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Title: Normandy

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Release date: December 29, 2014 [EBook #47813]

Language: English

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NORMANDY



A NORMAN PEASANT

N O R M A N D Y
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PUBLISHED BY ADAM
AND CHARLES BLACK
SOHO SQUARE · LONDON



Published

September 1905

PREFACE

Pen and brush are both necessary in the attempt to give an impression of a country; word-painting for the brain, colour for the eye. Yet even then there must be gaps and a sad lack of completeness, which is felt by no one more than by the coadjutors who have produced this book. There are so many aspects under which a country may be seen. In the case of Normandy, for instance, one man looks for magnificent architecture alone, another for country scenes, another for peasant life, and each and all will cavil at a book which does not cater for their particular taste. Cavil they must; the artist and author here have tried—knowing well how far short of the ideal they have fallen—to show Normandy as it appeared to them, and the matter must be coloured by their personalities. Thus they plead for leniency, on the ground that no one person's view can ever exactly be that which satisfies another.

G. E. MITTON.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

IN GENERAL

PAGE
1

CHAPTER II

THE NORMAN DUKES

18

CHAPTER III

THE MIGHTY WILLIAM

34

CHAPTER IV

A MEDIEVAL CITY

56

CHAPTER V

CAEN

79

CHAPTER VI

FALAISE

93

CHAPTER VII

BAYEUX AND THE SMALLER TOWNS

112

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAMOUS TAPESTRY

129

CHAPTER IX

AN ABBEY ON A ROCK

140

CHAPTER X

THE STORMY CÔTENTIN

155

CHAPTER XI

DIEPPE AND THE COAST

163

CHAPTER XII

UP THE SEINE

182

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece

FACING PAGE

1. A Norman Peasant	6
2. Cherry Blossom	8
3. The Harbour at Low Tide, Granville	10
4. A Festival Cap	12
5. A Seaside Resort	14
6. Grandmother	22
7. An Approach to the Abbey, Mont St Michel	28
8. Entrance to Mont St Michel	32
9. A Street, Mont St Michel	36
10. Harbour of Fécamp	44
11. A Road near Rouen	46
12. Near Pont-Audemer	58
13. Old Houses, Rouen	62
14. A Street in Rouen	64
15. The Towers of St Ouen	72
16. An Hotel Courtyard, Rouen	84
17. The Milk Carrier	94
18. A Street Vendor, Falaise	96
19. A Little Norman Girl	102
20. Rural Scene	104
21. Starting for the Washing-Shed	110
22. Lace Making	114
23. An Ancient Inn Yard	120
24. Timber-frame House, Lisieux	122
25. Valley of the Rille	124
26. St Lo	126
27. A Street in Granville	134
28. The Spinning Wheel	142
29. Mont St Michel—Sunset	144
30. La Porte du Roi	146
31. The Street, Mont St Michel	148
32. A View from the Top of Mont St Michel	156
33. A Holiday Head-dress	160
34. Cherbourg	164
35. The Gateway, Dieppe	168
36. The Quay, Dieppe	174
37. Fishermen at Fécamp	176
38. Havre	182
39. Quai Sainte Catherine, Honfleur	186
40. Caudebec-en-Caux	

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CHAPTER I

IN GENERAL

It is a task of extreme difficulty to set down on paper what may be called the character of a country; it includes so much—the historical past, the solemn and magnificent buildings, the antiquity of the towns, the nature of the landscape, the individuality of the people; and besides all these large and important facts, there must be more than a reference to distinctive customs, quaint street scenes, peculiarities in costume, manners, and style of living. Only when all these topics have been mingled and interwoven to form a comprehensive whole, can we feel that justice is done to a country. Yet when the scope of the book has been thus outlined, the manner of it remains to be considered, and on the manner depends all or nearly all the charm. It will not answer the purpose we have in view to follow the methods of guide-book writing; that careful pencil-drawing, where each small object receives the same detailed recognition in accordance with its size as does each large fact, is not for us; for it is essential that the whole must consist of wide areas of light and shade, to make definite impressions. Many people have passed through the country, guide-book in hand, have studied the style of every cathedral, have seen the spot where Joan of Arc was murdered, and where William the Conqueror was born, but have come back again without having once felt that shadowy and intangible thing, the character of Normandy, wherein lies its fascination. 2

It seems, then, that the only possible way to aim at this high ideal will be to exercise the principle of selection; to choose those things which are typical and representative, whether of a particular town or the whole country, to describe in detail some points which may be found in many places, and to leave the rest. A town-to-town tour, with everything minute, accurate, at the same level, would be wearisome and unimpressive, however useful as a guide-book. Here we shall wander and ramble, selecting one or two objects for special attention, perhaps by reason of their singularity, perhaps for the opposite reason, because they are typical of many of their kind, and by this method we shall gain some general idea of the country, without becoming tedious by reason of too much detail, or vague for lack of it.

It has often been said that Normandy is a beautiful country, or as it is less happily expressed, "So pretty," and this is not altogether true; no doubt there are parts of Normandy which are beautiful, such as the banks of the Seine, and the country about Mortain and Domfront, but there are also parts as dully monotonous as the worst of Holland or Picardy. To know the country, one must see all kinds, and perhaps with knowledge we shall get to feel even for the plainer parts that affection which comes with knowledge of a dear but plain face. 3

The present chapter, however, is merely preliminary and discursive, with the object of giving some general idea of the country as a background before filling in the groups destined for the foreground. The place where the majority of English people first strike Normandy is Dieppe. The coast-line running north and south of Dieppe is famous for its bathing-places and pleasure resorts, and it will be dealt with later on.

The district lying between Dieppe and the Seine is known as Caux. The route from Dieppe to Paris is well known to many a traveller, and the feeling of anyone who sees it for the first time will probably be surprise at its likeness to England. If the journey be in the spring-time, he will see cowslips and cuckoo flowers in the lush green grass, amid which stand cows of English breed. The woods will be spangled with starry-eyed primrose and anemones, while long bramble creepers trail over the sprouting hedges. Even the cottages, red-tiled or thatched, are quite familiar specimens; and it is only when some rigid chateau, in the hideous style most affected by modern France, built of glaring brick, and with an utter absence of all attempt at architectural grace, is seen up a vista of formal trees, that he will realise he is not in the Midlands. 4

Then we come to the banks of the Seine. Perhaps if one had to choose out of all Normandy, one would select the country lying within and around those great horseshoe loops of the river as admittedly the most beautiful part. So full of interest and variety is the course of the Seine, that we have reserved a special chapter for an account of it between Havre and Vernon. However, beautiful as it is, this part is not quite so characteristically Norman as some other districts. The Seine itself, though it flows for so long through Normandy, does not belong to it, but to France; the people who live on its banks are more French than Norman, and we have to go farther westward to find more typical scenery. The country lying about Gisors, and between that town and the Seine, was called the Vexin, and formed a debatable ground on which many a contest was fought, and which was held by France and Normandy in turn.

To the west of the Seine the country varies. Some towns, like Lisieux, lie surrounded by broken ground well clothed by trees, while much of the district, notably that south of Evreux, is monotonous and almost devoid of hills at all.

We find here some instances of those long, straight roads which it seems to be the highest ideal of the Vicinal Committee to make. We shall meet them again in plenty elsewhere, but may as well describe them here. Take for instance that road running between Evreux and Lisieux; it undulates slightly, and at each little crest the white ribbon can be seen rising and falling, and growing at last so small in the endless perspective, that it almost vanishes from sight. Six miles from any town a man is found carefully brushing the dust from this road, though what good he can possibly do by the clouds he raises with his long, pliant sweep is a mystery. On each side of the road there is a broad ribbon of green, and in this case it is overhung by a double row of trees that really do give some shade. The peasants walk in this green aisle, but even with the grass underfoot the patience needed to traverse perpetually such monotonous roads must be great; it is the quality often found in those whose lives know little variety. Sometimes these high roads are planted with poplars, which mock the wayfarer, for like so many other trees in France, these poplars are stripped of all their boughs almost to the top, and the little tuft of light leaves remaining gives no relief to sight or sense on a glaring road under a summer sun; oaks, horse-chestnuts, beeches—almost any other tree, and all seem to grow well—would have been far better for shade and comfort; yet for one road planted with these umbrageous trees a dozen are lined by the scanty and disappointing poplar. Along them pass the market carts with hoods like those of a victoria; and even the drivers 5

of slow travelling carts supply themselves with miniature hoods, exactly like those of perambulators, to cover their seats, for no one could endure the hours passed in the sun without some protection. 6

A great deal of Normandy is flat and bare; the flint and trefoil style is common. Wide fields of mustard of a crude raw yellow, not golden like the Pomeranian lupin fields, are often to be seen. The flat landscapes are broken by a few stiff or scraggy trees, tethered cows, or cottages of lathe and clay; yet, we hear the song of the lark and scent the breath of roses, and in the spring and early summer orchards of cherry blossom make gleaming sheets of white on many a roadside.

The valley of the River Rille, up which Pont Audemer lies, is of a different style altogether, still it has characteristics in common with other districts. The valley is flat, and from it on each side so steeply rise the fir-crowned hills that in describing them one could almost use the word rectangular. Though the trees are fairly thick there is a ragged, unfinished, rather scrubby look, very often seen in Normandy.



CHERRY BLOSSOM

If we spring westward now to Caen, we find the flat and bald landscape everywhere. The country is almost incredibly dull, and this is the reason why Caen, such an interesting town in itself, makes so small an appeal as headquarters. The long, straight roads radiate from it in all directions. Here and there there is a lining of trees, but generally only a green ditch, waterless, and a line of cornfield, blue-green or yellow as the season may be, with perhaps a ragged fringe of gnarled apple-trees standing ankle-deep in the corn, and the wide sky, like a great inverted bowl of clear blue, fitting every way to the horizon. There may be fields of deep crimson trefoil to vary the colouring, or there may be fields yet unplanted in which the bare brown earth seems to stretch to eternity, and far away in the midst are the stooping figures of two or three men and women busily working with bent backs on a shadeless plain. Yet in this wide flat country there is a freshness and an openness that one might imagine could permeate the blood, so that the peasants who were born and reared here might suffocate and die in a mountainous country, as the mountaineers are said to pine and die in a plain. This flat plain to the westward of Caen, and surrounding Bayeux in the district of the Bessin, has been, so long as history has any record, a prime agricultural country with magnificent pasturage. The most notable points in the little villages which stud it are the wonderful churches, out of all proportion to the size of the hamlets they represent. Of course this feature is found all over the country, and in almost every small town there is a cathedral, so that one cannot but wonder where the money came from which built such glorious monuments to piety. The line going to Bayeux runs at about seven or eight miles from Caen, between two little villages, Bretteville and Norrey, which share a station between them. The church at Norrey, built in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, is a very model of architectural perfection and simplicity, the tall spire is something in the style of the marvellous St Pierre in Caen itself. Bretteville falls not far short of it, though the tower is after a different pattern. A very few miles on, at Andrieu, is a church with a splendid tower of the same date as Norrey, and about two miles south, at Tilly aux Seullles, a church of which the nave is eleventh century, the choir twelfth, the tower fourteenth, and the portal fifteenth, all in the artistic and finished style we associate with that period when there seems to have been nothing but good work. This group of churches is worth mentioning as striking, even in the profusion to be found in Normandy. Leaving Caen and going southward, we plunge before very long into the hilly country from which the Orne rises. This is known as the Bocage, a name which suggests rich foliage. The part of the country in which Mortain and Domfront lie has been called the Alps of Normandy, and certainly it can hold its own for picturesqueness. It is, however, comparatively little known; the line of the quick-trip-man may touch Falaise, but it goes no further south. Yet even at Falaise one can see part of a ridge extending for many kilometres, a ridge which has been so magnificently utilised as the site of the castle where William was born. The hills through Mortain and Domfront run parallel with this ridge, and are of the same description. Indeed the positions of the castles at Domfront and Falaise are very similar. 7
8
9



THE HARBOUR AT LOW TIDE, GRANVILLE

Turning now to a new district westward, we find a rugged granite coast, chiefly notable for the splendid views it affords of the bay of Mont St Michel and its famous rock, and on a wider scale of the Channel, where lie the Iles Causey and Iles Normandes (Channel Isles). There are here a group of fine towns, Avranches, Granville, Coutances, and St Lo. The first named is the capital of the Avranchin district, which stretches up to the little stream Couesnon, separating Normandy and Brittany. Thus we are almost at the end of a general topographical survey; there remains only that peninsula of the Côtentin, very little visited, and entirely off the tourist track, yet in itself delightful. The hills rise and fall, and are well covered with trees, which, though not of a great height, grow warmly and bushily. The roads are good, and the country is studded with ancient chateaux, now for the most part farmhouses, which shall have, as they deserve, a chapter to themselves. We have thus run very quickly over Normandy in a general survey, gaining some idea of the characteristics of the districts, and calling them by the ancient names they bore in the days of the Norman dukes.

In regard to the people, what there is to say has been said in the various local chapters. The quaint costumes, which are familiar to us from many a picture, are fast dying out; in Normandy one sees less of them than in Brittany; here and there, it is true, we find a local fashion in caps, as at Valognes; and still on feast-days and fair-days some damsel appears in the wonderful erection of stiffening and beautiful hand-made lace which her grandmother wore, to be the envy of her neighbours; but in an ordinary way these things are not seen. "On y cherchent vainement ces riches fermières de la plaine et du Bessin, dont les hautes coiffes garnies de dentelles et les bijoux Normandes attiraient tous les regards."



A FESTIVAL CAP

And what is said of costumes may be said also of customs. Le Hericher, who has made a study of racial characteristics, says that the Normans are not a people of imagination and idealism like the Celtic races. "Il y a en Normandie deux localités où on remarque une population exotique, exotique de costume, exotique de langue; c'est Granville à quatre lieues de Cancale, son berceau, son point de départ; Cancalaises et Granvillaises sont des sœurs séparées par un bras de mer. L'autre c'est le faubourg de Dieppe, celui des pêcheuses, le Pollet. Ces deux localités où la race est Celtique, se distinguent par un esprit pieux qui, comme cela se fait chez les Bretons, mêle la religion aux actes de la vie civile et de l'existence maritime." He adds, "Le Normand chante peu et ne danse pas du tout. Son voisin le Breton chante beaucoup, danse un peu."

Nevertheless a dancing-match may still be found in some obscure corners of Normandy. 11

The Norman has the love of country strongly developed and though settlers have gone forth to other lands, especially to Canada, the mother-country retains their hearts in a peculiar way. One of the most popular of the national songs carried overseas runs:—

"À la Claire fontaine,
Les mains me mis lavé.
Sur la plus haute branche
La rossignol chantait,
Chante, rossignol chante
Puisque t'as le cœur gai,
Le mien n'est pas de même
Il est bien affligé."

Longfellow's *Evangeline* is full of the spirit of the exile and his picture of the girl herself:—

"Wearing her Norman cap, and her kirtle of blue, and the earrings,
Brought in the olden time from France, and since as an heirloom
Handed down from mother to child through long generations,"

gives us a clear-cut vision of a type of Norman girl now growing every day more rare.

A great many people who could visit Normandy as easily as one of our own coast towns are deterred by the difficulty of knowing where to begin, and what route to take. Normandy is the easiest of all countries to visit. One may begin anywhere with the certainty of finding interest and enjoyment, especially those who are cyclists, for the roads are as a rule excellent, much better than those in Brittany, and one may stay for a longer or 12

shorter time with equal pleasure, for the country furnishes material for many a month, and yet much can be seen in ten days or a fortnight.

The best known starting-place, as we have said, is Dieppe, and of the hundreds who enter Normandy yearly, at least eighty per cent. come in by this gate. A very usual route for a first trip is by Rouen, Evreux, Lisieux, Caen, Bayeux, St Lo, Coutances, Avranches, and St Mont Michel, returning from St Malo. This for a preliminary survey is good, and having once been in the country it is almost certain that the traveller will go again, given the opportunity.



A SEASIDE RESORT

There are of course many people who are content with the sea-coast, and wish to penetrate no further than Dieppe or Trouville, to mention the two largest of the coast resorts. There is much to be said for these places. There is a brilliance in the sunny air, a gaiety in the mingling crowds, a completeness in the round of amusements, and the opportunities for observing one's fellow-creatures, that are grand elements in the tonic of change. The bathing, the bands, the casinos, the toilets, are all excellent of their kind, and many a tired worker goes back to that office in the city, where his view is limited by his neighbour's window-reflectors, a new man for the busy idleness of a fortnight at one of these holiday resorts. Unfortunately for those who have not much to spend, the prices at the best hotels at these places in the season are almost prohibitive. However, the season is late, not beginning until July, and there are sunny months before that. There are also countless places along the coast less known, and having the primary advantages of the others; where the sands are just as stoneless and shadeless, and where the sea-air is as fresh and the sky as blue, but where the hotels are not so exorbitant, and the villas and pensions are innumerable also. Such, to take only one example, are the places that line the coast near Caen.

13

But this is the merest fringe of the subject. One who has sampled the coast towns, and rushed over the main route above described, has hardly begun to know Normandy. He has endless choice left for future holidays. He may make his headquarters at Valognes to explore the Côtentin; he may settle down at Domfront, and wander throughout that lovely district; or he may devote himself to the country around Les Andelys and Gisors; and everywhere he will find opportunity for enjoyment.

The difficulty in passing quickly through Normandy on a cycling or pedestrian tour is to get food when and where you want it. To make any progress at all in summer, it is necessary to start in good time after a substantial meal, then to take a very light luncheon, perhaps carried with one, and to arrive in time for a good dinner at the day's end. This is very difficult of accomplishment. Such a thing as that which an Englishman calls a good breakfast is almost out of the question, and the probability is that the cyclist riding off the beaten tracks cannot get anything at all for the rest of the day; for of all hopeless places for eatable food, the small villages in Normandy are the worst. Drink of some kind, vermouth, and the sweet syrupy grenadine, can be had at every little shanty, marked "Debit du Boisson," but there is nothing to eat.

