

CHAPTER THREE.

THE EARLES OF DEVONSHIRE.

We have seen the original Earle stock in Somerset sending shoots across the border into the neighboring counties of Wilts and Gloucester. This was quite natural, as the family estates at Beckington were almost on the boundary line between Somerset and Wilts, and no great distance from Bristol. And we are now to see a scion of this same stock transplanted into Devonshire, the next neighbor of Somerset on the west.

There seems to be some obscurity as to the exact time when this migration took place. Hutchins, in his "History of Dorsetshire," says: "The Erles were a very ancient and knightly family. The first that occurs in the pedigree is Henry de Erle (1251), lord of Newton, County of Somerset. They were subsequently styled of North Pether-ton, in that county, and seem afterwards to have removed to Culhampton, County Devon."

This does not fix any date for the removal to Devon, further than that it was subsequent to Henry de Erleigh, who was the sixth of the Somerset succession. Some have been led to identify Henry's son, John, with John Erle, of Ashburton and Culhampton, Devon, but this is probably an error.

The London writer before quoted says: "One branch of the Somerset Earles settled in the County of Devon, in the time of Edward the III. (1327-1377), as I find John Erle holding lands at Ashburton, twenty miles from Exeter, and bearing the same arms as his Somersetshire ancestor, viz: *Gules*, 3 escallops, *argent*, within a bordure, *engrailed*, *argent*."

As the first allusion to a coat of arms is in connection with the history of John de Erleigh (G 8), the eighth in the above succession and the grandson of Henry de Erleigh, this passage would seem to bring John Erle, of Ashburton, several generations later. He is evidently a son of a younger son, as the eldest sons are in the Somerset succession.

Now "The White Knight," Sir John de Erleigh, had three younger sons, Robert, Richard and Philip, and one of these may have been the father or grandfather of John Erle, of Ashburton. In fact, this

is the descent of the progenitor of the Devonshire branch as given by Sir Henry Earle, Bart., the highest authority on the history of the English Earles. The only point of conflict with the London writer quoted from, is that the latter places John Erle, of Ashburton, in the time of Edward III., that is, not later than 1377, whereas Sir Henry gives 1484 as the date of his death, which would make him more than 100 years old.

Not being able to resolve this difficulty, we shall accept the account given by Sir Henry Earle, Bart., of the origin of the Devonshire family. The genealogy is as follows:

TENTH GENERATION.

CHILDREN OF SIR JOHN de ERLEIGH (I 10), "THE WHITE KNIGHT," (b. 1334; d. 1410), AND MARGARET, daughter of Sir Guy de Brien:

- J 2) ROBERT de ERLEIGH.
- J 3) RICHARD de ERLEIGH.
- J 4) PHILIP de ERLEIGH.

K—ELEVENTH GENERATION.

A son of Robert, Richard or Philip de Erleigh, sons of the "White Knight."

- K 1) (Probably) ROBERT de ERLEIGH.

L—TWELFTH GENERATION.

CHILDREN OF ROBERT (?) de ERLEIGH:

- L 2) JOHN ERLE, d. 1484, of Ashburton and Culhampton, Devon; married Margaret de Sondes (L 1), died 1472.

M—THIRTEENTH GENERATION.

CHILDREN OF JOHN ERLE (L 2), OF ASHBURTON, AND MARGARET DE SONDES (L 1):

- M 1) ROBERT EARLE, of Compton, Somerset, d. 1517; ancestor of the Earles, of Wiltshire.
- M 2) JOHN EARLE (or Erle), of Culhampton, Devon, (d. 1508); ancestor of Devon, Dorset, Winchester, Southampton, Essex and Nottinghamshire branches.

Thus far on the authority of Sir Henry Earle. We may now quote again the London genealogist already referred to, whose statements seem, in the main, to fit into the above:

“This John Erle’s (L 2) second son (M 2) held lands at Culhampton, in the County of Devon, twelve miles from Exeter, and was succeeded in them by his son and heir, John Erle, who married Thomasine Beare, of the County of Somerset, and by her had a son, Walter, who married Mary, daughter and co-heir of Richard Wykes, of Binden and Charborough, both in the County of Dorset.”

“From the Erles of Devon are descended the Erles of Hants (Hampshire), Lincolnshire, London, Berkshire and Essex.”

“The elder son of John Erle, who first settled at Ashburton, County of Devon, and his descendants for several generations, continued to reside in that county. There are many lines of the Earles all springing from a common ancestor with him who first settled in Devonshire; and when perfected, the Earle pedigree would prove a valuable and interesting genealogical history.”

These statements call for one or two remarks. It is undoubtedly true that many lines of Earles have sprung from a common ancestor in Devonshire, but whether the descent of all of those named can be definitely traced, is open to question. The list given by Sir Henry under John Erle (M 2), of Culhampton, is later and is supported by evidence. We are glad to think that all the Earles of England, and therefore of America, are descended from the main original line we have been considering, but in many cases the proof of connection is lacking.

It is also true that the descendants of John Erle, of Ashburton, remained for generations in Devonshire. These constitute the Devonshire Earles. But the statement in regard to his elder son, Robert Erle (M 1), is probably not correct. He was of Compton, Somerset, and became the ancestor of the Earles of Wiltshire.

One other quotation completes our knowledge of the Earles of Devon:

“The ancient armorials, as originally borne, are as follows: ARMS, *Gules*, 3 escallops, *argent*, within a bordure engrailed of the last. CREST, a lion’s head erased or, transfixe with a spear, *argent*, embued, *gules*.”