

HISTORY OF THE DE LA POLES.

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(Read at Wingfield Castle, June 8, 1888.)

No family history is without its pathetic passages, and unquestionably that of the de la Poles forms no exception to the rule. Without attempting anything like an exhaustive account of this ill-starred family, or adding any new matter to what is already an oft-recited record, it may be well on this occasion to refresh in the minds of our members the dim outlines of a house which came and went in something under two centuries.

We begin with William de la Pole, taking our words from the register of the Abbey of Meaux. He "was first a merchant at Ravenrod, skilful in the arts of trade, and inferiour to no English merchant whatsoever. He afterwards, living at Kingston-upon-Hull, was the first Mayor of that Town, and founded the Monastery of St. Michael, which now belongs to the Carthusian Monks, near the said Kingston. His eldest son, Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, caused the said Monastery to be inhabited by that order. William de la Pole, aforesaid, lent King Edward many thousand pounds of gold, during his abode at Antwerp in Brabant. For this reason the King made him chief Baron of his Exchequer, gave him by Deed the Seigniorie of Holderness, with many other lands then belonging to the Crown, and him made a Baneret." Camden gives a reference to the Records of the Tower, in which he is styled *dilectus valectus et mercator noster*. On the term *valectus* he observes that it was an honourable title, both in France and England, till it came to have a menial significance, when it was turned into "Gentleman of the Bedchamber." It was bestowed on the poet Chaucer in 1367, when he received an annuity of 20 marks.

The son Michael here mentioned, some time Lord Chancellor of England, married Catherine, daughter and heiress of Sir John Wingfield, of Wingfield, and thus the de la Poles became inwrought into the history of this district.

The Earldom of Suffolk, vacant by the death of William de Ufford, whose four sons had died during his lifetime, was conferred on Michael de la Pole in 1385. "Better versed," as Thomas Walsingham tells us, "in merchandise than in martial matters, as a merchant himself and the son of a merchant," he appears to have been unequal to the burden laid upon him by these accessions of dignity. He had enjoyed his earldom barely a year when the voice of the Commons thundered against him, charging him with the misappropriation of supplies, the acceptance of excessive grants from the Crown, and the abuse of the Great Seal, in applying it to illegal pardons and charters. They weakened their case by imputing to the Chancellor the capture of English ships and the loss of Ghent. The trial is justly regarded, from the order which characterised its proceedings, as one of great constitutional importance, but it ended in a conviction only on the lighter charges, a forfeiture of money, and imprisonment during the King's pleasure, which terminated just after the dissolution of the Parliament of 1386. But the Parliament of 1387 was found to be more rancorous against him than its predecessor had been. He fled from the realm, and died at Paris in the year 1389, an exile from his native land, but, as we find from his son's will, was buried in the Church of the Carthusians, at Kingston-upon-Hull. That the measures taken against this favourite minister of Richard II. were generally regarded as severe, we may infer from the restoration of the earldom and estates by Henry IV. to the eldest son, the second Michael de la Pole with whom we have to do. The young man had in 1397 obtained the reversal of his father's outlawry, but as it would appear had courted and won Catherine, daughter of Hugh, Earl of Stafford, while the cloud of his father's disgrace still hung over his name.

During the reign of Henry iv., the de la Poles had a "close time," but family troubles revived in a new form after the accession of his warlike son. The siege of Harfleur in the autumn of 1415 was attended by terrible loss of troops by fever and dysentery, contracted in the pestilential marsh air with the usual accompaniment of camp filth. It must have been a truly miserable campaign. Before embarkation, Richard, Earl of Cambridge, second son to Edmund Langley, Duke of York, Edward III.'s fifth son, and ancestor of a long line of Plantagenet, Tudor, Stuart, and Hanoverian Sovereigns, was executed with others for treason to their king. Richard Courtney, Bishop of Norwich, died of fever on the march from Harfleur, far from the flock committed to him, with the lords Molines, Burnel, and others, while Michael de la Pole had already succumbed to the baneful influence of malaria, thus leaving their sovereign, for whom they had yielded their lives in a struggle more deadly than that of battle, to cut his way through his enemies on the memorable day of St. Crispin Crispian. The Countess Catherine was still in the first agony of grief for the loss of her husband to whom she had clung in the dark days of their betrothal as well as in the brightness of wedding life, when tidings reached her of the death of her first-born, the third Michael. For a short month he had enjoyed the title, if the term enjoyment can be applied to the desperate march of the English army towards Calais. Twice had they been disappointed of battle, at the bridge of S. Maxenæ,* over the Somme, and at Amiens. Then came the brush at Corby, with a body of French men-at-arms reinforced by the peasantry, the gallantry of Bromley of Bromley, the hanging of the church robber, who stole the silver pix, the tedious harassed march across the upper valley of the Eaulne, the clearing of the bridge over the Canche, and the final victory of combined method and impulse against the most tremendous odds at the village of Agincourt.