14



GRANDMOTHER

I can recall one scene which could never have taken place anywhere save in Normandy. An old farmhouse with half-door, which, being opened, admitted one to an old room toned in browns of all shades, heavy beams, walls, and floor alike. A few boughs, green-encrusted, and sending up a thick smoke, lie on the open hearth. A little old dame, of any age one likes to guess, with wizened nut-brown face encircled by a spotless close-fitting coif, is the lady of the house. Her face is one to which Rembrandt alone could have done justice, with an expression at once kindly, dignified, and shrewd. On the rough table, hacked and hewed by many a knife, are set bowls of milk strongly tasting of wood smoke. Sour cream is spread like jam on slices roughly carved from a loaf the size of a bicycle wheel, and about as hard as deal wood. The cream is very sour, and a few lumps of sugar are served out with it to be grated over it. The old dame sits by with folded hands while the party laugh over their strange meal, but as the laughter continues she grows slightly anxious, and asks to be assured that she is not the object of it; a royal compliment in the best French at the command of the best linguist of the party chases away anxiety, and also for the moment dignity and shrewdness, leaving nothing but delight pure and simple on that dear old work-worn face. 15

It is the fashion to praise French cooking, but to an Englishman who has passed the day bicycling with nothing but a couple of soft-boiled eggs and some sour cream, there is something unsatisfying about the ordinary dinner menu at a French hotel. The monotonous soup, always *maigre*; the dull variety of nameless white fish, which seems to be kept in stock as a staple; the little tasteless pieces of veal, all the same size and shape cut on a dish; the leathery and half-raw mutton, also cut in the same way; the very small variety of vegetables, and utter absence of attempt at sweets—is not an appetising menu. The French are apparently very conservative in their food. A traveller of eighty years ago tells us: "The breakfast at the table d'hôte at Argentan, as at every other place where I stopped, was of exactly the same nature as their dinners. That is, soup, fish, meat of different kinds, eggs, salad, and a dessert with cider; no potatoes or any other vegetable but asparagus at any meal," and this would be a very fair account of an hotel menu nowadays. The worst fault seems to be monotony, always chicken, gigot, or veal. Of course, at the very first-class hotels, at places such as Dieppe, where English influence has penetrated, things are certainly better, but in the ordinary best hotel in a second-class town, the food is very unsatisfactory, and the meat always tough and bad, in spite of the splendid pasture lands and the fine fat beasts one sees grazing; good beef is very rare, and good mutton unknown. In this respect Normandy seems to have been unvaryingly the same, for the traveller above quoted writes also: "With occasional exceptions, the meat in this part of Normandy (Caen) is of inferior quality, more particularly the mutton, which is generally as lean and tough as an old shoe." So often has the praise of French vegetables been repeated, that one has learned to take it as an axiom, until one goes and finds out for oneself. The truth is there is less, not more variety, than with us; such a thing as a good spring cabbage is unknown, and cauliflower is served only *au gratin*. Yet the hotels have improved enormously in many points in the last seven or eight years. 16

They have their advantages, and in some ways every French hotel, even the poorest, can beat its English compeers. The great advantage of cheap wine is felt at every hotel in Normandy; the question of what to drink at dinner, usually such a difficult one, is solved for you. On the table, almost everywhere, are red and white wine and seltzer water "compris"; and at every hotel, without exception, cider, varying it is true greatly as to quality, can be had for the asking.

The hotels are also cheap. At those of the first class, 1 franc is the average charge for the petit déjeuner meal; the déjeuner is generally 3; and the dinner 3.50; while the room may be taken at an average price of 3 francs. Therefore a full day at an hotel usually costs 10.50 francs, or *en pension* 10 francs, equalling between 8 and 9 shillings; but at fashionable coast resorts in the season 15 francs per day is the lowest rate, and in the out-of-the-way districts, and off the beaten tracks, 7 and 8 francs a day are the usual charges. At any rate, in Normandy one is free from the ridiculous impost called "attendance," which entails an additional 1s. 6d. a day in many English and Scotch hotels, while tipping is expected just the same.

Many of the hotels have a forbidding aspect outside; until one is used to it, it is a little damping to enter under a low archway leading to a stableyard, but the entry is often the worst part of it. An Englishman touring through the country will find as a rule he is able to find without difficulty quarters which possess all requisites though not luxuries.

CHAPTER II

THE NORMAN DUKES

Normandy is probably at the same time the best and the least known place on the Continent to Englishmen: the best known, because the most accessible; the least known, because, beyond the fact that the Duke of Normandy conquered England in the year 1066, and that it is in consequence from Normandy that our line of kings is derived, the average Englishman knows little or nothing of its history or associations. Ask him plainly: What is the extent of Normandy? and he will answer vaguely, "It is the north of France." So it is, a part of the north of France, but not the whole. As a matter of fact, the term Normandy has now little geographical meaning. Normandy is not a province for practical purposes, nor does it carry any civil boundaries marking customs, or law, or government. Normandy embraces the departments of Manche, Orne, Eure, Calvados, and Seine Inférieure; that is to say, it reaches from Eu and its port Le Tréport on the east; to the stream Couesnon, which flows into the English Channel a little beyond Mont St Michel on the west; and southward it just takes in Alençon, dips down to a point near La Ferté Bernard, returning with a wavering north-eastward line across the Seine at Vernon, and by Gisors to Eu aforesaid. It answers also to the modern dioceses of Rouen, Evreux, Sées, Bayeux, and Coutances. The Archbishop of Rouen still keeps the title of Primate of Normandy, otherwise the name has gone out of formal use, and Normandy is merged in France. 19

Yet it is extraordinary with what tenacity and affection Englishmen regard a name which links the dwellers in the land to them as kin, and it is still more extraordinary how, after centuries of submersion, beneath a rule entirely French, the kinship makes itself felt in manner and character as well as in memory. The qualities of the sturdy northmen whose bravery and roving dispositions led them to lands far from their own, and made them at home everywhere, still exist in their descendants, as the colonies of England testify. When the Danes had settled down upon the north of France "they were," says Freeman, "no longer Northmen but Normans; the change in the form of the name aptly expresses the change in those who bore it." Yet many and many a vessel full of vikings discharged itself on that land without making any impression, until one came bearing the mighty Rollo, who was destined to stay and make a permanent mark.

The France of those days, torn by dissensions, was not the homogeneous country we now know. Long before Cæsar first conquered Gaul, and in the time of his successor Augustus, Lyons was the capital; then came the Germans and Goths, who began to overrun the land, and a little later the low German tribe of the Franks came also; they were destined to give their name to a land alien from their own, just as the modern name of Scotland was brought over the sea originally by the men of Ireland. It was in the beginning of the sixth century that the greater part of Gaul lay under the dominion of Clovis, King of the Franks. Yet after his death, in accordance with the German custom, the kingdom was divided among his sons, one province being Neustria, which included what we know as Normandy, and endless struggles ensued, until in the middle of the seventh century arose the great Charlemagne, who ruled by his might over all central Europe, now divided into many nations. But in the struggle between his grandsons, his great dominion was split up, one grandson taking what is now Germany, another Italy, and the third, and most powerful, Charles the Bald, holding France. He had for his kingdom "all Gaul west of the Scheldt, the Meuse, the Saône, and the Rhone; it ran down to the Mediterranean, and was thence bounded by the Pyrenees and the Atlantic." Brittany was still savagely independent, however, and the northern coasts of Neustria were ravaged by the Northmen. The county of Paris became part of the possessions of the duchy of France, and Robert the Strong, made duke by Charles the Bald, was set to fight against the northern marauders, who had penetrated even to Paris. But the descendants of the great Charles were weak and feeble, and as his house declined that of Robert the Strong grew, culminating in his great-grandson, Hugh Capet, who, on the death of the last of the direct line of degenerate Carlovingians, became king of the France that we know. 20

But before Capet had succeeded in seating himself on the throne, the Northmen had settled permanently in France. In the reign of Charles the Bald's grandson, Charles the Simple, Rollo or Rolf, the Northman, had established himself at Rouen, and the king had made terms with him, giving him his daughter to wife, and granting him a tract of land from the Epte to the sea, with Rouen as its heart. This was in 912, and is the first recognised settlement of the Northmen. Rollo himself is a fine bold figure, only surpassed by one other among his descendants. His frame was gigantic, and when in full armour no horse could carry him. He seems to have combined, with the strenuous virile qualities of the northerners, the capacity for organisation and settled government belonging to a later period, and a more civilised people. He embraced the faith of his wife Gisella, and was baptized under the name of Robert, though it is as Rollo he will be known and remembered. He was the founder of Normandy, and under his government, learning and industry sprang up and flourished. His followers received the softening influences of the French, and the French language began to be spoken in Normandy. 21

The first Normandy was, as has been said, the district lying around Rouen, but in 924 the district of Bayeux was added to it, hereafter to become a stronghold of the older language and customs against the Frenchified influences of Rouen. Freeman says: "Nowhere out of old Saxon or Frisian lands can we find another portion of continental Europe which is so truly a brother land of our own. The district of Bayeux, occupied by a Saxon colony in the latest days of the old Roman empire, occupied again by a Scandinavian colony as the result of its conquest by Rolf, has retained to this day a character which distinguishes it from any other Romance-speaking portion of the Continent." 22



AN APPROACH TO THE ABBEY, MONT ST MICHEL

As we have seen, at the time of Rolf's settlement in Neustria there were two powers in France, the King of France, Charles the Simple, and the powerful Duke of the French, who included in his dominions the future capital, Paris. It was to the King of France that Rolf did homage as overlord; and the story goes that the proud Northman, on being told to kiss the monarch's foot by way of homage, deputed one of his men to act as his proxy, and that this man, no humbler than his master, contemptuously raised the king's foot to his own mouth, thereby oversetting the monarch. The story is probably apocryphal, but it has lived with odd persistence. 23

Rollo died in 931, and a few years after his death his son William Longsword had the satisfaction of adding to his lands the district of Côtentin, including the peninsula and the land as far south as Granville. He obtained this additional land when he was suppressing what was called a revolt of the Bretons—for the Dukes of Normandy held shadowy rights over Brittany, rights which they were never able to enforce. By his new conquest the Channel Isles were included in Normandy, and oddly enough it was thus they became attached to the English crown, for when the Norman dukes, as kings of England, lost all their other French possessions, they retained the islands. William Longsword was of a softer mould than his father, and from what can be gathered from the chronicles of the time he was a man of a thoughtful cast of mind, serious and gentle, a character rare enough in his age. He was succeeded by his son Richard, who, of all the Norman dukes except the Conqueror himself, is the best known to English people from Miss Yonge's charming story, *The Little Duke*, in which it is to be feared she regards both father and son through a haze of idealisation; but it is indeed difficult if not impossible to make sufficient allowances for the radically different cast of thought in a bygone age, and to draw men as they really were. Richard the Fearless reigned for more than fifty years, and it was ten years before his death that Hugh Capet combined in himself the power of the kings and dukes of France, and became the first king of consolidated France. Richard had been sent as a lad to Bayeux, in order that he might be brought up under the influences of the country of his ancestors instead of becoming too much Frenchified; but he was of a vigorous disposition, and there seems to have been no reason to believe that he would have suffered unduly from any softening influence. 24

Nothing is more striking in the early annals of France than the succession of weak rulers she produced; occasionally there arose a man of capacity and power, but his sons were invariably weaklings. France does not seem to have been able to carry on a strong ruling race. In contrast to this, note the towering figures of the Norman dukes—the gigantic Rolf, the wise William Longsword, Richard the Fearless, Robert the Devil, William the Conqueror—all men of exceptional power and capacity. The infusion of Norman blood seems to have given just that basic power of endurance needed in the Teutonic nation. Richard the Fearless was succeeded by his son Richard the Good, and he by two of his sons successively, another Richard, and Robert the Devil or the Magnificent (see p. 34). It was Roberts son William, who, left as a child to his inheritance, became the most famous of his race. No story of romance or legend is more wonderful than that of the Conqueror. At present we leave it aside to form the theme of a separate chapter, so as not to prolong too far this sketch of Norman history, which is necessary for any understanding of the topographical allusions. 25

With the Conquest, Normandy began to sink in importance; as in the case of a mother who has brought forth a son, destined to wield power and occupy positions far beyond her capacity, she herself took a secondary place. To be the independent King of England was grander than to be Duke of Normandy subject to the kings of France, and it needed but a generation or two to make the English forget the fact of their being conquered, and to look upon Normandy as an appanage of the English crown. It was a strange position altogether; the best blood of Normandy was emptied into England at the Conquest; abbots, warriors, nobles, men of learning and men of birth settled in the new country and became the English, and England found herself so much Normanised as to be transformed.

It is customary to consider that the history of Normandy ends with the conquest of England, being thenceforth merged in that of the greater country; but though the importance of Normandy as a country was lessened by the union, her history is by no means identical with that of England. Normandy several times enjoyed a sovereign prince altogether distinct from him who wore the crown of England, and this state of affairs began immediately after the death of William the Conqueror, who left the duchy to his eldest son Robert, while the second son William became King of England. Of Robert we know chiefly that he suffered from an incurable "mollesse," and further, as regards personal details, that as "Jambes eût cortes, gros les os," he earned the nickname of Court-hose. This son of a famous father and admirable mother, was a libertine, given over to pleasure, incapable of taking decisive action, one of those weak characters on which experience cannot engrave permanent lines, but withal full of the courage of his race. He was, however, unable to hold what had been left him. William had prophesied that his youngest son Henry should be greater than both his brothers, and Henry soon began to fulfil the parental prophecy by seizing and holding for himself the Côtentin peninsula, and with it the lordship of Mortain. Nothing is more significant of the grasping natures of the trio of brothers than the way in which they changed over, first one couple joining against the remaining one, and then almost immediately breaking up for a fresh combination. William and Henry warred against Robert; Henry and Robert combined to thwart William; William and Robert mutually agreed to keep Henry out of the succession, and so on; exactly as self-interest dictated for the moment. Finally William came uppermost, and Robert submitted, and henceforth practically held his duchy at the pleasure of his brother. It was Henry's turn to be the "odd man out," and he fled before his elder brothers, taking refuge in Mont St Michel, where they both besieged him. He had to submit, and, yielding up the fortress, retired a penniless adventurer. But in some way he afterwards regained the whole of the Côtentin. When the crusading mania began, Robert was seized with it; under his rule Normandy had been wretchedly governed, and little he cared. For a comparatively small sum he mortgaged his duchy to his brother William the Red, for six years, and went off to the Holy Land. Normandy was probably the better for his action. In returning from the Holy Land, he managed to occupy a year in the journey, and on the way he married Sybilla, daughter of Count Geoffrey of Flanders. He had already, it may be stated, two sons and a daughter, who seem to have inherited the best of the traits of his house. One of the sons, Richard, while on a visit to his uncle William in England, was accidentally killed in the New Forest.

26

27



ENTRANCE TO MONT ST MICHEL

Sybilla attempted to reclaim her husband from the crowd of bad companions who gathered round him on his re-entry into Normandy, and when Robert was tired of her, as he soon became of everything, he found this inconvenient, so in less than two years she died suddenly of poison. Robert had returned too late to put in a bid for the throne of England! which was already occupied by Henry; but the death of William freed him from any

28

obligation to pay back the debt on his duchy, and Sybilla's dowry went in other directions. Henry now made a treaty with his brother, by which he delivered up the Côtentin, but kept Domfront and Mortain. However, becoming once more embroiled with Robert, he quickly won for himself the whole duchy, clinching the matter at the famous battle of Tinchebray, whereby the process of his father was reversed, and the King of England now conquered Normandy as the Duke of Normandy had then conquered England. After the terrible death of his son near Barfleur, Henry set his heart on the succession of his daughter Maude, who had been married first to the Emperor of Germany, and afterwards on his death, evidently by her father's choice, to Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou and Maine, one of the most powerful of the rulers who might have opposed her succession in Normandy. Yet Maude never ascended the throne that her father had so carefully guarded for her. It is true that a claimant who might have proved very formidable, William, the remaining son of Robert, had died seven years before his uncle Henry, but there remained the two sons of Adela, daughter of the Conqueror; of these the younger, Stephen, was determined to oust his cousin. During the weary civil war that followed, Normandy was many times traversed by one party or the other, but on the whole the country declared for Stephen. The Count of Anjou was an hereditary enemy, and the Normans did not relish the idea of being governed by him in his wife's name. When at last, after the death of Stephen's son Eustace, it was settled that Henry should be recognised as next heir to his cousin, the land enjoyed peace. With the accession of Henry a fresh era began, for the new king held in France not only Normandy, but in right of his mother and his wife, Touraine, Anjou, Maine, and Aquitaine—together more than half the country—a formidable vassal for the French king! Henry was tenacious of his rights, and it was only as his turbulent sons grew older, and displayed to the full those unfilial dispositions so common in their race, that he consented to divide some of his possessions among them, to be held from him as lord. His gifts were many times changed, but it seems certain that Richard had ruled in Aquitaine as an independent sovereign before his father's death, while Geoffrey, by his marriage with Constance, heiress of Brittany, became Duke of Brittany. Henry gave to his youngest and best loved John the title of Count of Mortain, and with it the vicounty of the Côtentin; and in 1181 he made his eldest son, Henry, Duke of Normandy. But Henry the younger did not long survive, dying at the early age of twenty-eight, after rebelling against his father almost continuously since his attainment of manhood. Therefore, at the death of the king, Richard came to the throne. John still continued ruler of Mortain and the Côtentin under his brother, and these dominions gave him an opportunity for putting in practice those treasonable conspiracies by which he hoped to throw off Richard's yoke, and become an independent sovereign. Richard, however, was too strong for him; he marched into Normandy, and speedily showed himself master. Thereupon John came humbly to ask forgiveness at Lisieux. The story goes that Richard, with the open-minded heartiness which won him so much more love than his worse qualities merited, exclaimed that he forgave him freely, and set his behaviour down to bad influence, as he was only a child. As John was then six-and-twenty, this reason must have galled him had he possessed an atom of pride, but we have reason to think he did not. While Richard was otherwise engaged in the Holy Land and on the Continent, John made a second attempt to win his realms, which was brought to an end by a knowledge of his brother's death. He heard this while at Carentan, and gleefully hastened to take advantage of it. True, there was still a boy to be reckoned with, young Arthur, son of his dead brother Geoffrey—a boy who was already Duke of Brittany, and who inherited to the full the proud fierce temper of his mother Constance. But John had two points in his favour: first, that in the old days a brother was often considered to have a better right to a throne, especially if he were a man, than a nephew who was still a child, and this idea had not altogether died out; secondly, the Normans of all people would have been the last to yield homage to the duke of the hated Bretons, their nearest neighbours, with whom they had been perpetually at war, and for whom they felt a fierce jealousy. On the other hand, Arthur had a powerful ally in Philip, King of France, who saw that it would be much more to his own advantage to have a weak boy as ruler of Normandy than a man equal to himself in cunning and craftiness. Therefore Philip helped Arthur, and even promised him his little daughter in marriage. But unluckily for the boy who was the principal actor in the drama, he fell into the hands of his uncle,—some say he was captured by treachery while asleep,—however that may be, he was in John's clutches, and little chance was there for him to get out again. This was in August 1202. John carried his prisoner at once to one of the strongest castles in his dominions, namely Falaise. Arthur was now between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and John, reckoning without that stubborn courage of nature which the boy inherited, attempted to make him abdicate his rights, in vain. Finding this hopeless, he hurried him away to Rouen, there to dispose of him finally. Arthur's incarceration at Falaise is dealt with in the chapter on Falaise, and his captivity at Rouen is treated in the chapter on Rouen. The fury of the Bretons, who saw the last of their ruling race, a promising boy, thus foully murdered by the duke of the Normans, their life-long foes, may be imagined; it hardly needed the French king's call to arms to make them rise in their wrath and flood in upon the neighbouring towns of Normandy. The conduct of John after this displays a pitiable weakness. He alone of all the Conqueror's line showed a lack of courage; others had been weak, vacillating, unfilial, cruel, vicious, but it remained for John to combine all these qualities in himself. His movements were like those of a timid animal who knows the huntsmen are closing in on him, but has not courage to make a dash through the ring. He hurried from Rouen to Caen, from Caen to Brix, and Brix to Valognes. Back again to Caen, and then to Domfront. He returned to the Côtentin, and at last embarked at Barfleur without striking a blow to save that land, which he had not hesitated to gain by murdering a boy, when he thought there was no personal danger in the action. He did indeed return in 1206 for a short time, but never in such a spirit as to make the retrieving of his dominions possible. Meantime the Normans did not submit so quietly; they could not endure the entry of the Bretons, and sternly defended themselves at Mont St Michel, which was set on fire, and at Caen; but it was of no use; the Bretons, after a triumphal progress, met the French king, who had received the submission of Caen as well as Lisieux and Bayeux, and thus with hardly a struggle there fell into the hands of France that territory which she had so long and so jealously regarded. If ever a king deserved to lose his land, it was the craven John.

