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TWINNING 1330 STYLE

by Edith M. L. Grout

I was perplexed when I first came to live in Exeter 15 years ago. As one usually does when moving to a strange place, one goes on a tour of discovery. To my surprise, I found names of places which reminded me so much of my native Canton de Vaud in Switzerland (Rougemont, Mont-le-Grand, Savoy, Locarno, Courtenay to name but a few). Having given it a little more thought and having read more about the history of Exeter, I found that William the Conqueror raised his Castle of Rougemont where Ceasar built his fort. Whether he named it Rougemont because of the beautiful red colour of the Devonshire stone or for any other reason, I do not know. The cathedral was set up by the men who followed the Conqueror and was gradually transformed into the magnificent shrine it still is today. The Swiss Bishop, Ermenfroy of Sion, legate of the Pope, was sent to England to visit the churches and appoint various ecclesiastical dignitaries and also to conduct services of repentance for all the sins and cruelties committed by the Conqueror's armies.

When I saw the relic of Rougemont Castle, which besides its natural beauty has a great historic appeal to me, it brought back vivid and happy memories of my childhood in the Vaudoises Alps. Every year, on the 1st January, the whole family would set out on a sleigh ride and picnic from our village of Leysin to Rougemont Castle in the remote and enchanting valley of the Pays d'Enhaut. As children we were enthralled by the magic of this annual event and the climax of this gay and carefree outing was the apparition of the fairy tale castle and church of Rougemont glistening in the winter snow and sunshine. Since living in Devon, I have often asked myself what was the connection between the two castles so

distant from one another. Being a searcher by nature I went on in my search for the key to this mystery and gradually built up my own story.

I remembered from my school days that the Comtes de Savoie were overlords of the Canton de Vaud in the Middle Ages, then discovered that Pierre de Savoie was the uncle of Eleanor daughter of Raymond de Provence and uncle by marriage of Henry III of England. At that time a great number of knights and churchmen from western Switzerland came to England in the household of Peter of Savoie. Amongst them was Otho I de Grandson. His name appears in English documents as early as 1265 when the king granted him certain houses. The high favour enjoyed at court gave Sir Otho many opportunities to assist his kinfolk of which he was not slow to take advantage. Otho's younger brother William came to England in attendance upon Edmund of Lancaster (Crouchback) brother of the king. From that Prince, William received estates in Gloucestershire. His residence was called Castle Grandisson. William had five sons and four daughters. His second son, John, became an ecclesiastic. In 1327 he was consecrated Bishop in Avignon and the following year was enthroned as Seventh Bishop of Exeter where he remained for 42 years.

When John de Grandisson came to Exeter, the cathedral was only half rebuilt but being one of the great bishop-builders, he undertook the gigantic task of finishing the work started. It was a slow process, hindered not only by financial difficulties, but also by the plague. That excellent prelate also formed the wish to found an establishment which might be a sanctuary for piety and learning. With great care and forethought and pious devotion, he

decided that the most suitable situation for the purpose would be Ottery St. Mary.

He procured a royal licence from King Edward III for the foundation of a collegiate church. In the main vaulting of the church, which has been beautifully preserved to this day, one can still see the arms of the de Grandson and those of the House of Montacute which alternate. The bishop's sister, Catherine Countess of Salisbury was a great benefactress to her brother's church.

The story would not be complete, if I failed to mention that Swiss women, too, came early to England. It was said at one time that they were a real threat to the young women of this island who were of a marriageable age. Some complained that so many pretty maids came over from what is now the Canton de Vaud that they spoil the matrimonial chances of the daughters of the noble English families. Bishop John de Grandisson's sister Catherine, Countess of Salisbury is described as the greatest beauty of her days. Her grace, charm and radiance entranced the young Edward III and she is said to have dropped the all too famous garter. It is of her that the well-known story is told of the founding of the Most Noble Order of the Garter — *Honi soit qui mal y pense*.

It is no wonder, therefore, that I feel so much at home in Devon and especially in Exeter and Ottery St. Mary. Being Vaudoise by birth, I followed the Vaudoises of yesteryears. It is often said that to the four ethnic groups of Switzerland, i.e. German, French, Italian and Romansch, one should add a fifth group: the Swiss-born living abroad who foster international relations and strengthen the ties of friendship woven by our forefathers.



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