Two and two only of the English nobility perished on

* So spelt in Baker's Chronicle.

that famed day; Edward Duke of York, who had made suit for the command of the vanguard, and young Michael de la Pole, who was in the main battle with the King and the King's brother, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. It could not have been long after the young Earl's marriage with Elizabeth Mowbray, daughter of Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, that a second widowed Countess of Suffolk mourned with her mother-in-law, and the title of Earl of Suffolk passed to the next brother, William. It was not long before he found himself occupying his brother's place in the French war. In 1417 he was at the capture of the Castle of Tonque. In 1421 he shared the fate of others in the ambuscade near Angers, and was taken prisoner, but in 1423 he was at work again in Burgundy, under the dreaded Thomas Montacute, Earl of Salisbury. When at the siege of Orleans, five years afterwards, a great shot struck the bars of one of the windows of the captured Great Fort from which Salisbury was taking observation, and caused the death of that valiant captain, Suffolk succeeded not only to the command, but in process of time to the widowed Countess Alicia, daughter of Thomas Chaucer, of Ewelme, in Oxfordshire.

The siege of Orleans, in Suffolk's hands, was a failure, and he was again captured at Jargeux, where his brother Alexander de la Pole was killed in cold blood by the Duke of Alençon. We find him, however, assisting in the defence of Paris, in 1430, and negotiating a peace some ten years afterwards. In this matter he went beyond his commission in propounding and carrying through the marriage between Henry vi. and Margaret of Anjou. His Marquisate appears to date from 1443. In 1447 he becomes Duke, but as he went up in rank he went down in popular estimation. His services in France for more than thirty years were set at less than nought. The disastrous ending to the Hundred Years' War was put to his account. But so far as we may judge the man from the last words to which he put pen, he was good and true hearted.

Of the localities assigned for his embarkation Camden's (Suffolk) is probably the more correct. His enemies having procured his banishment in 1450, we may suppose that he took sea at Dunwich, the nearest Suffolk port, and trace him in the fair spring weather through Fressingfield, along the "broad" road, called in all deeds, "the high road from Dunwich to Bury St. Edmund's," by Laxfield and Yoxford, and over Westleton Heath to the Roman Sitomagus. How he was caught and beheaded on the side of a boat off Dover is well-known. Bloomfield speaks of a defaced monument to him in Wingfield Church, remaining to his day, but we can point to no such thing now.*

Duke John, a fresh creation after his father's forfeiture, whose noble monument we see on the north side of the altar, seems to have been a dutiful son. The mother lived a good deal at Wingfield. The *Paston Letters* give glimpses of her there in 1452, but more notably in October, 1460. Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, the legitimate sovereign, is now all-powerful in London. Though the Suffolk interest was distinctly Lancastrian, Duke John had married York's daughter, Elizabeth, and the young couple were made wire-pullers by the Dowager. So we find from a letter written by the wily Franciscan, Friar Brackley, to John Paston. "The Lady of Suffolk hath sent up hyr sone and hise wyfe to my Lord of York to aske grace for a schireve the next yer, Stapelton, Boleyn, or Tyrel, *qui absit*. God send zow Ponyng, W. P., W. Rokewode, or Arblaster." A keen practitioner apparently was Duke John, very unpopular according to Margaret Paston, but we must make allowances for the Pastons' dislike on account of the Duke's attempt to seize Hellesdon Manor. We find him raising men for Henry VII. in the autumn of 1485. In 1491 he died, leaving his widow presumably living in Wingfield. His eldest son, John, created Earl of Lincoln by Edward IV., died before him. He espoused the cause of Lambert Simnel, and fell on the field of Stoke, near

* The effigies in wood on the south side of the Chancel seem to be those of Duke William and Duchess Alice. There is a fine monument to her in Ewelme Church.

Nottingham, in 1487. The dukedom appears to have been restricted to the eldest son, for when in 1491 Edmund de la Pole succeeded his father, it was only as Earl. He married Margaret, daughter of Richard Lord Scrope, head of a well-known Yorkshire house. In the year of his succession he accompanied his sovereign to the siege of Boulogne; in 1495 he lent his aid to the overthrow of the Cornish rebels, under Lord Audley and Thomas Flammock, on Blackheath. Whatever he might do, it was not in his power to purge himself of the taint of Royal blood. He escaped from England on the 1st of July, 1499, whereupon letters were issued by Henry VII., not only to arrest his abettors, but also "any suspect person nyghe unto the see costes which shall seme... to be of the same affynyte." The unfortunate man remained in exile fourteen years, and venturing to return to England some little time after the death of his merciless sovereign in 1509, was finally executed by Henry VIII. in 1513, "being a man of turbulent spirit, and too nearly allied to the crown." Truly, the tender mercies of the Tudors were cruel!

Last in our mournful record comes Richard de la Pole, another son of Duke John and Elizabeth Plantagenet. He was evidently awake to the fact that, "turbulent" or "not turbulent," he was "too nearly allied to the crown." Accordingly, he remained on the continent, a soldier of fortune, and wielded his sword for Francis I., of France, in whose service he was slain at the disastrous battle before Pavia in 1525.

With him ends the grim family chronicle. Cardinal Pole's father was a Welsh Ap Hoel, and had no claim to an origin from the vicinity of the big pond, from which the Earls of Suffolk took their name.

Matthew Poole, M.A., of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, the learned author of the *Synopsis Criticorum*, evidently was thought to be of this family, from the arms engraved with his portrait in the first volume of his *Annotations*. He was a Yorkshireman, but I am unable to throw any light on his pedigree.