29

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A STREET, MONT ST MICHEL

By a curious oversight in the ratification and the submission which followed this conquest, the Channel Islands were overlooked. It has been suggested they were simply forgotten; if so, the event proved fortunate for them, for they have remained ever since in the happy independence granted them by England. The title of Duke of Normandy was dropped by Henry III., John's son, at the Treaty of Saintes in 1259, when it was agreed that Aquitaine should remain an English possession, and the title was afterwards borne by a scion of the ruling French house. But the tale of Normandy's wars is not ended. For in the time of Edward, that monarch was set upon recovering not only the territory lost by his grandfather, but, if possible, the French crown for himself; he landed at Barfleur, and, quickly subduing the Côtentin, passed on to St Lo, Coutances, and Caen, taking towns and seizing vast quantities of precious stuffs wherever he went. These triumphs were followed by the famous battles of Crécy and Poitiers, and the historic siege of Calais. However, his conquest left no permanent mark on Normandy, for by the Treaty of Bretigny in 1360, though he received much else, he resigned Normandy with his claim to the French crown, and it was reserved for his great-grandson, Henry V., to recover the duchy by the sword. This he actually did, after a brilliant series of victories; so that in the years 1417 and 1418 Normandy became an appanage of the English crown, but under the rule of the weak Henry VI. his father's conquests lapsed, and by 1450 Normandy was once more included in the dominions of France, never again to be severed.

CHAPTER III

THE MIGHTY WILLIAM

William's father was the fifth Duke of Normandy, and if the story of how he attained that dignity be true, certain it is that his nickname "Le Diable" was more fitting than the other, "Magnifique," which he earned by his lavishness. His elder brother, Richard, was Duke of Normandy when Robert set up the standard of rebellion at Falaise. But Richard was no weakling, and did not suffer the disaffection to spread; he appeared before the walls with all the forces at his disposal, and soon compelled his younger brother to sue for peace. Then an arrangement was made by which a certain grant of land was conferred on the rebel, while the castle of Falaise, a powerful stronghold, was recognised as the property of the reigning duke. To celebrate the occasion the two brothers repaired in amity to Rouen, and there in the castle fortress, then standing on the site of the markets near the river, a banquet was held, to cement the new friendship and understanding. But suddenly Richard turned pale and sickened, and before nightfall he was dead. There was little doubt that poison had been in his cup; put there by whom but the man who was now duke, and held the power of life and death in his hands! None dare speak to accuse him, and, like many another in the Dark Ages, he reaped the full reward of his crime in perfect security. There were others of his family alive, uncles as powerful, and, had occasion arisen, doubtless as unscrupulous as himself; but Robert was on the spot, he held possession, and apparently without a word being raised in protest, he occupied his murdered brother's place. An illegitimate son of his brother's, named Nicholas, he placed in the abbey at Fécamp to be trained as a monk, a method often made use of by half savage kings to soften youthful rivals, still susceptible of being taught the hollowness of worldly ambition and the wickedness of rebellion against authority. It may be thought that this youth can hardly have been regarded as a serious rival, but in those days the marriage-tie was not deemed essential to inheritance. From William Longsword every Norman duke so far had been born out of wedlock, and though they had been legitimatised afterwards by some ceremony between their parents, this was rather a concession than a necessity. It is said that Nicholas entered with zest into his holy vocation, and was himself the architect of the first church of St Ouen at Rouen, of which there remains only the beautiful apse, known as the Tour aux Clercs. He was fourth abbot, and was buried in the church.

35

36



HARBOUR OF FÉCAMP

What always strikes one as remarkable in reading history, is the youth of the principal actors. Robert was but twenty-two when he murdered his brother for the ducal crown. Falaise was one of his favourite seats, the hunting was good, the country pleasant, and the security of the stronghold reassuring. Once, as he returned from hunting, he had espied a tanner's daughter, of rare beauty, washing clothes in the little stream that runs beneath the mighty rock; when he looked out of the high narrow window the next day, he had no difficulty in recognising the same girl again; and subsequently he introduced himself to her in the guise of a lover. Tanning was looked upon by the Normans as being a very low trade indeed, and though Fulbert, the Conqueror's grandsire, added to it the avocation of brewing, he could never shake off the odium which clung to his name on account of his principal business. The base-born brat of the tanner's daughter would hardly be considered at first as even a pawn in the great game of statecraft. But the boy was dear to his father's heart. His mother, Arlotta, was taken into the castle, and there was none to rival her, for Robert was not married. Yet strangely enough he did not make her his wife, and so render brighter the prospects of the sturdy boy, whom he regarded

with much affection. He could not bring himself to recognise Arlotta even by the sort of ceremony his ancestors had considered sufficient; his pride was too great to give the tanner's daughter a right to share his throne, and he preferred that his son should start more heavily weighted for the race than he need have been. When Robert made up his mind to go on a crusade to the Holy Land, the position became one of great difficulty; he was worse than childless, and men began dimly to foresee that this only son of his would prove a heavy stumbling-block in the way of any other succession. But Robert's selfishness being immeasurably stronger than his paternal love, he departed, leaving it to be well understood that in case of accidents William was to be his heir. But there were a number of the descendants of the great Rollo still alive, strong men, soldiers, nobles with retinues of their own, and each and all put his own claim prior to that of this nameless boy. Looked at thus, it seems little short of miraculous that William should ever have raised himself to the throne at all, a more wonderful feat than even his conquest of England in later years. The boy was but eight when, after various warning rumours of failing health, the news came definitely that his father was dead. Duke Robert had left him in charge of Alain, Count of Brittany, who, though a relative, could not himself hope to ascend the throne, and the choice was wise. Alain fulfilled his trust loyally, and the exceptional talent and courage of the young duke seem from the first to have attached to him a number of nobles, so that his position gradually gained solidarity, though the marvel that he should have escaped knife or poison in an age where such means of riddance were frequently employed remains the same. Full credit for his safety at this dangerous time must be given to the nobles of the Côtentin, especially to Neel of St Sauveur, who is mentioned again in the chapter on that district. The bitterness of the stain upon his birth was early felt by William, and there are instances in his career which point to the smarting of a hidden sore shown by a man ordinarily self-possessed. His treatment of the burghers of Alençon, because they had openly taunted him with his birth, is one case in point; the other is his own unexampled domestic life, which stands out in strong contrast with those of his predecessors; he seems early to have made up his mind with iron will that what he had suffered through his father, none should suffer through him.

At thirteen he took upon himself responsibility, and really began to rule. His mother had been separated from him, and had no share in the government. She had married a knight named Herlouin, by whom she had two children, of both of whom we hear much in history. The elder, Odo, became Bishop of Bayeux. He it was who encouraged his half-brother's troops at Hastings, going before and calling them on. As Odo's dealings had more to do with England than Normandy, we may dispose of him here in a few words. After the Conquest, vast wealth and many estates were bestowed upon him; he was viceroy in William's absence, and second in power to the king himself. His overweening pride made him overbearing; he aspired to sit on the papal throne. William, discovering in him many treasonable practices, kept him prisoner at Rouen. On his half-brother's death, however, he once more became prominent, led insurrections against his nephew William the Red, and joined with Duke Robert in his fraternal wars. At last this turbulent, vigorous, astute man went crusading with Robert, and died at Palermo in 1097.

Arlotta's other son, Robert of Mortain, was a loyal brother; he prepared a hundred and twenty ships for the great flotilla, and lived peaceably during the Conqueror's lifetime, though he too warred against William the Red. He is mentioned again in connection with Mortain.

The generally received opinion of William the Conqueror in England is, that he was a stern and cruel man; stern he certainly was, stern with the sternness of strength which serves as a shield against familiarity, and enables its possessor to go straight on his own way, regardless of unfavourable opinions or specious arguments.

"This King William that we speak about," says the chronicler, "was a very wise man, and very rich; more worshipful and strong than any of his foregangers were. He was mild to the good men that loved God, and beyond all metes stark to them who withstood his will. Else, he was very worshipful." This is the testimony of one who was almost his contemporary, and who had nothing to fear from him, nor ought to gain by praising him.

The idea of William's cruelty is based on his harrying of Northumberland, an act that could never have originated in the mind of a soft-hearted or imaginative man; but William's bent was not toward cruelty, and considering the age in which he lived, the well-authenticated cases which we have of his clemency are remarkable. When he was only twenty, an age when if there be any hardness in a man's nature it is at its worst, unsoftened by personal experience of sorrow, he spared the lives of those of his vassals who had risen against him not openly but with treachery. The manner of it was thus. Guy of Burgundy, William's first cousin, entered into a conspiracy with many of the most powerful nobles of Normandy to assassinate the duke. It is easy to be seen what was Guy's motive; though he could only claim through his mother, he meant to make himself Duke of Normandy; but it is more difficult to see what the others expected to gain by a move which proposed to substitute one duke for another. It was not the first time that rebellion and revolt against the duke had risen, but it was the most serious plot, and the turning-point of William's career.

So secretly had the conspiracy been planned that he was all unaware of it. He was at this time in his twentieth year, and, as Wace tells us, "the barons' feuds continued; they had no regard for him; everyone according to his means made castles and fortresses." Up till now William had lived, but he had not been master. "Affrays and jealousies, maraudings and challengings" had continued in spite of him, but this deadly conspiracy was to bring matters to a head in a way its projectors little thought. William was in the castle of Alleaumes close to Valognes; he had retired for the night, when he was awakened by the agonised entreaties of the court fool, who told him that the nobles were even now on the point of arriving in order to seize him unprepared, and murder him. William must have had great confidence in his jester, for he rose straightway, and apparently without waiting for attendants saddled his horse, and rode off into the dark night. The whole story is mysterious; were there then no men-at-arms to guard the duke, no attendant to go with him? would it not have been safer to barricade the castle rather than to have fled alone? Whatever the cause, William's midnight ride is a matter of history. There were no smooth, easy roads then; the country, from various accounts in charters and deeds of the tenth century, was covered with woods, and much waste ground; and, as we know, wolves abounded, for much later (1326), forty-five wolves were taken in the district of Coutances, twenty-two in that of Carentan, and nineteen in that of Valognes, in the Easter term alone. The young duke could only have had the stars to guide him, and safety was far off. He meant to get to Falaise, where he could feel tolerably secure; but

even as the crow flies Falaise is over seventy miles from Valognes, and the way would be difficult to find. The account of this dramatic episode is circumstantially given by the old chronicler, who tells us that even as William left the town he heard the clatter of the enemies' horses entering it. The enemy, finding he had fled, and knowing they had implicated themselves far too deeply to think of pardon, set off in hot pursuit, and the duke was only saved by hiding in a thicket, whence he saw them go by. He did not follow the direct route, but kept along by the sea-coast, until the next morning on a worn and jaded steed he found himself at Ryes, between Bayeux and the coast, where he revealed himself to the lord of the manor-house, a man named Hubert. Hubert promptly rehorsed him, and sent him on his way with two of his own sons as guides. Thus the duke managed to reach the stronghold of Falaise in safety.

Later on William constructed a raised road, running through the country in the direction of his flight; it ran from Valognes to Bayeux and thence to Falaise, part of it may still be seen between Quilly-le-Tessin, Caitheoux, and Fresni-le-Pucceux. It is said that it was the forced task of the very conspirators who had compelled the fight, an instance of grim justice!

The malcontents must have trembled when they knew that their powerful overlord was free, and fully aware of their guilt; there was no escape now, open revolt was their only chance, so they gathered their forces and attacked Caen. 43

William, for his part, collected his men, and leaving a garrison in Falaise, marched to Rouen; but too much depended on a battle, to risk it against a greatly superior and better prepared force. He resolved on a stroke of policy, no less than to call for protection from his own overlord the King of France, who had formerly been his invader and enemy. King Henry responded to the appeal, possibly feeling that Normandy might slip from him altogether, and France itself be menaced, were the handful of nobles to win power by their swords.

Then was fought, at Val-ès-dunes, about nine miles from Caen, one of the most memorable battles in the history of Normandy.

A picturesque incident marked the beginning of the battle. A splendid company of knights, carrying devices on their lances, were seen in the forefront of the nobles' ranks, and William, advancing, cried out that they were his friends. The leader, De Gesson, was so much touched by this, that though he had banded himself with the insurgents, and taken a fearful oath to be the first to strike William in the *mêlée*, he satisfied his conscience by one of those transparent evasions common to superstitious ages, and considered he had redeemed his word by striking William gently on the shoulder with his gauntlet, and then immediately transferring himself and his followers to the side against which he had come out to fight. 44

It is said the army of the nobles numbered 20,000, but figures seen through such a distance of time have generally suffered from a little extension. The fight was fierce, and hand to hand; battle-axes and swords played greater part than arrows. It is impossible to better the picturesque account given by Wace. "There was great stir over the field, horses were to be seen curvetting, the pikes were raised, the lances brandished, and shields and helmets glistened. As they gallop they cry their various war-cries: those of France cry 'Montjoie!' the sound whereof is pleasant to them. William cries 'Dex Aie!' the swords are drawn, the lances clash. Many were the vassals to be seen there fighting, serjeants and knights overthrowing one another. The king himself was struck and beat down off his horse."



A ROAD NEAR ROUEN

But in the end William and his ally triumphed, and the nobles fled in confusion from the field. Yet, when he seized the arch-traitor Guy of Burgundy, he treated him as we have said with extraordinary leniency, and except for taking from him the territory which had enabled him to play such a part, he suffered him to go unpunished, and even provided for him otherwise. This treatment bore fruit, for Guy became a good subject, and led troops at Hastings with distinction. The other leaders were deprived of their estates, and one was imprisoned, but none were executed, while the smaller men escaped scot-free. When the duke had come to his full stature he was a mighty man, some say seven feet in height, and unwieldy in bulk; none could wield his axe; in battle, horse and man went down before him, cloven by the strength of his mighty arm. And not alone in strength was he more than a match for his fellows, but let a man as much as whisper treason, and he heard of it; those who plotted were reached surely by that penetrating power, and lived to rue their folly. He was a kingly man, born to rule. 45

But though the victory at Val-ès-dunes made him duke *de facto*, his work was far from being done, insurrection continued in other parts of the duchy, and shortly after he was called to subdue Alençon, which held out against him. "He found the inhabitants all ready to greet him: calthrops sown, fosses deepened, walls heightened, palisades bristling all around ... to spite the Tanner's grandson, the walls were tapestried with raw hides, the filthy gore-besmeared skins hung out, and as he drew nigh, they whacked them and they thwacked them; 'plenty of work for the tanner,' they sang out, shouting and hooting, mocking their enemies" (Palgrave).

Then in an ineffectual sortie some of the townsmen fell into William's hands, and terrible was the vengeance which fell on them for their savage joke. Their eyes were spiked out, their hands and feet chopped off, and the mangled limbs were flung into the town. Soon after, no doubt awed by an anger so much fiercer than they had reckoned on, a cruelty so merciless when aroused, the people made terms, and William, victorious, once again returned to Rouen. 46



NEAR PONT-AUDEMER

The next rebel was William's own uncle, of the same name as himself, his father's half-brother. He trusted to the strength of the castle of Arques, near Dieppe, which had been given him by his nephew. But the young duke was in the heyday of his vigour. The news was brought to him at Valognes at midday one Thursday, and by Friday evening he was before the gates of Arques, having come by way of Bayeux, Caen, and Pont-Audemer. The castle was stoutly defended, and so impregnable by position, that the only method was to sit down before it and wait; a method adopted with complete success, though the arch-traitor himself managed to escape and fly. Many other smaller risings occurred which kept the great Conqueror in practice, and then came the second great battle in Normandy, that of Mortèmer, at which he was not present himself. He had shown his diplomacy in using the King of France as an ally against the men of the Côtentin, now it was the same King of France, Henry, who, being jealous of the power of this great vassal, fomented insurrection among his subjects and entered that part of the duchy known as the Vexin, in a hostile spirit. To the French, the Normans were even yet pirates, and pirates they continued to be called until the end. Wace says that the Frenchmen would call the Normans "Bigoz," a corruption of their war-cry, "By God," from which comes our word bigot; and they would ask the king, "Sire, why do you not chase the Bigoz out of the country? Their ancestors were robbers, who came by sea, and stole the land from our forefathers and us."

47

So the French marched as far as Mortèmer, and began to pillage. But after pillage came revelry, as it so frequently does, and the Normans, who had been watchful but unseen, fell upon the French and routed them hip and thigh. With the blithe exaggeration of days before statistics were known, the old chronicler says, "nor was there a prison in all Normandy which was not full of the Frenchmen. They were to be seen fleeing around, skulking in the woods and bushes, and the dead and wounded lay amid the burning ruins, and upon the dunghills, and about the fields, and in the bye-paths."

As we have said, at this battle William personally was not present, and the French king was not taken prisoner.

Record states that William broke into poetry, apparently the only time he was so seized: the very words of his poem are preserved; here is a verse of it:—

48

"Réveillez vous et vous levez
 Guerriers qui trop dormi avez
 Allez bientôt voir vos amys
 Que les Normands ont à mort mys
 Entre Ecouys et Mortèmer
 Là les vous convient les inhumer."

After this, negotiations were concluded, and the French prisoners restored; nevertheless the French again soon after entered Normandy, and ravaged the country, even so far as the coast. The River Dive, lying to the east of Caen, is considered the dividing line between Upper and Lower Normandy, and it was at this river that William came up with the main body of the French, including the king himself. William's strokes generally owed as much to their policy as their strength, and this time was no exception. He waited in ambush until half the French had crossed the stream, and then falling suddenly on the remainder, cut them off, and totally routed them. Those in advance, taken in the rear, fled in confusion, and vast quantities of spoil fell into the duke's hands, though the French king himself escaped. After this, peace was concluded at Fécamp.

But still fighting did not cease. The Counts of Anjou had been a perpetual thorn in William's side, and the most formidable of all was Geoffrey Martel, who seized Maine, and held it as well as his own territory; but buoyant with victory, the Norman troops advanced upon the principal city, Le Mans, and took it without difficulty, and Geoffrey Martel was quieted for a while; he died four years before the Conquest of England.

