

## Count of Chambord

When the first Napoleon was removed from power as a result of military defeat, the original Bourbon royal house was restored to the French throne. The dynasty was united, a candidate had been waiting in the wings for some time, and there was an overall welcoming back of the monarchy after years of war. This government later fell when there was an attempt to turn back the clock to the days of the *ancien regime*, which to many meant the triumph of royal absolutism and the restriction of basic popular rights. The monarchy of the House of Orleans did well for a time until it too started to go too far to the right, to be replaced with another republic by another revolution. And, like the First Republic, this one fell under the spell of a Bonaparte. Once again, this Bonaparte's reign ended years later in military failure. At this time, it seemed that history was repeating itself; an ineffectual republic, a temporarily strong empire, and now some support for another royal restoration. The royals had called for peace. They presented a strong personal symbol for France to rally around. The two rival branches had even seemed to settle their rivalry and agreed on a candidate for the throne. Many people were expecting another restoration of the Bourbon dynasty in France. However, the head of the house issued a proclamation that many saw as evidence that he was too eerily similar to his ancestor who tried to turn back the clock in France. The insistence of the Count of Chambord (referred hereafter as Chambord or Henri V) on reviving a long abandoned symbol (as well as his vocal loyalty to the long-rejected Charles X) virtually destroyed any chance of his ascending the throne, which a short time earlier many had assumed to be all but inevitable.

The fall of Emperor Napoleon III was precipitated by the Franco-Prussian war, in which the armies of the French empire were virtually obliterated by the forces of the Kingdom of Prussia, even witnessing the proclamation of King William I of Prussia as Emperor of Germany in the Versailles palace, the home of old French royalty since Louis XIV. Napoleon III had been captured and deposed soon after the beginning of the war, and the parts of France that were not in German hands were under the rule of an interim republic that vowed to continue the war. The city of Paris was brought to near starvation by the German siege, and much of the rest of France was not a great deal better off. A

radical government seized control of Paris, only to be put down by the forces of the new Republic. The peace itself was humiliating to France, with its loss of territory and reparations payments. The republican party in France was split between the moderates, who fell behind Adolphe Thiers, and the radicals, who supported the revolutionary Leon Gambetta. The people were tired of the war and ready for peace. To many, the ideals of peace and stability were symbolized in the rule of one national symbol in the form of a monarch.

Since Napoleon III had seemingly lost a humiliating war for the French, he and his house were not in the running. The former ruling House of Bourbon, which seemed a logical choice, was at the time divided between two rival branches. The senior branch, known as Legitimists, was under the leadership of Henri, Count of Chambord. Henri had been the grandson of the reactionary King Charles X. Chambord had been in exile since his grandfather's fall from power in 1830, and assumed the leadership of the family and claim to the throne upon the death of his uncle, the Duke of Angouleme (known to Legitimists as Louis XIX). Henri was married, but childless. The junior branch, called the Orleanist branch, was led by Louis Philippe, Count of Paris, who himself was the grandson of another former monarch, France's "Citizen King" Louis-Philippe I (who had been the Duke of Orleans). Paris had made a name for himself in the United States War of Secession in which he and his brother had briefly fought in Virginia under Union General George McClellan. He was also married, but had children by his wife.

The two candidates and factions had contested over which one was the rightful heir in the years since the fall of their respective branches from the throne. However, the time seemed right in 1871 for a royal restoration if the two houses could reconcile. Discussion of rapprochement between the two branches began to circulate, and both of the candidates for the throne returned from exile. Monarchists began negotiating with the two men to unite their claims. Since Chambord had no children and was the last of his line of the family, the throne could naturally pass to the Count of Paris. This idea seemed to be a good one, and both sides talked seriously about implementing it. Finally, in the summer of 1871, there seemed to be the breakthrough. The *New York Times* had declared in early June that "the fusion of the Legitimists and Orleanists is complete" after some Orleanist nobles had proclaimed their allegiance to Chambord. Some still doubted

the finality of the fusion afterward, as they felt that the more liberal house of Orleans would not associate with the Legitimists for fear of spoiling its chances for the throne, but it appeared to most that the healing of the breach, and therefore a restored monarchy, was not a question of “if” but of “when”. A large number of monarchist candidates had been elected to seats in the French Parliament as well, seemingly demonstrating growing approval for a restoration.

In the early days of July, a proclamation went out throughout France from the recently returned *émigré*; “People of France: I am among you.” The Count of Chambord had now gone public with his return and his readiness to restore his house and to reign over France. His *Royalist Manifesto* began well enough as he thanks the people of France for welcoming him back to his homeland, as well as his support for decentralization, liberty, and representative democracy. He goes on to declare the working classes to be the “subject of my liveliest concern and my dearest studies” and decrying the disorder that was raging in parts of France. While the beginning was promising, the rest of the proclamation begins to hit a sour note with its readers. “I am ready to do everything to help my country to rise again from its ruins and to regain her position in the world; the only sacrifice I cannot make for her is sacrifice of my honor.” His honor, the Count declares, is the old white flag of the house of Bourbon. “I shall not permit the standard of Henry IV, of Francis I, and of Joan of Arc, to be snatched from my hands... I received it as a sacred trust from the old King, my grandfather [Charles X]... It floated over my cradle: may it overshadow my grave.” Chambord finishes his proclamation with the declaration, “People of France! Henry V cannot abandon the white flag of Henry IV.” With this declaration, he hoped to rally the people behind him and to transform himself from being Count Henri of Chambord to Henri V, King of France.

