pretence of his treating with the English. In retaliation it is supposed, and secretly instigated by Henry VI., or some of his nobles, Francis de Surienne, an Arragonese knight, governor of Verenueil, and Conde sur Noireau, and a knight of the Garter, surprised and took the castle of Fougères on the night of the 23rd March, 1448-9, and refused to deliver it to the Duke of Brittany, saying he held it for the English king. The truce was at an end, and the events which followed form a brilliant chapter in the history of France. The English, with singular ill-fortune, rapidly lost all that had been won by the valour of Henry V.: while the French, under Arthur of Richmond,

Constable of France, closed a series of successes by the decisive battle of Formigny in April, 1459, which ended the rule of the House of Lancaster in France.

Such is an imperfect outline of the chief events in the history of this romantic place. The visitor, who from the heights to the west, looks down at evening, on the vast bulk of the ruined fortress lying in deep shadow, while the last rays of the setting sun light up the old town beyond, its houses rising, tier above tier, till the view culminates in the Beffroi, and the tower of St. Leonard's on its wood crowned slopes, will admit, varied as his experiences may be, he gazes on a panorama of singular charm. Should he be endowed with some of that imaginative faculty that so greatly enhances the pleasures of travel, fancy will come to his side, and re-people the deserted battlements. He may recall the warlike Raoul, setting forth with his chivalry to Palestine, the bold Du Guesclin, incorruptible champion of Brittany, or the crafty Aragonese, and his midnight escalade. Or fairer forms may flit across the scene; ladies look out from their towers, as their knights ride forth to battle, the fabled Melusine hovers around the abode of her descendants, and Diana of Poictiers (for she, too, once owned the castle) displays once more the charms which captivated the most Christian king. And as the short twilight melts in darkness, and the gazer, shaking off his visions, seeks the valley below, he may even fancy in every bush a devoted Chouan, stealthily creeping to seize the walls manned by the hated soldiers of the Republic.