49

But now we must turn for a moment from William's battles to his domestic life. His romantic marriage is an outstanding incident in his career. He did not marry until he was twenty-six, a considerable age for a king. But in that as in other matters he had a mind of his own, and one lady and one only would satisfy him, and she kept him waiting for seven years. She was his own first cousin, Matilda of Flanders, daughter of Baldwin V., Earl of Flanders, but neither she nor her relatives cared for the match. There are various tales concerning her, one of which says she was already a widow when William expressed his preference, and had two children of her own. Another story says she favoured another suitor, who, however, was perhaps well advised in declining the perilous position of husband to the lady of William's choice, however flattering that lady's preference for himself. After waiting with more or less patience for seven years, William took summary methods. He went to Bruges, where his ladylove lived, and meeting her as she returned from church, rolled her in the mud of the street, humiliating her in the eyes of all, and ruining her gay and beautiful clothes. This Petruchio-like method served the purpose. In a very short time Matilda consented to marry the man who had shown her his determination in so unequivocal a manner. This particular marriage seems to have been a brilliant exception in an age when marriage vows were held in scant respect. Yet, when he won Matilda's consent, all William's troubles, in regard to the alliance, were by no means at an end. By the tenets of the Church to which he and his bride belonged, they were within the prohibited degree of consanguinity. This difficulty was surmounted by their gaining absolution on the condition that they erected two religious houses at Caen, houses which stand to this day, and are mentioned more particularly in the chapter on that city.

50

It was two years before his marriage that William had paid that celebrated visit to England in which had probably originated his intention to become lord of that country in due time. But it was not until he was thirty-six that he received the return visit from Harold, when he extorted from his unwilling guest the oath on which he based his right to the English throne. The story of Harold and of the Conquest is told in connection with the famous tapestry, one of the most marvellous contemporary records ever a nation possessed. We resume the narrative here when William, as King of England, in March 1067 returned to Normandy, bringing with him the harmless Edgar Atheling, also the earls Edwin and Morcar, and the archbishop Stigand, probably less with the intention of treating them as guests than with the idea of leaving no head for a revolt behind him in his new country. He held festivals at Rouen, Caen, Fécamp, and Falaise, a kind of triumphal progress in fact; and then returning to quell the revolts which had broken out in England in his absence, he took with him Matilda, and they were jointly crowned at Westminster. But his triumphs were soon to be dimmed by sore domestic worry. During his frequent absences in England he left Matilda in charge of Normandy, and with her he associated his son Robert. But Robert was rude and unfilial; he grasped at power on his own account, and his mother, with that weak affection so often shown in a mother toward her first-born son, aided and sympathised with him. One great source of quarrel between the young prince and his father was the government of the country of Maine. Robert had been affianced to the young Countess of Maine, who had died before the marriage; he held, therefore, that he ought now to rule there independently, while William, who had subdued the country by his sword before he took possession of the young heiress and betrothed her to his son, held it for himself, and the subject was the cause of endless recrimination between the king and his eldest son. Besides Robert, he had had three other sons, but the next, Richard, "had been killed in some mysterious manner, which seemed to make people loath to speak even of the circumstance" (Palgrave). He seems to have met his death in the New Forest, where also were killed William the Red and one of Robert's sons. William, afterwards known as Rufus, was six years his eldest brother's junior, and Henry was several years younger still. There were also, at ages varying between the brothers, five daughters. Cecily, of whom we hear at Caen, as first abbess of her mother's foundation; she became eventually Abbess of Fécamp. Constance, married to the Duke of Brittany. Adeliza or Agatha, first betrothed to Harold, and afterwards, much against her will, to the King of Galicia; but she was never married to him, dying on the journey to Spain. Adela, who married Stephen of Blois, and whose son afterwards became king of England; and Alice, who died young. Others add Constance and Adelaide, but five daughters and four sons are enough for any man, and the existence of the other two seems mythical. Various insurrections and petty wars vexed William's later days, but still his hand was strong, his courage unflinching. He forgave his eldest son's disloyalty more than once, only to find it break out again. At last, after wandering in exile for several years, Robert fixed himself in the castle of Gerberoi, on French soil, whence William assailed him, having his two younger sons with him. In one of the desperate sallies of the besieged, father and son engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict, and being disguised by heavy armour, neither knew the other. At length William, being wounded, cried out, and in a moment his son, struck by remorse, raised his visor and fell on his knees asking forgiveness, sobered by the thought of the terrible crime of patricide of which he had nearly been guilty. Yet the reconciliation was hollow, and the father and son were never at heart friends. It was nine years after this that the end came. Philip, now King of France, seized an opportunity to make inroads on Normandy, and a mocking speech of his about William, who had grown corpulent and unwieldy, was repeated to the English king. But his spirit was the same; embittered by personal troubles, lonely in the estrangement and loss of her who had been his faithful companion through life, though not old in years—for he was only sixty—yet old with the turmoil of a fierce, hard life lived from the cradle, he still had the fire of youth, and he returned a furious answer to Philip's taunt.

51

52

53

"The harvest was ripening, the grape swelling on the stem, the fruit reddening on the bough," when William entered the fertile land where he was to meet with death. He seized the town of Mantes, belonging to the French king, and soon the place was in red ruin. A mass of flames mounted high in the sky, the inhabitants lay wounded to death or fled in terror, and the king himself, in spite of his great bulk and increasing infirmity, superintended the work of destruction; then suddenly—one has heard the story from earliest childhood—his fine charger, treading unexpectedly on a hot cinder, started violently, and flung its rider violently against the high-peaked saddle of the country—William had received his death-blow. There was little left to follow. He was carried by easy stages to his capital city, Rouen, and there laid in the abbey of St Gervais. And we may read of his lonely end in the account of the city of Rouen. But even after his death, the solitude which had attended the end did not desert him; of all historical funerals ever recorded, that of this great man is the most terrible.

54

The body was conveyed at the cost of a private citizen on its journey to Caen. Some say that his youngest son Henry followed it to Caen, but it seems hardly likely, for in that case there would have been no need for a

subject to defray the expenses, as he undoubtedly did. The corpse was taken to the church in the abbey of St Etienne—the abbey that, so light-heartedly years before, William had erected in penance for his marriage. Yet the mischances were not at an end. As the procession passed along the narrow street, a cry arose that the town was on fire. Down went the bier, and off went the crowd in search of this new sensation. It was not until the fire was quenched that the funeral was resumed. As they prepared with all due solemnity to lower the body into the grave, one stepped forward, crying, “I adjure ye that ye inter not William in the spot where ye are about to lay him. He shall not commit trespass on what is my right, for the greater part of this church is my right and of my fee, and I have no greater right in any of my lands.... By force he took it from me, and never afterwards offered to do me right.” He who had never dared to rebuke William publicly for “offering that which cost him nothing,” after his death was very bold. “All marvelled that this great king, who had conquered so much, and won so many cities and so many castles, could not call so much land his own as his body might lie within after death.”

55

The claimant was appeased by money, and after a further mishap too terrible to relate, those who had fulfilled their duty left the body of the king.

But even then his dust was not suffered to rest in peace, for in 1562 his tomb was broken into by the Huguenots, and again by the mob in 1793, and the remains disturbed. All that was preserved was a thigh-bone, a mighty bone, showing by its measurements the size and strength of the man, and this was reburied, and now lies before the altar, where a long inscription records the burial-place. It is the same as the original epitaph, though new cut:

“Hic Sepultus est invictissimus Guillelemus Conquestor Normanniae Dux, et Anglae Rex Hujus ce domus conditor qui obiit Anno MLXXXVII.”

56

CHAPTER IV

A MEDIÆVAL CITY

Rouen is surrounded by high hills, and can be seen lying on the margin of the river in the aspect of a toy city. In this there lies one great advantage, namely, that she is not easy to forget. Perhaps the remembrance of any place is sharpened more by having seen it whole than by any other circumstance. If this be impossible, one's mental pictures are often blurred or only partial. Into what, for instance, does the remembrance of Caen resolve itself? Fragmentary peeps, or at best, the view from the railway, where the town is seen on edge, a thin line, above which spires rise irregularly. At the mention of the word Rouen, on the contrary, what a vision leaps up in the mind, a wonderful glittering picture of spires and bridges, of shining water, and piled house-roofs, of islands and tall chimneys!

France has an excellent plan of tucking away her chimneys and other unsightly commercial accessories on one side of a river, leaving her residential quarter free from smoke; so it is here. To southward, in the Faubourg or suburb of St Sever, lie the working quarters, with all the smoke—which, however, never seems so smoky as in England—the noise and din of men who manufacture. On the islands, as in an intermediate quarter, are the houses of the workmen, and on the northern shore is the grand old city. 57

We have spoken previously of the difficulty of putting on paper the soul, character, entity—call it what you will—of a country, and the same thing holds good of a city; but in the case of such a city as Rouen, how is the difficulty increased! There is one obvious note, however, which must strike anyone at once, and that is that the town is French, not Norman—thoroughly French; and the difference between it and the towns further westward, if not so marked as in the days when little Richard of Normandy was sent to be educated at Bayeux, is still noticeable. The modern houses are, of course, severely French, the people in the streets are French, the shops are French, and the whole tone of the life is French altogether.

Secondly, Rouen is, as might be expected, a city of contrasts, the broad boulevards have cut deeply into her, but the change is superficial, not radical, she is still to all intents an ancient city,—a mediæval city to which a certain trimming of the latest fashion has been added. Electric trams run along the boulevards, but the parts between the boulevards remain mediæval. Let anyone who doubts it go to a topmost room in a block of buildings, say between the Rue Jeanne d'Arc and Rue de la Republique, and, craning his neck out, "see what he will see,"—a grotesque and curious medley of chimneys, leaning walls, slanting house-roofs, and old-fashioned projecting stories, mingled in an inextricable fashion. The crooked buildings seem to have grown on to one another and stuck there, in the manner of cowries and periwinkles on a rock. There is hardly a line exactly horizontal or perpendicular; it is difficult to tell where one house begins or the other ends; to pull down one would be to have all the others tumbling about one's ears. High up are tiny platforms with doors opening on to them; the roofs are broken by many a quaint dormer window; the whole could only be swept away by a great fire, such as came to London in 1666. Then above and about these roofs and gables and angles rise wonderful towers containing some of the best work that man has done: the towers of the great Cathedral, or one of the famous churches. 58



OLD HOUSES, ROUEN

There are streets in Rouen which might have come straight from mediæval London. Such is the Rue St Romain, near the Cathedral. Here there are rows and rows of timber framed, heavily projecting houses with small quaint windows. In a courtyard beneath the very shadow of the Cathedral is a delightful row, with a carved stone parapet running across the frontage, and the oddest mixture of lines and angles and irregular windows ever seen out of a picture. In almost every side street may be found traces of the ancient city. In one corner there are grotesque figures carved on the supports of a house bowed out with age, in another we see suddenly a bit of stone carving, worn and defaced with continual rubbing, where the women of Rouen fill their cans at a fountain as their mothers and grandmothers have done before them. Here a low dark arch like a cathedral crypt is used as a small vegetable shop, and in it a pleasant blue-bloused man and comely woman pass their time contentedly though their heads nearly touch the roof; there an arcade betrays what has once been a chapel, but is now a yard filled with lumbering omnibuses. One of the most delicate and fanciful of frontages, belonging to an old house, was preserved at the time of the demolition which took place at the making of the Rue Jeanne d'Arc, and re-erected beside the Tower of St André, of which the body, by the way, was sheared off at the same epoch. It has often been overlooked, this pretty bit of work, which must have occupied a man's time and thoughts and skill for many months, because it does not face the street, and is partly concealed by the church tower. A tiny bit of railed-in garden—that is to say, some gravel and a couple of seats—surround the tower, and even this wee spot has its "gardien" to accompany visitors to the summit, if they wish to ascend. 59

For its size, Rouen has singularly few of those open spaces of greenery, those charming public gardens, which, as a rule, form one of the best features of a French town. There is a little public garden to the east, and Solferino is certainly delightful with big shady trees and a neat bit of water; but it is small. There is also the garden to the east of St Ouen and the Hotel de Ville, but the combined area is not great. In the streets of Rouen, too, there are few trees. We see none of those bright bursts of greenery overhanging walls unexpectedly, and telling of quiet gardens within enclosing gates, that one finds frequently elsewhere; it is a towny town. 60

The chief jewel of Rouen is of course the Cathedral, which in its bewildering variety and transition of styles, has a character of its own sufficient to stamp it permanently on the memory. I confess that to me personally, variety has an infinite charm; I remember far more readily and with greater appreciation a building where the slow growth throughout ages has ensured variety, than one where absolute harmony proclaims its completion to the pattern of a plan. After all, nothing in nature is uniformly monotonous; we do not see an oak or an elm with boughs at precise angles on each side, and the trees, such as the poplar, which approach most nearly to uniformity, are by no means the most beautiful.

The strange unlikeness of the two towers, and the centre tower crowned by the iron *flèche*, is sufficient to ensure attention from the most casual observer. One of the western towers has fretwork windows, bossy 61

pinnacles, and an octagonal coronet; and the other is much less beautiful, and has less decorative lines, terminating in the ugly, high, slate-roofed gable tower. Yet it is better than if it had conformed; the two together are perfect. The plainer one to the north is the Tour de St Romain, which dates from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, though with considerably more of the earlier date. The other is called the Tour de Beurre, because built from the produce of the sale of indulgences to eat butter in Lent. It bears its date, namely, the latter half of the fifteenth century, in every line of its decoration.

We wonder what the ancient church that stood on this site in the tenth century was like; massive and grand no doubt, carrying out in stone the character of its founder Rollo, who was baptised in it before its completion, receiving the name of Robert. The edifice was not finished for many generations, and when it was, a grand ceremony took place in which Rollo's great descendant William figured. But a hundred and fifty years later, when Henry II. held Normandy and England, this church was destroyed by fire.

The rebuilding was begun very shortly afterwards, and the main part of the mighty fabric as we see it dates from then. The main part—but each succeeding century added something, stamping its hall mark on its style, so that one may say here is the work of the fourteenth century, here the fifteenth, here the sixteenth, and—in the iron *flèche* rising high and not ungracefully—here the nineteenth.

The decorated frontage with its three doors was considered by Ruskin the most exquisite piece of Flamboyant work existing. The intricacies of the detail are inexhaustible; and above the centre rises a fine wheel window of the type that mediæval craftsmen loved.

But there are other doorways rich in detail also. Of these the northern, the "Portail des Libraires," was so-called because the courtyard before it was once filled with booksellers' shops, in the same way as the space round our own old St Paul's in London. This is a most impressive entrance, and the innumerable sculptured figures which decorate it are representative of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It was begun in 1280 and finished in 1470. The southern door has also its own name: it is the Portail de la Calende.

The great drawback to the Cathedral is the difficulty of seeing it at a "middle" distance. From afar it rears itself with splendid majesty over the house roofs, but nearer it is too much hemmed in and enclosed by houses. One has no place to stand in such a position as to see it in right perspective.



A STREET IN ROUEN

The interior is graceful enough, and the delicate arcade running round choir and transepts is attractive. One great defect, which at the same time is a curious feature, is the cutting in two of the nave arches by a sort of false story with a second and shorter arch over the primary one. The effect is displeasing and inharmonious.

How infinitely more graceful the arcades would have been if allowed to rise to their natural height, may be gathered from the instances in the side aisles.

The dust of Rollo and William Longsword lie within the great walls, while an empire mightier than ever their wildest dreams foreshadowed, governed by their descendant, covers half the earth, and its sons and daughters come to do homage at the cradle of their kings. There is here also the heart of Richard Cœur de Lion, though Richard himself lies at Fontevrault.

The churches in Rouen are almost innumerable, and in many, notably St Patrice and St Vincent, the glory of the old stained glass in the windows is a great attraction. But out of all the two which every visitor goes to see are St Maclou and St Ouen. St Maclou is quite small, but no one who has seen, under favourable conditions, its curious convex western façade will ever forget it. The fine, deeply recessed doorways, with their magnificent carved doors, are unique. The stonework is like lace; and the stone is of that variety which shows artificial shadows in its stains. The whole appearance is so original, so unlike the conventional western façade, that the beauty is heightened by the rarity which tends to emphasise the impression. The interior is disappointing, and there is a mass of metal high over the altar, which looks as if it might suddenly descend, and cause ruin to all beneath. St Ouen is the fifth church on the same site. It can be observed at leisure from the green garden that lines its sides, and it is wonderful, with its coronet tower and flying buttresses. It was built in the first half of the fourteenth century and restored in 1846, when the western façade was added; and if possible it is better to make a *détour* to avoid the western façade, or the memory of an almost perfect piece of work will be blurred. It was in the garden beside St Ouen that two scaffolds were erected on the 24th of May 1431. On one was placed Joan of Arc, strictly guarded by armed men, and on the other stood the dignitaries and judges who had gathered to hear her recantation. This and her submission she formally made, saying all that her persecutors wished, but afterwards, having fallen back into her "errors" and announcing that saints still visited her and voices spoke mysteriously, she was adjudged a witch, and condemned to death.

64



THE TOWERS OF ST OUEN

One of the oddest bits of Rouen, and one which it is to be hoped will be long cherished, is to be found in the Rue de la Grosse Horloge. The great clock itself is a marvellous work in gilt, standing on a low, heavy archway which bestrides the street, as Temple Bar bestrode Fleet Street before a utilitarian age hustled it away. In London, the only specimen of this kind of gateway, suffered to remain over a public street, is the gateway of St John's, Clerkenwell. La Grosse Horloge conceals an older clock of the fourteenth century, and itself dates from 1529, when it was put up on the newly completed arch. The inner part of the arch is highly carved, the chief figure being the Good Shepherd. Close at hand is a strongly built and well-designed tower or belfry, begun in 1389 and finished about a hundred years later. It contains a deep-toned bell, from which the hour of curfew

65

sounds sonorously every night. This bell, whose name is Rouvel, is cherished by the citizens, as in times of danger and distress they have been summoned by its tongue echoing over the walls and roofs for many a hundred years. In 1382 a new tax on merchandise was imposed by the French Government, and its first enforcement was demanded at Rouen. The people rose in revolt, named one of themselves king, and made him solemnly revoke the tax. The procession gathered as it went, mockery turned to riot, blood was shed, and condign punishment followed. The Duke of Anjou, at the head of troops, marched in the king's name to the city to enforce order, and as it was Rouvel who had called the men of the city to rebellion, he commanded that the belfry should be destroyed. So it was; but the citizens preserved their bell, and very soon after began building a new tower for him, so Rouvel's deep-throated notes still vibrate every night.

It is not however the clock, the arch, and belfry that constitute this one of the most quaint and picturesque corners in Rouen, though they all add to it. There is also a fountain, begun in 1250, and decorated with a large stone bas-relief in the reign of Louis XV. There is a tiny house of carved woodwork that looks as if it were glued to the wall behind. There are many other quaint houses near at hand, and if one had to choose a sample of the old city one could not do better than select this bit. Take it as we may see it any day from the western side. There is the heavy arch, with its sombre shadows beneath its broad curve; there is the wonderful glittering clock, which may perhaps catch the rays of the declining sun. Rising high at the corner is the solid tower with its cupola. We may people this background with figures to fancy. A group of loungers there is sure to be, the men in caps and a few of them in blouses, though the blouse is not so ubiquitous in the town as in the country; perhaps a neat little shopwoman comes tripping by, with her hair screwed up on the top of her head in a glossy tight knot; an old country-woman passes her, wearing a close-fitting coif-like cap, and bearing on her shoulders a wooden frame from which are suspended baskets of ripe strawberries. Then out of the darkness of the arch, starting dazzlingly into the sunshine, there comes a lithe slim figure, robed from head to foot in a sheet of white muslin: it is a young girl returning from her First Communion. The loitering vendors with barrows stop to look at her, and the tourists from England, of whom there are sure to be two or three, for the Hotel du Nord is just the other side of the archway, turn to stare also. Such is a slight sketch of the best-known corner in Rouen.