Soon after the manifesto was issued, the likelihood of “Henri V” to actually become recognized as such appeared to evaporate almost immediately. As reported by the *Times* of London, “The manifesto issued by the Comte de Chambord has not met with much success. It is thought that it will prevent the realization of the projects of Fusion which had been entertained.” It seemed that Chambord’s insistence that the tricolor be abandoned in favor of the old white flag might be leading to another attempt to turn the clock back to the time of repression and “divine right”. As one paper commented, “the

[monarchy] ‘by Divine right’ has departed this life for ever.” Those who supported the Republic were almost ecstatic with the Count’s proclamation; the monarchists groaned as their hopes to restore the ancient Gallic throne seemed to disappear. A later writer reflected on these responses this way:

“The effects of the proclamation were all that the more prudent Legitimists had foreseen. The Republicans rejoiced. Thiers [now President of France] told Marcere that ‘this event may definitely establish the Republic.’ Laurentie, who had tried in vain to save the Pretender from his folly, lamented, ‘We have just lost in twenty-four hours the fruits of twenty years of prudence.’”

As for the people of France welcoming Chambord back as king-in-waiting, a correspondent for the *Times* remarked, “I think it is safe to say that the majority of readers on coming upon this startling salutation experienced a very decided shudder of discomfort.”

Of course, the Orleanists were forced to think twice about the proposed fusion. Their own forerunner, King Louis Philippe I, had restored the Tricolor and maintained it during his reign. Brogan states “The Royalists in the Assembly refused ‘to separate themselves from the flag which (France) has given herself, a flag made illustrious by the courage of her soldiers and which has become, in opposition to the bloody standard of anarchy, the flag of social order.’”

Not only was the flag controversy harmful to the Count’s chances, his public adherence to his grandfather only damaged his possibilities even more. This seemed to provoke “doubts as to the sense in which Henri V would interpret ‘order and liberty’” and “reminded [the people] of the danger that the new King might follow in the footsteps of that spoiled boy who had changed from a frivolous and dissipated young man only to become a frivolous and bigoted old man.” Finally, there were even ideas circulating that Chambord, a faithful Catholic, might seek to restore the power of the Catholic church and to help the Pope recover his temporal power over central Italy, which had been lost after France’s withdrawal from Rome to fight against the Prussians.

Perhaps the best summary of the result of Chambord’s manifesto is a *New York Times* editorial in August of 1871 that begins as follows:

“[T]he Count of Chambord has lost the opportunity of restoring the Bourbons, in his own person, to the throne of France, because he refused

to accept the tricolor with the crown, and insisted that it should yield place to the white flag which it displaced eighty years ago... This decision of the man who for two or three weeks seemed not unlikely to be known to the world as Henry V., is at once the most foolish and the most characteristic that he could have made; and it has done more for the continuance, and even the perpetuation, of the present republican government of France, than could have been brought about by all the speeches that could have been made in the assembly or all the articles that could have been published by the newspapers in Paris.”

The article continues with the point that the talked-of fusion was seemed more than a mere possibility, with the hope at first that Chambord would be the “new kind of Bourbon – one who had learned something” The editorial then says that he “went down forever as many a man, brave, honorable and narrow-minded like him has gone down before him, for his faithfulness to a bit of bunting... he stood by *his* flag; and he asked all his fellow Frenchmen to desert theirs.” The flag, no matter how important or symbolic it might be, was not worth fighting the will of the nation over. The author of this piece even tells how the white flag was not introduced until the time of Henri IV himself, and was not used in the time of the others whom Chambord cites. The editorial ends by saying that “Chambord has shown himself, indeed, a new kind of Bourbon – one who has learned nothing and forgotten everything.”

The reference to Henri IV is especially surprising when one has even a basic history of the founder of the House of Bourbon; Brogan comments,

“And the last straw was the reference to Henri IV, for there could be no doubt that had he returned to earth in 1871, the first person to abandon the flag of Henri IV would have been Henri IV. To the founder of the Bourbon dynasty, Paris had been well worth a Mass; to its modern representative, all France was not worth gaining at the expense of sacrificing private honour identified with a family flag.”

The question may be brought up that if Henri IV was willing to sacrifice his own religion for the sake of a crown and a throne, why should his descendant not be willing to give up a piece of cloth for that same throne?

Monarchism was by no means dead in France. In 1873, the long-expected reconciliation between the Legitimists and Orleanists finally took place as Chambord accepted the Count of Paris as his heir. In an election that same year, the pro-monarchist right-wing parties won control of the French parliament, and the monarchist Marshal

MacMahon was elected to the presidency hoping to fill in until the day that Henri would be ready to accept the Tricolor and take his place as the rightful King of France. However, the impetus of the end of the war was no longer there to finally push the monarchy over the top. Most importantly, Chambord still could not publicly give up his ancestors' flag. As time went on, the republicans gained more support as the question was not about peace and stability but about actual leadership. When the lawmakers of France convened in 1875 to write a permanent constitution, France was officially confirmed as a republic by a singular vote. This was the end of the most serious chances of monarchist restoration.

Henri V died in August of 1883, and was replaced as pretender by the Count of Paris, formerly his rival and now his heir. Had Chambord been willing to bend and accept the Tricolor as the national symbol of France, this very well might have been the passing of King Henri V and the ascension of King Philippe VII. Instead, all it turned out to be was the transfer of a phantom throne from one pretender to another. To this day, the descendants of the Count of Paris still maintain a claim to that throne, and had their predecessor's rival been more willing to compromise on the flag, his namesake might be the French head of state today as King Henri VII. However, Chambord decided to "stand by his honor" and in doing so likely lost the throne of France for himself and his posterity.

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