But besides her mighty Cathedral, her wonderful churches, her street vistas, and her quaint corners, Rouen has much to show. We have not yet touched on her Renaissance palaces, and her historical memories, to say nothing of the twenty-six other fountains with which she is credited, and her busy quays.

To take the Renaissance houses first. There is a magnificent "hotel," standing in a part lying west of the Rue Jeanne d'Arc, which has also a little group of associations of its own. Here, where the great iron-bound markets stand, Joan of Arc was burnt to death, after which her ashes were cast into the river. In these days when the thought of the public hanging of a notorious criminal turns us faint and sick, we can hardly, even in imagination, fancy a great crowd gathered to watch the agonising torture and death of an innocent young girl.

It was thought for long that Joan was burnt in the open space near by the Place de la Pucelle, and here stands a grotesquely hideous statue of her, the very epitome of all it should not be; but it is now fairly certain that the place of her last agony was on the site of the market. Facing the statue is the entrance gate of the beautiful house of which we have spoken, the Hotel Bourgtheroulde, now the "Bureaux du Comptoir d'Escompte." The house was begun in 1486 by Guillaume le Roux, Lord of Bourgtheroulde, and was decorated by the most famous of the Renaissance architects, Jean Goujon, to whom almost as impossible an amount of work is attributed as to Grinling Gibbons. The decoration in the courtyard is a splendid example of the period, and can hardly be overpraised. Under the five broad windows on the left hand, run large panels, with scenes of the meeting between François, King of France, and Henry, King of England; for the mansion was not finished until 1532, a date when that meeting was still one of the greatest of political events. Above the windows the artist has given his fancy full rein, and in the symbolical scenes and strange beasts we find a representation of the "Triumphs" of Petrarch. All the uprights and lintels of the windows are richly carved. In the corner is a hexagonal tower, and in this the carving is in marvellously sharp and clear preservation, treated with a certain flatness of the most prominent surface, difficult to describe, but very effective and original; the scenes are pastoral. There are two splendid windows on the frontage beyond, rising into high, pierced pediments, with pinnacles and tracery, and on this side also is exquisite carving.

The Earl of Shrewsbury was lodged in this house when he came as Ambassador from Elizabeth to invest Henri IV. with the Order of the Garter.

Another magnificent example of Renaissance work in Rouen is the Palais de Justice, begun in 1499, on the site of the Jewry. It was meant to be partly the Exchequer and partly the Exchange. Unfortunately, the worst end—the west end, which is of eighteenth-century sham Gothic, unmistakably so, even to the merest novice in architecture—is that most frequently seen, as it faces the open space in the great Rue Jeanne d'Arc, whereas the really fine court has to be sought for down a side street.

Lying northward, hidden away by houses beyond the Solferino Garden, not far from the great buildings of the Musée and the Library, is a solitary relic, namely, the round tower called Tour Jeanne d'Arc. It is not very attractive in appearance, being a solid cylindrical mass of masonry capped by projecting wooden battlements and a conical slate roof, both of which were added in restoration. The battlements are interesting, as they are of the ancient sort, formed to protect the defenders, who poured down boiling lead or showered stones upon their attackers.

It was not in this tower, however, that Joan was kept a prisoner from December 26, 1430, to May 30, 1431, but in another which stood near the top of the present Rue Jeanne d'Arc. Both of these towers belonged to the great castle begun by Philip Augustus in 1205, when he had at last snatched Normandy from England, and was feverishly anxious about the safety of his new dominions. Before beginning his own castle, he destroyed all that remained of the old castle built by the Norman dukes, and now his own has followed the same fate, and has vanished, excepting the Tour Jeanne d'Arc, an interesting relic, dating far further back than most of the ancient buildings we have seen.

Joan was brought to the tower, still standing, on the 9th of May, for an examination before her accusers, and the torturer was held in readiness to prompt her replies did she fail in answering. The very room in which she

stood is here to be seen; though it was in the chapel of the archbishop, near the Cathedral, that her death-warrant was signed. When Joan was in Rouen the oldest of the timber houses must have been fresh and new, the Palais de Justice and Hotel Bourgtheroulde had not been begun. The oldest parts of St Ouen stood, and St Maclou was incomplete. Could Joan but have looked on into the future and have seen the finest street in Rouen called after her name, have known that her memory was regarded as that of heroine and martyr, how astonished she would have been.

The thought of Joan and the various scenes in which she played a central part, conjures up many other historical memories also.

Rouen is rich in such pictures, not the pictures painted by human hands and representing imaginary scenes, but living pictures which, though lacking the cinematograph, have nevertheless remained indelibly fixed in the great drama of history. The earliest of all is the vision of a dying man, royal in position and by nature a king, alone, forlorn, and stripped of every vestige of glory.

From the day when he had been a boy amid the turbulence of a headless court, had heard men whisper this and that, and look aside at himself with significance, he had ever stood out by virtue of some compelling power, which, even while he was still undeveloped, drew the force from the strong and made it a weapon on his behalf. Yet now, perhaps, those weary eyes, fast closing, saw more plainly than ever before. The dominions he had gained were but as the shuffling of a pack of cards in a game, his clemency, his loyalty of life, outweighed all the deeds that men called great. 71

He was only sixty, but his life had begun so young that it seemed long since that first wild dash at Val-ès-dunes, where he had settled himself on the ducal throne and given the outward sign of his mettle, to the day when, soured by the loss of the wife who had been to him the true mate, lonely, in grim dignity, he had irritably replied to the coarse jest of the King of France by a red-hot retort which had cost him his life.

Now there stands a modern church on the site of the abbey of St Gervais, in which William then lay. It stands a little away from the din of tempestuous Rouen, and beneath it is the oldest crypt in France, the crypt of St Mellon. Dimly through the dying Conqueror's brain scenes would flit; in them he himself would be always the most prominent, the principal figure; and now an end—

Hark! what was that? The tones of the bell in the Cathedral of Rouen were wafted across in at the heavy unglazed window; it was the call for prime, at six in the morning, and as the slow strokes fell on his ear William recognised in them another call; he offered up a prayer, and died. 72

Yet, by a strange mischance, those who would have honoured the mighty dead were not present. The pious Anselm had been summoned from Bec; but travelling was slow, the prior was ill, and he had not arrived. William the Conqueror's best-beloved and ever favourite son had hasted to seize on that inheritance which his father had hardly dared to leave him, except provisionally; Henry had disappeared on a similar errand, though some say he returned in time to accompany the body on its last journey; between Robert and his father no love had lain, and Robert was missing.

A living dog is better than a dead lion; and living dogs there were at hand. Within an hour of his death, the Conqueror's body had been stripped of all that was valuable, even the hangings of tapestry in the chamber had been seized, and the craven souls who had trembled at the flicker of the king's eyelash in life handled him contemptuously in death.



AN HOTEL COURTYARD, ROUEN

A whole day he lay there, alone and untended. Then the news spread abroad, and bishops and barons gathered together. The body was placed on a bier, suitably draped, and with a great procession was carried to Caen, as had been commanded, passing down the Seine in its route. And to Caen we must follow it for the last terrible scenes of that drama, for it is with Rouen only we are now concerned.

The picture of William dying is the first of those connected with the town which can never be forgotten. Another of a different sort calls us for a moment to the river-side. By 1090, Robert, the Conqueror's eldest son, had so misruled his duchy that there was a prominent party in Rouen which held it would be better to apply to William the Red, who, though cruel enough, was a strong and able governor. At that time Henry Beauclerc was in league with his eldest brother, and the two together entered Rouen, and established themselves in the tower by the river, which was indeed the only part of the city where they could feel safe. This tower had been built by Duke Richard (996) on the right bank of the Robec, near the Seine, to replace that of Rollo, which was falling to pieces. An affray succeeded the brothers' entry, in which Beauclerc led his men through Rouen, and engaged in combat with the leading citizens. The place was turned into a shambles, the narrow streets ran red, and many peaceful citizens were involved. Meantime Robert had retired to a little abbey near the city, where he awaited the result in fear and trembling. Henry captured the principal leader of the town party, who was named Conan, and brought him captive to the castle. Robert thereupon returned, and vindictively declared that he would not kill the traitor, but condemn him to a far more hideous punishment—perpetual imprisonment, which in those days of noisome, airless dungeons was equivalent to perpetual torture. Henry, however, had no mind to do the thing; he thought death was preferable from many points of view; notably, because a dead man is forgotten, and provokes neither sympathy nor reprisal. Therefore, with cold brutality which equalled that of the occasional streaks of hardness to be found in his otherwise great father, he dragged Conan to the top of the tower, and pitched him straight over the ramparts. "The mangled corpse, contumeliously dragged amidst the soaking filth from end to end of the town, gave insulting warning to his compeers and townsmen" (Palgrave).

This is the record of the Conqueror's sons.

More than a hundred years later, this ancient castle or tower was the scene of a tragedy so dark and mysterious that it has never been wholly penetrated, and some hold that it cannot be proved to have taken place at Rouen at all; but our greatest dramatist notwithstanding, the evidence against Rouen is pretty strong, and though we can never know the method of young Arthur's death, there is little doubt that here by the Seine he was murdered. There are various suppositions as to the manner of his death; some, with Shakespeare, believe that he fell from the tower walls in attempting his escape, but if this were so we may be pretty sure that John would have made the most of it to absolve his craven soul from the accursed stain resting on it, which made him abhorred of his contemporaries. The commonly received theory is that John took the boy out in a boat and

stabbed him with his own hand. This does not seem impossible, for notwithstanding the cheapness of assassins in that day, it may be remembered that John had already been disobeyed once when he gave orders for Arthur's mutilation, and he may have dreaded a like result, for even in those days, to kill a helpless boy of fourteen was a crime not lightly to be bought. By whatever means it was effected, no trace remained of Arthur, who suffered his last agonies of terror or revolt alone and helpless, and with the added hideousness of enduring his death at the hands of a near relative.

Every vestige of the old castle has now disappeared, and on its site there stand market buildings round three sides of a square. On the south side is a curious double cupola—an arch over an arch—called a chapel, the *Chapelle de la Fierté*, and this is associated with a strange custom, which must originally have had its rise in that solemn scene when the crowd called, "Not this man, but Barabbas!"

Once a year, on Ascension Day, the Chapter of Rouen Cathedral were allowed, by the "Privilege of St Romain," to release a prisoner condemned to death, and the list of such releases runs from 1210-1790. The ceremony took place at this little chapel; it was performed with great solemnity, and was witnessed by a vast crowd. As it was always necessary in mediæval times to have some legend to account for the origin of any custom, a legend was forthcoming, as follows:—A mighty dragon dwelt in the marshes by the river, and devoured all whom he could catch. The saint Romain, however, lured him from his place of security by the bait of a condemned criminal, and then made the sign of the cross over him, after which he had no difficulty in leading the beast captive to the town, at the end of his stole. Therefore, in memory of this great deliverance, a condemned criminal was freed each year.

Among historical scenes it is impossible to forget the terrible siege of 1417, when stern-faced Harry of England sat down before the walls and waited. His fleet was to the north, his army had crossed to the south, so that Rouen was cut off from assistance from Paris and left to her fate. The citizens made desperate sorties now and again; they could make no impression on the mighty force opposed to them. It was the end of July when Henry appeared, and by the time winter came, the horrors of starvation were at their height. A scene which has been enacted in other sieges, and more than once depicted with ghastly power upon canvas, now took place. Fifteen thousand "outsiders," countrymen who did not belong to Rouen, but had taken refuge inside her walls, were turned out, and on the bitter icy slopes, between the full-armoured English and the rigid walls, they writhed in agony, tearing up the very earth to still their craving, and dying raving mad, or of utter weakness. It is said that 50,000 persons died before New Year's Day, when envoys were sent to ask terms of the English. But it was not for another ten days that terms were agreed upon as follows: Life to all but nine persons whom Henry chose, was granted, and an enormous price was fixed as ransom. Then Henry received the keys, and until 1449 the town remained English. The Duke of Bedford ruled here as regent during the infancy of King Henry VI., and he was succeeded by the Duke of Somerset, under whom the final surrender took place. He was supported by the veteran Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, who had seen a hundred fights; but well they knew that the case was hopeless. Fortress after fortress had fallen before King Charles of France, and in the town itself was a strong party in favour of France. At length Somerset made a disgraceful compact with the French before his gate, by which he surrendered the town, and delivered Talbot and other officers up as prisoners. He also pledged the English to surrender Honfleur, Caudebec, and Arques, and to pay 50,000 crowns. Charles VII. entered on the 10th of November 1449.

It would be impossible to give the slightest sketch of Rouen without mentioning the names of the great among her sons. Greatest of all is Corneille the poet, born in 1606, in a house standing on the site of No. 4 in the present Rue Pierre Corneille; Maupassant and Hector Malot owed part of their education to Rouen; Flaubert was born at Rouen in 1821; and the roll of lesser names contains many which, if not known across the Channel, are representative of good work to their own countrymen.

Such is Rouen, a city with as many facets as a jewel, each one of which contributes something to the perfect whole. We can see her as a city of magnificent churches, a city of famous Renaissance buildings, a city of narrow, crooked, winding streets, cobble-paved, and lined by mediæval timbered houses; we can see her in the light of an historic past, or as a wideawake city of the present day, with trams running along broad thoroughfares, with spacious quays and busy trade; she is a medley of the past and the present, and the one or the other is seen as it is sought. But there is one thing to be noted, she is not a city of the Normans, those Norman dukes who held her as their capital seem to have been utterly effaced; there are but few fragments surviving from their time, and those either difficult to find, or so much incorporated and overlaid with later work, that for all superficial purposes they are obliterated: in Rouen the magnificence of mediæval times has made an ineffaceable impression; she is a mediæval city if you will, or a modern city, or both together; but above all things she is thoroughly French, and not Norman.

76

77

78

79

CHAPTER V

CAEN

The admirers of Caen rank it high. Mr Freeman says: "Caen is a town well-nigh without a rival. It shares with Oxford the peculiarity of having no one predominant object. At Amiens, at Peterborough—we may add at Cambridge—one single gigantic building lords it over everything; Caen and Oxford throw up a forest of towers and spires without any one building being conspicuously predominant. It is a town which never was a Bishop's See, but which contains four or five churches each fit to have been a cathedral."

It is quite true that in the richness of its churches Caen rivals Rouen. And if we except the splendid abbey of William and Matilda which flank each end of the town, most of these churches belong to the fifteenth century, and show the marvellous combination of grace and strength, of richness without tawdriness, in which the workmen of that date were unrivalled. After its churches, the most notable feature in Caen is its collection of Renaissance dwelling-houses, called hotels, which are to be found here and there—but not always conspicuously—in its streets. Beyond the churches and hotels, Caen is not otherwise a mediæval town; though many of the streets are narrow and old-fashioned, they do not contain anything like the same number of carved and timber-framed houses as are to be found at Rouen. There are a few of these to be seen, lying for the most part in the narrow streets at the west end of St Pierre. The Maison des Quatrans in the Rue de Geoles is one which visitors most frequently find; it is a large timber house in excellent preservation, but of plain design; on the tower in the court is the date 1541, though the house itself is older than this. A far more fascinating example is to be seen in the little steep street going up to the castle. This house is small, and no line is in its right plane; it looks as if it would very soon fall down altogether, yet it is carved everywhere, with human figures and faces, all animated by that diablerie and wicked mirth which the carvers of the Middle Ages seem to have been able to pour forth from their tools at will.

Beautiful bits and picturesque corners are to be found in Caen in plenty, as in every continental town with a long history, but they are different in kind from those we see in Rouen. The most beautiful part of all the town is to be found around that famous church, St Pierre.

Shady horse-chestnuts in all the glory of delicate foliage and fresh pink flower, show up in contrast with the towering fretwork pinnacles of the church. Close by, a tram crowded with people going home from work stops for a moment, to fill up every foot of space on its two cars before it winds slowly away, toot-tooting to clear the lines.

The pavement near at hand is covered with flowerpots in bloom, azaleas, roses, cinerarias, pelargonium, and fuchsia, showing flashing lights like those of some rich window of stained glass, and the foot traffic flows round about the impediment tranquilly; for in all foreign towns every shopkeeper seems to have a prescriptive right to the bit of pavement before his door.

In front of the church is a space of green grass, with seats and a cool basin of water. The evening sun, which has now left in shadow all the base of the masonry, picks out the lines and curves and angles of the parapet and the buttresses above, those wonderful flying buttresses with bossy pinnacles; it shows up the stiff, eternally yearning gargoyles, and the red-tiled roof. High above, up against the brilliant clearness of a pale-blue sky, swallows skim and wheel around one of the most graceful and perfect spires ever man devised or wrought.

Opposite to the church, in the depth of grey evening shadow, is the great Hotel de Valois or Escoville, a Renaissance palace, built early in the sixteenth century. The lower part is occupied by a row of shops; above rise small engaged pillars, between which are the lofty windows, now cut into two stages. In the courtyard all is gloom and dirt; a huge scaffolding covers most of the building, and grimly down from those once princely walls look the gigantic statues of David and Judith, each carrying the gory burden of a head!

Above, but difficult to see without a crick in the neck, is a lantern tower in two stages, recalling a little the famous domes of Chambord. There was formerly the figure of a white horse carved on the stone above the principal door, and the symbol exercised greatly the imaginations of antiquarians, some of whom went so far as to see in it the Pale Horse of Revelation. In some lines written on the hotel by M. de Brieux, we read:—

*"Lorsqu'on porte les yeux dessus chaque figure,
Qui lui sert au dedans de superbe ornament
On croit être deçu par quelque enchantement
A cause des beauté de leur architecture."*

The house was built in 1585 by Nicholas de Valois, Sieur d'Escoville, the richest man in the town, who died even as he entered into possession; for, the first time he seated himself at table in his new dwelling he was choked by an oyster, at the early age of forty-seven. This hotel, with many other buildings in Caen, is attributed to Hector Sohier, the architect of part of St Pierre, and it is supposed that he carried on the two great buildings that faced one another—the church and hotel—partly at the same time.

In most Norman towns the first object for which the visitor seeks is the cathedral, and the second the castle. Caen has no cathedral; and though it has a castle, no one can see it, for it is used as a barracks, and entrance is forbidden. In any case the castle is not at all evident; it stands on no great elevation, and has to be sought for by a narrow back street. Yet it has seen many a spirited historical feat, and been through not a few sieges. From time immemorial a fort of some kind has stood upon the site, but it was William—the great William—who founded the present building. On his death the castle formed one of Robert's most important strongholds, and it was from thence he started out on his crusading expedition. On his return he made Caen his headquarters, and added greatly to the fortifications in prospect of being attacked by his brother Henry. Yet when Robert was overthrown at Tinchebray, these very defences fell into Henry's hands, and served him against whom they had been intended. That the town was of great importance then, was shown by the fact that when Henry established

two permanent exchequers, one for England and one for Normandy, it was at Caen and not at Rouen the latter was placed. Caen was one of Henry's favourite residences; here was born his eldest son Robert, afterwards Earl of Gloucester, whose mother was Nesta, the Welsh girl who managed to hold the king's affections so long. In days when loyalty was a rare virtue, Robert proved himself throughout his life a loyal brother, and the Empress Maud owed much to his strong arm and good faith. John took refuge at Caen after the murder of his nephew, but he soon had to retreat, and the city opened its gates to Philip Augustus in 1204. However it was not destined to remain consistently French, for it was besieged by Edward III. in 1346, when, according to Froissart, the town "était grosse et forte, pleine de très-grande draperies et de toutes marchandises et de riches bourgeois et de noble dames et de belles églises." After a stern resistance this rich prize fell into the hands of the English, who pillaged it for three days, and reaped a magnificent harvest of "draperies" and other goods, so that many stout ships were sent laden across to England. It however reverted again to the French, and was subject to another siege under Henry V., when, with the rest of Normandy, it remained attached to the English crown from 1417 to 1450. It was at this time Henry founded the famous university, which continued to flourish throughout the change in the town's ownership. After 1450 the castle was twice besieged by the French themselves, during the Protestant wars.



THE MILK CARRIER

So much for a rough sketch of its history. But Caen belonged far more than this to the personal history of William the Conqueror, who had particular reasons for loving it. When he and Matilda, his wife, had agreed to rear two abbeys in penance for the sin of having married though they were first cousins, it was at Caen that they established their twin abbeys, one at the north and the other at the south end of the town.

William's abbey indeed was begun in 1066, the year in which he had established himself as supreme in a wider sphere than Normandy, and he doubtless returned to the scene of the work with none the less interest because of his larger experience. There is a little vagueness about the date when the sister abbey was actually begun; some say in 1062, which would make it slightly in advance of St Etienne, and it seems to have been consecrated in 1066, while St Etienne was not consecrated until 1077, when the ceremony was performed by Lanfranc, who had been brought from Bec to be the first abbot, but had been rapidly advanced to the Archbishopric of Canterbury, which at the time of the consecration he had held for seven years.

The opening ceremony was an occasion of great solemnity, and the king with his queen and eldest son Robert, then in early manhood, were all present. The church was not at first exactly as we see it now, for the two mighty western towers, grandly simple, had no spires, which were added in the fourteenth century. In William's time also the church was shorter, ending in an apse. The present choir dates from a couple of centuries after that fine opening scene, and is of the Pointed, not the Roman, or as we call it, the Norman, style

like the nave.

Could William, when seated on his throne, with his wife and son by his side, overlooking that vast crowd of nobles, knights, and commoners, to whom his lightest word was law, have gazed ahead into the grim mystery of the future, he would have seen a far other picture. A lonely death, with his son a traitor, and himself deserted, at last to be hastily and ignominiously buried by the charity of the monks, whose munificent patron he had been. Could he have seen such a vision, the realities of power and place might have seemed less pleasantly substantial to him!

None of the Conqueror's sons are buried in the abbey, though the bones of the youngest, Henry, rested for nearly a month before the high altar, waiting for a favourable wind by which they could be taken over to England for burial.

Close by the abbey William built a palace, where now stands the École Normande; nothing of the palace remains, though a later building which succeeded it has been partly adapted for the school.

The earlier kings of the Norman race seem to have resided at palace or castle indifferently while at Caen. The abbey grew and flourished. It was at the height of its power in the twelfth century, but was totally ruined in the religious wars at the end of the sixteenth.

The large building, called the Lycée, to the east of the church, dates from 1726, and a Gothic hall, used as a gymnasium, dating from the fourteenth century, is considered to have been once part of the abbey.

Matilda's Abbaye aux Dames, or St Trinité, has one great advantage over St Etienne—it can be seen to advantage from the broad open space which lies before it. The church, like the other, has two western towers, but they are more decorative, not so grand and stern as those of St Etienne, and show a charming and original feature in the row of oval openings beneath the parapet. The windows are long, narrow, and round-headed. Matilda's church, as well as William's, is one of the purest remaining examples of Norman work. The husband and wife were parted in death: he lies at St Etienne, and she here. Their love was genuine in an age when wedded love was a rarity, more especially with kings; but they were bitterly estranged in their quarrels over their sons before the end came. Matilda died four years before her husband, and her grave may be looked on with reverence as that of the ancestress of all succeeding sovereigns who have held the English crown.

The city hospital buildings, dating from 1726, occupy the site of the convent which Matilda founded for gentlewomen of the highest rank, and of which her own eldest daughter, Cecily, was the first abbess. It is said that she was dedicated to this office at the time of the consecration of the church in 1066, when she can only have been about twelve or thirteen years of age.

After the two great abbeys, and perhaps before them, in the minds of many, comes that jewel of the fifteenth century, St Pierre, of which the exterior has already been slightly described. The chief feature is the towering spire, so pierced as to give a fairy-like appearance of elegance, and yet so firm in its lines as to produce a powerful impression of strength. This spire was built in the beginning of the fourteenth century, on the foundation of an earlier one. The nave followed, and the choir was completed about 1521. But in spite of the two centuries over which the building spread, the whole design is emphatically of one style and time, of which it forms one of the most brilliant examples. In the two disused churches in Caen, St Etienne the Less and St Gillies, we may see the same design and style in the pierced parapet, the flying buttresses, and the decorated pinnacles; though parts of these churches are of the twelfth century. This is not so notable in St Gillies, but in St Etienne the Less, in spite of the growth of weeds in all the crevices, in spite of discolourment, and filled-in windows, in spite of bars and general decay and disuse, we have a most beautiful church, and one that almost any English town would consider its most precious possession.

There are many other churches which might be mentioned, but we have space only for one, because of its peculiarity. St Sauveur consists of two churches, which were originally built side by side, and now, with the partition wall removed, form one! Not far from St Etienne is St Nicholas, belonging to the eleventh and twelfth centuries; and in the Rue St Jean—down which the station traffic passes—is the church of St Jean, dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

After the churches in interest come the Renaissance hotels, of which we have already described the principal one; of the others, there are two connected with the name of Etienne Duval de Mondrainville which cannot be overlooked. These are to be found in the little narrow street running behind St Sauveur. Etienne de Mondrainville was born in 1507, and was for a long time one of the most important personages in Caen. He twice made a fortune, and was twice ruined by the jealousy of his comrades. He was an energetic man, and pushed his trade to an extent which at that time was remarkable; he carried on trade with Africa and America, and his staple was corn from Barbary.

The smaller of the two houses he built stands in a little courtyard. The carving, the miniature tower, and the dormer windows are all charming, and are enhanced by the bit of green in front. In 1550 the Chambre de la Monnaie was moved here from St Lo, and the house retained the name. Across the street is the larger house of about the same date, now a printing establishment. It was built in 1549, and the cupola and lantern, columns and dormers, all bespeak its date. Etienne died in 1578, leaving two sons, one an abbé and the other a soldier. The Hotel de Than, in the Rue St Jean, is another house of the same date, telling of the wealth and opulence of the burghers of Caen after the city had recovered from the effects and uncertainty of the English occupation, and become once more French.

From all that has been said, it may be gathered that there is much to see in Caen, and yet the account is fragmentary, and has not told the half. There are other churches not mentioned, other hotels to be found in dark courtyards and down unpromising tunnels; there is the famous Maison des Gens d'Armes, built in the reign of François First, only a mile or so out on the Ouistreham Road, and there are countless other features that would take long to discover, but are well worth the explorers' trouble. By the river Orne there are wide quays and boulevards, and the great race-course fringed with trees. In the centre of the town is the pleasant and well-kept Place de la Republique, once the Place Royale, a name still retained by the principal hotel, which stands at one end. Here there are the usual flower-beds, and seats, and trees, and on the west side rise the large and fine

public buildings, the Hotel de Ville, including the splendid public library, the inevitable Musée, and behind is the Prefecture. From all of which it may be gathered that Caen is a town which in no way neglects the interests of her citizens. Yet with all these manifold attractions, with her many advantages and her historic past, it is impossible to deny that a slight feeling of dullness broods over Caen. It is indescribable, it is unanalysable, but perhaps it may be due to what I have before called the spirit of a town; perhaps Caen as an entity lacks originality, or else why is it that English visitors who go there, full of intelligent appreciation, who see much, and who acknowledge the intrinsic interest of what they have seen, leave at the end of two days, feeling glad to go? 91

Malherbe the poet was born at Caen in 1555, and it is impossible to quit the city without mentioning the name of Charlotte Corday, who, though not a native, passed her girlhood here with an aunt. The house in which she lived has disappeared, but No. 148 Rue St Jean stands on the site of it. She came here after being educated in a convent, and seems to have been left much to herself, spending her time in reading such works as those of Voltaire.

After the downfall of the party of the Girondins in 1793, some of the leaders came to Caen, and Charlotte attended their meetings. It was at this time she conceived her courageous idea of going to Paris to assassinate Marat, who typified all that was worst in tyranny. She obtained a passport in which she is described as being twenty-four years of age, only 5 feet 1 inch in height, with chestnut hair and grey eyes. Her face was oval, her forehead high, her nose long, and her chin dimpled. The quiet determination with which she executed her project, and the absence of all revulsion after it, put her on the same level as the other great heroine, Joan of Arc. A country which has produced two such women, may well take high rank. 92

CHAPTER VI

FALAISE

Although Falaise is not a typical Norman town—for it has too much character of its own for that—there are certain features here which are to be found in nearly all the other towns in Normandy, such as the long narrow streets, roughly paved with cobbles, and the irregular houses, most of which are neither very old nor very new, but just softened by time.

To linger in the streets is to get many a peep which, transferred to canvas, would give lasting pleasure. In one place we see long narrow passages running between houses; the black shadow is in contrast with the yellow sunlight on the pavement beyond, and at one end there falls over a parapet a mass of glorious deep-tinged lilac. Surely lilac never grows elsewhere as it grows in Falaise! In another place there is a tiny court, with an indescribable medley of steps, grey stone, worn beams, gable ends, and child life. We come suddenly upon a tiny chapel with a bit of ancient moulding that proclaims its hoary age; it is perched upon a rock, up the steep sides of which straggle staring yellow wallflowers, brilliant blue forget-me-not, and stiff tulips of various colours.

One of the most striking bits of Falaise is the quiet square before the Hotel de Ville, where grass grows between the cobbles, overshadowed by the mighty figure of William on horseback, many times life-size. Round the pedestal are graven his ancestors, the previous dukes, men to be reckoned with, one and all, but not one to compare with their great successor, whose magnificent energy and power the artist has succeeded in transfixing in metal.



A STREET VENDOR, FALAISE

On one side, aslant to the square, is the church of La Trinité, a curious church, built without any rules; and at its east end bestriding a street, with a delightful disregard for the change of level. It has a fine porch, and admirably carved buttresses, and over a great part of it runs that profusion of carving which the ancient craftsman seems to have thrown in for sheer love of it. The tower, however, is a note of ugliness, interrupting much pleasant quaintness. This is not the most notable church in Falaise; that honour is claimed by St Gervais in the widened space in the middle of the main street, and St Gervais is all glorious without but disappointing within, where its dull lines are devitalised by the terrible mockery perpetrated in the name of decoration. Outside, however, the warmly tinted sandstone, carved in every fantastic semblance, rises grandly against the

clear blue sky. Particularly noticeable are the gargoyles, turning this way and that, and the wonderful moulding round the tower windows. The restoration has effected notable improvement on the exterior, clearing away all the old houses which clung like barnacles to the walls.

If one could only reverse the wheel of time and see the church as it looked at its great dedication festival, when, glittering in the smartness of work fresh from the chisel, it was dedicated in the presence of Henry the First of England! Would the workmen differ greatly in type, we wonder, from the group who now sit lazily sunning themselves on the steps? The present men, who are in blue blouses, are spare, not large of limb, with faces the colour of their own house-tiles, with sharp thin features and keen eyes? The clothing of the poor in Falaise is not so picturesque as in many parts of Normandy—the blouse is here as everywhere, but there is nothing else striking in the costume of the men, and only the older women wear caps, and those of a very simple sort; the young ones go about with heads uncovered, and hair neatly coiled up in a little top-knot, after the usual manner of the French.

One of the most attractive views in Falaise, is that to be gained by standing on the raised road that leaves the town direct to Caen, and looking east and west. In the deep fosse, where once a mighty river must have run, there is now only a dirty ditch, which serves the women of Falaise for a washing-place, as it did nine hundred years ago. On either side rise neat trimly-kept gardens, terrace upon terrace, rich in greenery. In fact, the masses of green foliage which break up any general view of Falaise are among its principal charms. The influence of environment is seen in character, for even the smallest and poorest cottages have their window-boxes and flowerpots, and the neatness of the gardens is a sight to marvel at; even the wee children love flowers. In the shops, especially the butchers', where least of all one would expect to see them, one finds great bowls and pyramids of flowers, so large that they could hardly be encircled by both arms; these are made up of lilac, rhododendron, pale pink peonies, tulips, and forget-me-not, and are such Gargantuan bouquets as would make sunshine in any London house.

96



A LITTLE NORMAN GIRL

A rough and narrow track leads along the northern side of the river opposite the castle. This is a very poor part of the town, where one small room serves for bedroom and living-room for a whole family, and the dark nut-brown interiors are in striking contrast with the blaze of sunlight outside. The children are mostly healthy, sometimes strikingly so; and among them it is difficult to pick out any special type; bright brown eyes and sepia locks are seen side by side with hair perfectly flaxen in colour and eyes of palest watery blue; both types alike greet the "English" as a friend, for too many English are seen here to allow them to be awesome, and perhaps also the little ones learn with their earliest history there is a bond of kinship between them and these strange people who come from across the sea. From nearly every house comes the quiet hum of a hand-machine,

97

wherewith men and women knit socks and other garments; this sound mingles with the splash and thud of the women busily washing clothes in the little narrow ditch, kneeling in their wooden tubs, arms in ice-cold water, and backs bent in the occupation which seems to take up far the largest proportion of a French peasant-woman's day.

There are little bridges over the water, and footpaths winding in and out, and above all is the clear vivid sky of a May day. If we went on a little further until we were almost beneath the perpendicular walls of the castle, we should come all at once on two things, which would carry us back into the far past, for a large tannery still spreads irregular buildings on the very place where once rose the tannery of William's maternal grandfather. Its presence is quickly felt, and we can see the peasants coming away from it laden with the little "cakes" of waste bark called "mottes," which are used for fuel, and so oddly resemble peats. Not far off a sound of voices and splashing of water will bring us to a strange place, the town washing-shed, where, with the dim light from the roof gleaming on the soapy green water, and the time-worn posts, we shall find a score of women, perhaps some of them actual collateral descendants of Arlotta's, slapping and splashing the soiled linen with as much heartiness as ever did the girl who was to become the mother of a line of kings. It is the same spot, the same stream, whose name is Ante, only the place is now roofed over instead of being open to the sky, as it was in Arlotta's day. We leave the valley and wind upward past some tumbledown cottages of picturesque lath and plaster; past others with such a solid foundation of stone showing in the low doorways, that they seem as if they might well have stood since the Conqueror's day. On and on until we reach a lane, with high hedges and lush rich green grass, and pass out at last on to a flat tableland, where the purple-red orchis stand up like little tin soldiers in the grass, and heather and gorse grow everywhere. We are upon Mont Mirat, and at one end is a clump of grey rocks close by a group of windswept firs; quite suddenly, at our feet as it were, a familiar object greets us, startlingly close; it is the flat cap of the Talbot tower, and as we near it, we see the whole castle appear, and realise we are on the other side of the ravine, on a level with the tower, which is in reality some distance away, but which, in the brilliant clearness of the atmosphere, looks as if a well-thrown stone might easily strike it. The jackdaws wheel and scream around the walls, and their shadows flit after them, growing, fading, disappearing with infinite fantasy. And the castle is a vision of light, bathed in the rays of a westering sun; it appears as a perfect mass of yellow, from the deep dead gold of the streaks of lichen to the palest biscuit colour of the patches on the walls, fading to dun and sepia in the shadows. 98

You can still see in the castle the room in which the mighty William is said to have been born, though all probability points to his birthplace having been in the valley below. The room shown is in no sense a royal apartment; it is a little, dark, dungeon-like chamber, airless and lightless, built in the thickness of the wall; but sleeping accommodation was not made much account of then. In any case, the castle and the valley on which we look were the earliest associations of William's childhood. Here he lay an unconscious babe, when, as we are told by Wace, he was visited by two of the premier barons in the land, one of whom exclaimed prophetically, "Par toi e par ta ligne sert la mienne moult abaisse." 99

Here in that varied childhood, passed partly in the unsavoury tanyard with his grandfather, partly in the castle with the stern-faced man who caressed him, and whom he was told to call father; eyed askance by the richly-dressed young nobles; hugged by the simple-minded Arlotta, he grew up. Gradually a knowledge of his own peculiar position, of his royal but sullied birth, of the battle before him, must have forced themselves into the mind of a boy far more thoughtful than his years; and by the time he was eight, at an age when most boys have hardly begun to think, he had to take up his stern inheritance. 100

There is no doubt that spring is the time to see Falaise—spring, when the trees are at their freshest and richest, undimmed by dust or heat. By standing on the highest part of one line of rocks, we can see behind the castle in miniature the church of Guibray perched on a hill, its conical spire showing up against a distant line of horizon, so straight, so blue, so misty, it might well be the sea.

The town itself shows as a mass of roofs, varying from brick red to slate blue, but mostly the colour of rust; these are strangely high-pitched to an English eye, and show well amid the mass of complementary green, in which there are darker touches in the copper beeches and cedars here and there—a magnificent panorama, with enough sentiment and history about it to keep it from the insipidity of mere beauty, and nothing more.

Only second in interest to the story of William's precarious boyhood, is the tale of that other boy, Arthur, the young Duke of Brittany, who, at the age of fourteen, was brought to Falaise a prisoner in the hands of his treacherous, crafty, and unscrupulous uncle, John. The room in which Arthur was confined is still pointed out near the supposed birthplace of William. It was in August that he came here, and often must he have looked out over the wide horizon, wondering if his faithful Bretons would come to his rescue. All through the winter he remained a close prisoner; but he won the sympathy of his gaoler, Hubert, and when John, finding him obdurate in his refusal to sign away his rights, gave the cruel order that he should be so maimed as to render him incapable of ruling, Hubert tacitly refused to obey it, pretending to the king that the boy had died, and even arranging a mock funeral. It seems odd, that having got so far he could not manage to compass Arthur's escape altogether; but when matters had reached this point "the fury of the Bretons became boundless, and Hubert soon found it necessary, for John's own sake, to confess his fraud" (Miss Norgate). This incident showed John that if he were to rule in peace he must use sterner methods, and Arthur was, at the end of January, removed to Rouen, from which time we hear no more of him. 101

A good deal of the castle which still stands is of the thirteenth century, and there is no reason to doubt that it was within these very walls the proud boy ate out his heart in loneliness and captivity.

A word must be given to the famous General Talbot, first Earl of Shrewsbury, whose name is kept alive in the great donjon which he built. He held the castle as governor during the English occupation under Henry V. and VI., and his deeds are scattered broadcast in the annals of the continual fighting of the period. We hear of him at Dieppe, in Anjou, and in Maine, and his name became a synonym for dash and daring. At the age of more than seventy years he was slain in actual warfare at Castillon! 102

There is one other association of a generation preceding that of John which cannot be wholly omitted. It was at the Castle of Falaise that William the Lion, King of Scotland, did homage to King Henry of England,

acknowledging him as overlord, and thereby regaining a limited freedom.

The castle can be visited at any time, and though there is not much to see—the keep being a mere shell, and the chapel not now shown—it is worth going over for the sake of the superb views which its situation commands. It is said that Rollo built a fort on this site; and certainly if he ever saw it he must have done so, for a more perfect position for a fort can scarcely be imagined. It was in this building or its immediate predecessor that Robert was besieged by the brother he afterwards so traitorously murdered. It is probable that Robert himself built up and restored the castle after his accession to power. A good deal of what stands, however, dates from much later, including Earl Talbot's tower.



RURAL SCENE

Beside the memorable siege under Henry V. of England, Falaise has been retaken more than once, notably by Charles VII., commanding in person in 1450; and by the French king, Henri IV., in 1590.

In the neighbourhood of Falaise there is some of the most attractive scenery in Normandy. It is true that the main roads, which stretch out from the town like the rays of a starfish, are not interesting. They are of the typical green-bordered, poplar-lined kind. But the side roads are very different. Take, for instance, the direct route between Falaise and that other castle-fortress, Domfront. Here there are woods of straight-stemmed beeches and proud oaks covering acres of rounded hills that fold softly, contour on contour, revealing at last a distance seemingly infinite in its horizon. Wide, splendidly engineered roads sweep in flattened curves down the hillside to the brown river, amid its brilliant grass, and rise again as smoothly. Every vista shows some picture; perhaps a tiny church perched on the top of a hill, its spire rising sharply, or a tall, stern Calvary set against a background of firs. The number of these Calvaries bearing recent dates, would seem to show that faith still shines brightly among the country people, whatever may be the trend of thought in the large towns.

The road passes many a typical Norman village of the poorer sort—villages where the houses are made of lath and plaster or lath and mud, and are set about anyhow and anywhere, rather as if they had come together from some neighbourly instinct than had been regularly built as a village. They stand often in a little plot of ground, worn and poor enough, but made shady by the apple and pear trees. The umber of the simple cottage walls, and the peculiar dead colour of grass in shade, make a particular effect. Under the trees the mother of the household sits sewing, as often as not with a child beside her.



STARTING FOR THE WASHING-SHED

The women do a great deal of the work. Far out on a country road one overtakes an old, wrinkled, shrivelled woman, whose right place is surely not far from her hearthstone, trudging along with a great scythe over her shoulder. The market carts one meets on the roads are driven by women more often than men; women tend the cows as they feed quietly by the wayside; women do the work in the fields; they do the milking, frequently also in the fields; where the great glittering copper jugs may be seen, standing on the grass, shining in the sun; the women make the butter; and when one thinks that to all this are added the multifarious duties of maternity and housekeeping, there is little wonder that Norman women have small time to think of their personal appearance, and are usually far from beautiful, though their brown shining faces generally have that comeliness which the content of a well-filled useful life gives. On the roads all over Normandy one meets with donkey carts, for donkeys are more largely used than with us, and they form a contrast to the fine team of great horses over which the carter cracks his whip, and whose height is greatly increased to the eye by the monstrous sheepskins, dyed dark blue, with which their collars are nearly always adorned. In some parts the collars themselves are resplendent, painted red and yellow, and bells jingle at every step, making a team of horses as striking an object as a show. Yoked oxen of massive build are still occasionally seen, notably in the country about Gisors. 105

The situation of the castle at Domfront is curiously like that of the castle at Falaise; both stand on a spur of cliff, separated from a similar spur by a deep ravine in which runs a tiny stream. But at Domfront the scene is more striking, for the rocks are higher, the ravine is narrower, and the great masses of strata, inclined at an angle of 45°, would fit into one another if pushed together like two pieces of a child's puzzle. It seems almost incredible that water can have exercised such immense corrosive force, the appearance is rather as if a giant hand had chiselled out the rocks, for their masses would require no less than a Titanic agency, yet we know that from time immemorial that little stream the Varennes has run in this cleft.

The peculiarities of the situation are best seen from the fir-crowned, heather-covered heights opposite; and it is the situation that makes Domfront, for the castle is a mere ruin, picturesque enough, and giving an excuse for the public garden that runs around its base, but not in itself interesting. The site is grander far than that of the famous Chateau-Gaillard, grander even than that of Falaise, for the sheer height is stupendous; no wonder Domfront was a strong castle and house of defence to him who held it. 106

The view from the plateau is limited only by vision. A single hill to the south-west stands out above the plain. In the immediate foreground, just below, are a few toy houses, and a tiny, neat church, cruciform, and bearing Norman date in every line of its architecture. It was only ten or eleven years junior to the chateau in its first building, and has long outlived it. The man who built both chateau and church, Guillaume de Belesme, sleeps within the latter. He had not held the chateau so much as forty years, when a stronger William than he, the mighty Conqueror, swooped down upon him and drove him out. Of another Belesme, a scion of the same house,

we shall hear elsewhere.

William's successors retained the castle in their own hands, and Henry II. here received the nuncio sent by the Pope to reconcile him and Becket. In the religious wars of the sixteenth century the castle was seized and held by the Protestants, and only taken after a bitter siege; otherwise it has not much recorded history. It is peaceful enough at present, surrounded by a charming garden, where one may wander at will, gazing out over the widespread view, watching the swallows wheel and skim far below, and hearing the song of countless birds, which, here as elsewhere in Normandy, build preferably in the neighbourhood of man to escape their more dreaded foe, the magpie. 107

There is an old rhyme which says:—

“Domfront, ville de malheur
Arrivé a midi pendu à une heure.”

Though the reason why the town should have earned so unhappy a reputation is lost in the mists of antiquity.

The neighbourhood of Domfront is full of interest: westward lies Mortain, which has a bit of ruined castle, speaking of the building destroyed by Henry I. after Tinchebray. Mortain is interesting because of its counts. The first of any general interest is that Robert, half-brother of the Conqueror, son of Arlotta and Herlouin, who took great part in his brother's conquests, and accompanied him to England, being the first Norman to receive a grant of land after Hastings. He was made Earl of Cornwall, and received also large estates in Devon, Somerset, and Yorkshire. The title had previously been held by the Comte de St Sauveur, and it was after his rebellion it was joined to that of Mortain, and the two went down the ages together. John Sans Terre, when only a little boy of eight, became Count of Mortain and Vicomte du Côtentin. Though the first Count Robert is known chiefly as a rather rough soldier, he was a large benefactor to the Church, founding the abbey of which, as usual, the church remains, and but little else. The parish church of Mortain is due to a later gift of the same patron. 108

Mortain abounds in beautiful peeps; its irregular rocks stand up in fantastic shapes amid numbers of trees, and the broken ground makes great variety of scenery. It is chiefly celebrated, however, for its waterfall, notable only in a country where such a possession is literally unique. The Great Cascade, as it is called, is about sixty-five feet high, and should be seen in wet weather if possible, or the glory of Normandy's only waterfall will be sadly discounted. Northward is Vire, with a ruined castle, which was rebuilt in the twelfth century, and demolished by Richelieu's order in 1630. But the fine gateway with its tower belfry is what everyone goes to see at Vire.

Not far from Vire is Tinchebray, the site of the brothers' struggle. This battle is mainly of importance because it indicated a curious reversal of that at Hastings. Then a Norman duke had conquered England, at Tinchebray an English king conquered Normandy. Freeman says “the fight of Tinchebray really was a battle, one of the very few pitched battles of the age,” and he decides that it must have been on the flat ground near the station that the historic contest was fought, when Robert fell into the hands of a brother some eight or ten years his junior.

If instead of coming north-westward from Domfront we had gone north-eastward, we should have come to a district not so beautiful in natural scenery as that about Mortain, but in itself well worth study. Argentan has the donjon of an ancient castle, a fifteenth-century church, and several other points well worth attention. The two small places of Exmes and Almenèches are associated with the name Robert of Belesmes, who seems to have been a monster of cruelty. He is said to have plucked out the eyes of a little godson; and refused ransom for prisoners, as he preferred holding them for the pleasure of torture. His unfortunate sister Emma was abbess of Almenèches; and in 1102, when Robert had been driven out of England, he descended upon her abbey and burnt it, meantime occupying the castle of Exmes. 109

At one time he had in his possession the strongholds of Alençon, Bellême, “Domfront, St Cever, Essai, La Motte, Pontorson, Mamers, Vignes, and very many more.”

Robert had been in every Norman war occurring since he was of an age to bear arms, and his personal vigour had made him worth something to the cause he espoused. He married Agnes, daughter and heiress of Guy, Count of Ponthieu, the same into whose hands Harold had fallen, and he subsequently became Count of Ponthieu; also, he succeeded his brother as Earl of Shrewsbury, in England. When he was tired of his diversions in Normandy, he returned to England, seized and held his forfeited castle of Shrewsbury, until he was forced to surrender, and a second time exiled. He came to a fitting end, for having, by joining in the rebellion of Fulk of Anjou against King Henry of England, proved himself a traitor, he had the audacity to go as an envoy from the French king to Henry, who, with poetical justice rather than in accordance with the laws of nations, seized him and kept him a prisoner, out of the way of further mischief, until his death. The little town of Bellême, twelve miles south from Mortagne, was the original home of the family from which this promising branch sprang. The highest part of the hill is crowned by houses, but beneath there are still underground vaults, and wall foundations belonging to the mighty castle of the Bellêmes or Belesmes. 110

At St Saturnin, near Séz, in this district, Charlotte Corday was born, but her later life was so closely associated with Caen, that she is there mentioned more fully.

Westward is the large town of Alençon, which marks the border of Normandy in this direction. Alençon has been famous since the reign of Louis XIV. for its beautiful point lace, and the industry is still carried on, though to a less extent than before. The lace is made of pure linen thread, worth £100 per lb., and is composed of ten different stitches, which are specialities done by different workers.



LACE MAKING

The usual earning for this highly-skilled labour is about 1s. a day. The castle of Alençon was destroyed, all but the keep, by Henri IV. of France.

Of the famous siege of Alençon we have already spoken.

111

Here must come to an end this rather rambling chapter, designed to cover a district which, with the exception of Falaise, is comparatively little known by the English visitor to Normandy.

112

CHAPTER VII

BAYEUX AND THE SMALLER TOWNS

Some old established shops there are, with prestige so secure that they do not have recourse to the art known as "dressing the windows"; it is the customers who seek them out, not they who try to attract the customers. Something of this kind may be said of Bayeux, for of all simple unpretending towns it is the chief; anyone who entered the long straggling street unforewarned, would imagine that he was in some humble village, and yet Bayeux ranks high among Norman towns. After Rouen, admittedly the capital, and Caen, so much larger than herself, she assuredly, for importance, antiquity, and all those things that go to make the fame of a city, comes third.

The first sight of the cathedral strikes one with astonishment; it is so composite, so decorative, that it takes one's breath away. There is a feeling of hopelessness—one will never be able to understand it. And even after some study it remains almost impossible to analyse the architecture as one generally can analyse a cathedral, setting down the nave to one age, the choir to another, and perhaps the western towers to a third. 113

The great central tower rests on a square decorated platform, and is carried up two lantern stages above it; the top one is surmounted by a copper cupola. The upper stage was added in 1860, and is unfortunately quite ugly. Features which add much to the appearance of the exterior are the richly decorated portals; that of the south transept is carved with figures representing scenes in the life of St Thomas à Becket, who at the time it was done had been dead for more than thirty years, and was among the most popular of saints. The great portal at the west end, however, surpasses it in beauty; in it are no less than five doorways, diminishing in size from the centre; and seen beneath the fine western towers, it forms a feature in a view of the exterior by no means the least attractive.

The oldest church on this site was burnt down in 1046, and rebuilt by Bishop Odo, Arlotta's son by her second marriage. It was consecrated with great ceremony in the same year as St Etienne of Caen, and in the beginning of the next century again suffered by fire. But the greater part of the cathedral as we see it, dates from the reconstruction in 1205 by an Englishman named Henry Beaumont, and as has been said, the tower was only completed recently.

It is well to enter from the west, and to seat oneself at the very end of the nave, in order to observe best the cathedrals greatest peculiarity, namely, the strange carving on the spandrils and interstices of the pillars. The patterns vary from diaper work to overlapping scales, and clothe the walls richly. Between the arches are shields with the strangest collection of figures, a dragon, an Anglo-Saxon man, and other devices, showing a wide range of thought on the part of the sculptor. The pillars themselves, which rise into Norman arches, are all of one pattern, what may be called the fascicle or bundle of small shafts forming one whole. As in every church whose growth ran throughout several centuries, the Early Pointed style caps the Norman work; and here pointed clerestory windows rise above those splendid arches. The arches are decorated with various devices, among which we see an unsurpassed example of the beakhead moulding. The choir stands over the crypt, and both the transepts are on the lower level—a beautiful idea, which gives an appearance of loftiness and elegance in looking up toward the east. The vista is, however, unfortunately blocked by a heavy altar at the chancel step. This peculiarity in the level of the choir, and the fantastic carving in stone, are the two most notable features in the building, as the stained glass is not very attractive. 114



AN ANCIENT INN YARD

It was in this great church that William wrested from Harold the deadly oath on which he partly based his own right to the throne of England—an oath extorted by fear and partly by fraud, and the breaking of which, by even the most malevolent of Harold's foes could hardly be accounted to him for wickedness. The scene is depicted in the Bayeux tapestry, fully described in the next chapter. 115

On this same wide green space there is a statue to Alain Chartier the poet, a native of Bayeux, the "most distinguished Frenchman of letters in the fifteenth century," who also bears the reputation of having been the ugliest man of his time. He was born at Bayeux between 1380-90, and became highly popular by his verse. Margaret, wife of the Dauphin, is said to have kissed him as he lay asleep, for the sake of all the beautiful things that had proceeded from his lips; and it is probably the record of that kiss rather than his poems which has kept his memory alive.

One of the charms of Bayeux is the number of its famous old carved houses, which more than anything else carry us back into the streets of the past. One of the most notable of these, with innumerable statues on its frontage, is to be seen in the Rue St Malo, another, plain but very substantial, and having several features of its own tending to give it individuality, is in the Rue St Martin.

This is at the corner of the main street, and turning up it we may go to the open space where the market is held. If we are fortunate enough to visit the town on a Saturday, we shall see this long, narrow, cobble-paved street literally flecked with the little tight white caps, which are all that remains of the national headdress. These are not worn by very young girls, but are assumed after the first communion, when the child is supposed to have become a young woman. The fact of wearing the first "bonnette," as the cap is called, is very serious, and not to be lightly considered. The invariable style is that the hair should be neatly parted in the middle and smoothed back, flattened down, while a tight-fitting bit of muslin is drawn over the head and set into a band of muslin, which is again mounted on one of plain black velvet; the only jaunty part of the headdress is the white muslin bow at the back, which bobs up and down like a rabbits scut, and when a number of women are talking together, the bobbing sometimes becomes quite laughable. 116

The rest of the women's costume is of the usual peasant type, stuff jacket-bodices or blouses; full, all-round stuff skirts, well off the ground; check aprons of blue, or mauve, or grey, and among them all there is a strong family likeness. We see the same good-humoured commonplace face again and again; there is shrewdness in the keen eyes and sensible mouths, health in the smooth brown-red cheeks, and a certain comeliness notwithstanding the homely features. One feels sure that if one asked a question an intelligent answer would be given, for these women habitually use their brains as well as their hands in all their daily occupations. Here and there one sees a young girl with a much fluted upstanding edging to her cap, and perhaps a pair of white muslin 117

strings elaborately tied under her chin, but where such a one appears she is recognised as being uncommonly fashionable, and respectfully admiring glances follow her self-conscious figure.

The men in this district have a great partiality for pearl buttons about the size of a sixpence, with which they stud the fronts of their smocks, sometimes in double and treble rows. They are big, broad-shouldered fellows these brothers by blood to the men of the Côtentin, and are more akin to ourselves than to the Frenchmen of Rouen, for the Danish blood and speech lingered on in Bayeux when the west of Normandy had been Frenchified.

The market is surrounded by a thick hedge of limes, and here is sold the usual assortment of everything in daily use, from boots to bonnet pins. The only thing which would strike a stranger as novel are the enormous masses of butter, fitted into cylindrical hampers, and so heavy that it takes two men to move them at all.

Later on the crowd thins down, and a steady stream sets in toward the station. The women laden with enormous baskets carried by leather straps, and sometimes holding large red cotton umbrellas, compare notes as to the days events. At the station nearly every one, man and woman alike, invests in a paper for Sunday reading before they disperse to their homes on the flat plains of the Bessin. Some to go to homely cottages, others it may be to those castles fallen from their high estate, such as Argouges, once the fortress-dwellings of the highest nobles in the land. 118

Less than ten miles westward from Bayeux is Formigny, one of the historic battlefields of Normandy; it ranks with Val-ès-Dunes, Tinchebray, and Mortèmer. It was in 1450, when all Upper Normandy was already in the hands of Charles VII. of France, that a desperate effort was made to save Lower Normandy from the same fate. The English landed at Cherbourg and marched on into the Bessin; they were met and defeated at Formigny, and the battle was the final stroke that severed Normandy from England.

In a book like the present it would be as difficult as it would be futile to attempt to give in detail an account of every town. Those already described give the atmosphere of the country, and to go further would be wearisome, or lead to repetition, for in many of the towns the same features reappear. In Lisieux, prettily situated amid its broken green hills, we have a fine cathedral, which shares to the full in that irregularity so often found in Norman churches. One tall spire springs from a platform base, and its companion ends in a conical stumpy gable. The manufacturing part of the town lies mostly south of the railway, and the wonderful carved wooden houses which attract visitors from all parts reproduce the best features of those already noted elsewhere. 119

In a town like Evreux, we may see the narrow streets and cool green sun-shutters, with the stately cathedral rising over the roofs, its grey majesty softened to beauty by the lace-like fretwork. Down by a canal-like feeder of the river Iton, in a part reminiscent of the Cambridge "backs," is the Allée des Soupirs, under whispering limes; by the river also are the washing-sheds, with tiled floors, where women and girls wring and beat and twist all day long, chattering the while, as if the perpetual dipping of hands and arms in the ice-cold water and the bending of backs were a mere game. Under the limes on a market day the usual Norman crowd can be seen. The prevailing tone of colour is blue—blue blouses, blue bodices, blue check aprons. Now and then a gendarme strolls down the centre, looking like a gorgeously coloured fly in his bright uniform. All the promenaders passing to and fro are in list slippers, which speaks volumes for the dryness of the climate; and none of the women wear hats, and only a few caps or folded cotton handkerchiefs.

The typical Norman town is for the most part irregularly built; we do not find the formal squares and straight streets to be met with in Touraine. There is almost always a cathedral, varying a little in its beauty, but at the worst wonderful. There is very often a barracks, and an open dusty space for the drill; and the other public buildings, the Préfecture, and Palais de Justice, if the town be the centre of its district, the Hotel de Ville, the public library, the Musée, the Mairie, according to its status. There is generally a river, sometimes very small, and an open space or two wherein wayfarers may sit. 120



TIMBER-FRAME HOUSE, LISIEUX

We may spring northwards to Pont Audemer, where we shall find some features in common with many Norman towns, and some peculiar to itself. We may go there on a Monday, for Monday is market day, and we shall find the wide street before the splendid old church filled with stalls—indeed, here, as ever in Normandy, the wonder is, where everyone is a vendor, who buys; perhaps it is a disguised form of barter. The men are good-looking as a rule, though the strong admixture of French blood has produced a race in which there are few of the characteristics of their countrymen further west. One sees all sorts, of course, but the type which might be selected as predominant is that of a slightly built, fairly tall man, with straight marked features, abundant hair showing strong tendency to curl, on head and lips; dark eyed and dark complexioned, good-looking, merry genial fellows, they are a sun-loving race. It makes a splendid picture this open-air market. The church with its great tower at the west end, carved and enriched, speaks of the richest period of the fifteenth century. By the grand western door are many decorative niches for saints, now empty. 121

Perhaps the western sun has fallen sufficiently to cast the long shadows of the odd medley of houses facing the cathedral over the rough cobbled street, and thereby to render the contrast of all that gallant fretwork, picked out, illuminated, and gilded by his splendour, all the grander. Within, the church is magnificent—and heartrending. Surely never in any other Catholic church, where loving hands are usually ready to perform devout offices, was more dirt seen.

There is rich stained glass of the fifteenth century in the side aisles. But for those who prefer their architecture unembellished, there is plenty here. The chancel was built at least two centuries before the nave, and is plain indeed. Heavy and solid arches, comparatively low, and somehow lacking the grace that usually appertains to this style, enclose the chancel. The singularly low central arch is not in line with the nave.

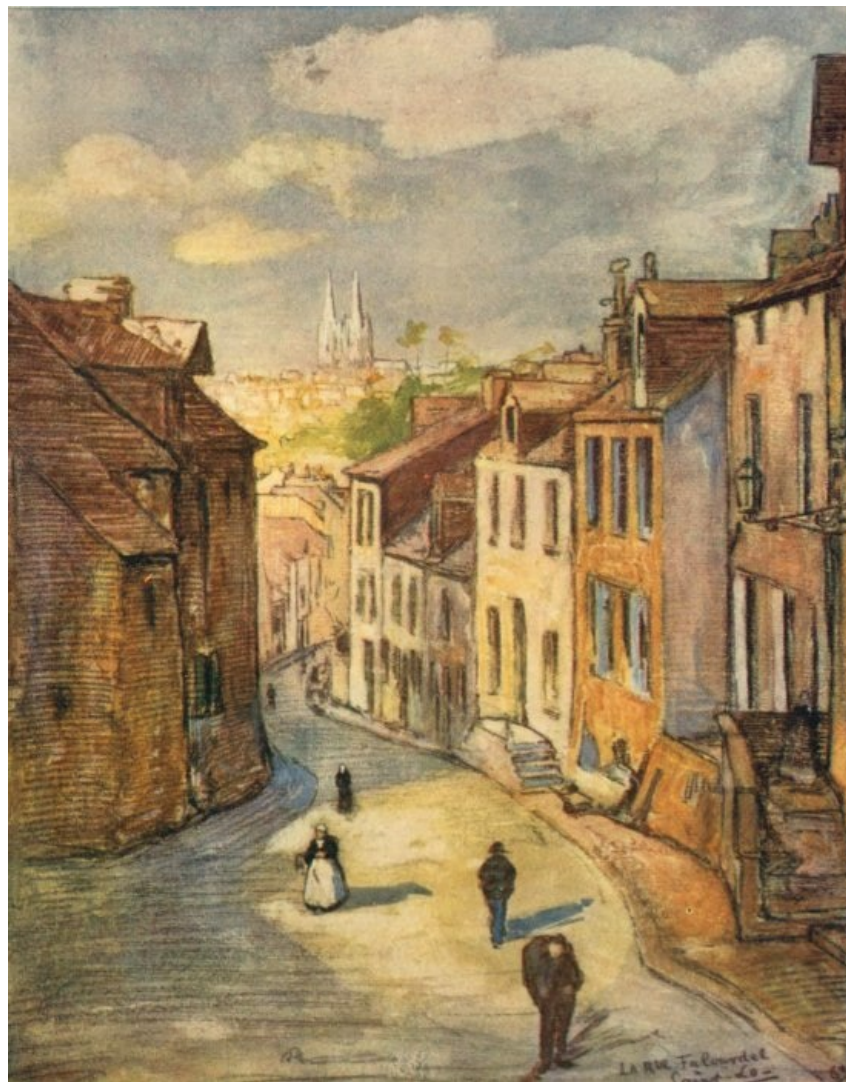
The main street crosses a narrow bridge, beneath which the quickly running current of the Rille or Risle flows. Both above and below, there is such a medley of picturesqueness and decay as surely never was seen more condensed before.

Gable-ended, timber-framed houses, with projecting stories, overhang the flood; beams discoloured and all but fallen to pieces, jut out in all directions; here the red brick walls catch a glimmer of the departing sun, there the flap of a bit of wet linen reveals a kneeling woman in one of the little washing-places on the lip of the river. Here a thatched gable projects like a huge hood; there black darkness shows a tiny court. 122



VALLEY OF THE RILLE

Some fifteen miles from Pont Audemer, in the valley of the Rille, are the ruins of the famous Abbey of Bec, which takes rank with the Jumièges and Fécamp, and others of their class. There is no remnant of the first great abbey; what are called the monastic buildings, date from the seventeenth century; they are now used as a depôt for military stores. The tower and part of the church, rebuilt in the fifteenth century, are, however, standing, but the greater part of this magnificent building "one of the finest of its kind in France," was overthrown at the Revolution. Bec is so closely associated with the names of its two great abbots, Lanfranc and Anselm, successive Archbishops of Canterbury, that it is impossible to pass them over here without mention. Lanfranc was an Italian, born at Pavia in the first years of the eleventh century. He had a genius for attracting and influencing young men with a desire for learning, and his following was soon a large one. He crossed over into France and settled at Avranches, where he founded a college. In the course of a journey to Rouen he was seized and robbed in the woods near Jumièges, and was left bound to a tree for the whole night. In the morning when released, he found, not far off, a humble abbey which had been raised by the piety of one Herlouin. He was greatly influenced by this incident, and abandoned his scholastic career to become a monk. But his great genius for teaching could not be hidden; scholars flocked to him, and as all the money he earned by this avocation went into the common fund, the monastery grew and flourished. But the holy man had a bitter tongue, and he made enemies who maligned him to Duke William, so that at last he was sentenced to banishment. The well-known story goes that Lanfranc, stumbling along on a worn old horse, met the duke, who caused him to be upbraided for not having already gone; he made answer in all good humour, that if the duke would give him a better horse he would depart faster. William was pleased with his ready wit, and did not forget him. While in Rome, the prelate was able to be of some service to his royal master in pleading his cause with the Pope, who was angry with William for marrying his cousin, and when the two great abbeys of Caen were built in expiation of this fault, Lanfranc was installed as first abbot in St Etienne. He then became Archbishop of Rouen, and after the Conquest, Archbishop of Canterbury. During his rule a fire destroyed the cathedral at Canterbury, and the rebuilding was due to him. In the new cathedral he crowned William II. in 1087. Two years later he died. His great successor, Anselm, was some thirty years younger; he was also an Italian, born at Aosta; he followed very closely in Lanfranc's steps, going first to Avranches, and then to Bec, where he succeeded Lanfranc in the abbacy. It was he for whom William cried in his last illness; but Anselm was also ill, and could not travel speedily, and the king was dead before his arrival. He was forced by William II. to accept the Archbishopric of Canterbury, but he shrank so much from the office that it is said the pastoral staff was actually thrust into his hand, and his fingers savagely closed upon it so that he could not drop it. His quarrels with William II. belong to the history of England. He died in 1109.



ST LO

Passing now to the west of Normandy, we find St Lo, Coutances, Granville, and Avranches forming a group with features in common. They are all picturesque, all worth seeing; but with the exception of Avranches, poised upon its rock, there is no peculiar feature which, like the Bayeux tapestry, the carved houses at Lisieux, and the twin abbeys of Caen, draws visitors. St Lo is on different levels, and the river Vire which flows through it is of a considerable width for a Norman river, therefore pretty peeps can be seen in many directions. There is, of course, a cathedral, dating from thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and also an old church, named, so the story goes, in accordance with the advice of St Thomas à Becket, who was passing through the town while it was being built. He suggested it should be dedicated to the first saint who should shed his blood for the Church, and as he was himself murdered shortly afterwards, the dedication was made to him. 125

Not far from St Lo is the Forest of Cerisy, mentioned in connection with the Chateau of Bur. At Cerisy an abbey was founded by Robert, father of the Conqueror, and the church, which still stands, is in use, a plain and grand building resembling St Etienne. Coutances has also a cathedral and an ancient church. Its name is derived from Constantia, which we see in slightly different form in the Côtentin, derived from the adjective Constantinus, which occurred in its description, "pagus Constantinus." Coutances is the seat of a bishopric, and its bishops played no small part in the stirring times of old. Its bishop, Geoffrey, blessed the Norman host on its march from Senlac to Hastings. He was made Earl of Northumbria, and his estates spread through thirteen shires; "his flock and his see were little thought of." The cathedral which stands now is later than his time. The principal features are its towers, the central one, octagonal in shape, is interesting and striking, and the two towers ending in spires at the west end, themselves spring from a forest of smaller spires. The cathedral has been called the most beautiful church in Normandy. Coutances was for long considered the chief town of the Côtentin, which nominally extends so far south as to include it as well as Granville. Passing on to Granville, we find a coast town built on the side of a rocky promontory, and having quays and jetties and a small lighthouse. The chief charms of Granville are in its views over the bay, and the possibility of visiting the Isles of Chausey. 126

Of Avranches there is much more to say; with it we enter the district of the Avranchin, which now, with the Côtentin, is included in La Manche. The town stands, to begin with, on an extraordinary hill, the spur or outpost of a range; it rises sheer from the railway at its foot: a situation to arrest the attention and stimulate memory. Then its views of the islands of Tombelaine and Mont St Michel are unrivalled, and, seen as they may be against the glory of a western sky, the setting is worthy of the jewels. Avranches has claims to historical memories of its own. On a spot known as the platform, and embracing a wide prospect of sea and sky, we find a stone inscribed to the effect that it was part of the threshold on which Henry II. knelt in humble penitential garb to be absolved from the curse of excommunication brought upon him by the murder of Becket. This is preserved from the ruins of the cathedral which, unlike most of the solid work of early Norman times, did not stand the test of time, but

partly fell down, and had to be wholly dismantled in 1799.



A STREET IN GRANVILLE

To this town may be accredited the honour of having produced the first poet laureate, for a poet named Henry of Avranches so attracted the notice of Henry III., that he gave him a pension and attached him to the court. 127

Avranches was from very early times noted for its magnificent and valuable library, but in 1899 a fire broke out and destroyed many priceless MSS., among them a copy of Domesday Book in three colours.

There are still, however, 16,000 volumes in the Public Library. These public libraries are notable features in almost every town in Normandy; they do not quite correspond with the English libraries of the same heading, but rather with the cathedral or chapter libraries attached to some of our diocesan towns, and they usually have owed their foundation to the monks, for abbeys were in early times the chief seats of learning. They frequently contain very valuable MSS., and nearly always have some treasures to show. The reference rooms are lofty, well furnished, and convenient, and strangers are freely admitted. At Rouen the library contains 133,000 volumes and 3600 MSS., including several service books and missals written in the eleventh century in the Anglo-Saxon style. One missal belonged to Robert of Jumièges, who became Archbishop of Canterbury, and to whose chronicles we owe so much of our knowledge of early Norman history; there is a Benedictional of 988, written for Æthelgar, Bishop of Selsey, and the earliest printed book is of the year 1468. The origin of the library is obscure. At the end of the twelfth century it is first mentioned as containing 160 volumes; in 1200 it was partly destroyed. The library at Bayeux holds 30,000 volumes, and that at Caen 100,000 volumes and 800 MSS. Other figures are—Lisieux, 28,000; Cherbourg, 30,000; Valognes, 20,000; Havre, 30,000, with eighth and ninth century MSS. These libraries are often housed in a part of the building of the Hotel de Ville, and should certainly be seen by any visitor who has half an hour to spare in passing through any of the above towns. 128

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAMOUS TAPESTRY

There is not a school child in England who has not heard of the marvellous piece of work supposed to have been wrought by Queen Matilda and the ladies of her court; but until the tapestry is actually seen, the conception of it is as vague as that of giants and fairies. As a matter of fact, the work is not tapestry at all, but crewel work. Real tapestry resembles carpet, and is closely worked, and the background is all filled in; but this of Bayeux is lightly worked in worsted, on a strip of linen about two hundred and thirty feet in length by about twenty inches in breadth, and is placed on a stand, ingeniously arranged, so that by walking round the outside and inside the whole strip can be seen without trouble, and in itself remains intact.

The question whether Queen Matilda and the ladies of William's court really were the authors of this marvellous record in needlework will, with such subjects as the authorship of the *Letters of Junius*, always remain unanswered. There are arguments for and against; the fact that the tapestry was designed for the glorification of William, looks as if it were executed in his lifetime, and the disproportionate importance attached to the smallest events in the campaign in Brittany, which are given with more detail and fidelity than even in the chronicles, looks as if that campaign must have been contemporary, and was depicted with that disregard for proportion which is ever the effect of seeing an affair in the foreground. The minute details given in the case of the figures look also as if they were done from personal knowledge—details such as the fact that Edward the Confessor is always represented with a beard, and that the Saxons wear moustaches, while the Frenchmen are clean shaven. In the reign of the Conqueror's successor, the Normans themselves cultivated beards, and allowed the hair to grow; and anyone working tapestry at that date would surely never have been realistic enough to depart from the fashions he saw around him to depict those which had preceded them. Later on, also, other little points, such as immoderately peaked shoes, were adopted; these are not shown in the tapestry, though had the work been done later than the Conqueror's reign, the fashions would have been those of the then prevailing mode. 130

On the other hand, there are serious arguments against Matilda's being the designer, though they are mostly negative; for instance, the tapestry is not mentioned in her will, neither does it find a place in the inventory of the goods belonging to the church at Bayeux in 1369, though it is mentioned in that made in 1476, from which the inference is drawn that it was not in existence at the earlier date. But, on the other hand, it may well have been overlooked. By some it is supposed to have been executed for the cathedral of Bayeux by Bishop Odo's command, and it is a fact that in length it exactly fits the circuit of the choir walls, where it might have been hung on feast days. 131

It was in 1724 that attention was first drawn to the tapestry, which until then had been lying unnoticed at Bayeux. There was a drawing of it in the Cabinet of Antiquities at Paris, and M. Lancelot coming across this was struck by it, and searched for the original, though he was quite uncertain what material it was in, whether it were a fresco, a sculpture, or a piece of needlework. It was unearthed at last at Bayeux, and was kept in a side chapel at the cathedral rolled around a mighty spool, whence it was unrolled once a year. In 1803, when Buonaparte meditated an invasion of England, the tapestry was brought to France with a view to stimulating the spirits of the French by pointing out to them what had been done might be done again. Subsequently, the much better plan of preserving the work from injury and enabling it to be seen, which is at present in use, was adopted. The case is glazed, so that the tapestry may stand for as many hundred years as it has already stood, without perceptible injury. 132

The worsted in which it is worked is as fresh as the day it was first used, and its brightness against the light background contrasts very strongly with the dingy hues of the tapestry one is accustomed to see. The colours used are drabs and greens, russets and blues, all art colours, and extraordinarily effective. The shadows are treated in a very original manner: for instance, when it is desired to show the inside of a horse's leg in shadow, the leg is filled in in a different colour from that of the horse's body; it is technically supposed to represent a shadow, and this does very well.

There is a border decorated by grotesque beasts and heraldic figures, and the border has sometimes to give way to the exigencies of the story, when an exceptionally tall man or a large ship has to encroach upon it.

The drama begins long before the Norman Conquest, and is told with a verve and humour quite unexpected; whether it were Matilda who was the designer, or the wives of those "natives of Normandy on whom William had bestowed lands in England," as the writer in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* thinks, the authors must have had plenty of character, and strong indeed must their freshness have been to resist the withering dulness of the life then deemed meet for women. And freshness they had in full measure, for no one could have depicted the lugubrious roundness of Harold's face, and the quaint expressions of the horses, who did not delight in the work. 133

The first scene shows King Edward the Confessor commissioning Harold to visit Normandy. Harold's object was nominally to obtain the release of his nephews held prisoners by William, but it is supposed that Edward the Confessor had his own reasons for sending him into William's power, as he feared Harold, and really desired William to be his heir in England. If this were so, William certainly took the advantage thus given to him, and played his cards with conspicuous skill. We are carried through Harold's journey to the coast, his voyage, his wreck, and his subsequent capture by Guy, Count of Ponthieu. It may be noted that the hawks, which can be seen on the wrists of the characters, are not hooded, another small indication as to date, for hawks began to wear hoods about 1200, so that the work must have been executed before then. When Harold follows Guy as a prisoner, his hawk sits reversed upon his wrist, a sign of dejection, while that of Guy looks forward in the usual way. At the repeated solicitation of William, who backed his request with the present of a considerable slice of territory, Harold is next brought to him as a prisoner by the triumphant Guy, who points to him, as much as to say, "See what I have done!" However, William receives him as a guest, and brings him to his palace. The

leading characters in this drama are by no means lay figures; Harold can be easily recognised by his round face and vacuous expression; he is smaller than William, who is heavy jawed and strong. In the beasts on the border we see the same spirit which is to be found more developed in the gargoyles on churches, a spirit full of mischief and appreciation of what may be called the "weird grotesque." 134

Did some of these ladies who worked, apparently so patiently and submissively, get rid of their feelings of petty jealousy and spite by working them into the canvas? Did Edith caricature the knight who was blind to her charms, and Matilda glorify him who loved her in secret? It is strange to notice that the main figures are all men; women very seldom figure in the play, only three times in fact, and twice they are nameless. In the next compartment we have the principal exception, a lady dressed in a nunlike habit stands in a small kiosk, and a man pats her cheek condescendingly; the inscription tells us that some woman named Elgiva conversed with a clerk. The probable explanation is that this is William's daughter Adeliza or Agatha, whom he agreed to give to Harold in marriage, and it may be that the pleasing intelligence so jocularly conveyed to her, is that of her future destiny. Though Adeliza at this date was only seven or eight years old, she afterwards refused to marry a Spaniard, on account of her former betrothal to Harold, and so it seems probable that she played a part in the drama.



THE SPINNING WHEEL

In the next stage Harold assists William in an expedition to suppress the rebels, Conan, Duke of Brittany, and the Duke of Anjou. The men are all represented in chain armour, and their pointed shoes nearly touch the ground on each side of the horses, which are small. It may be noted also that the horses wear no defensive armour, which was not used until the time of Henry the First. Towns are symbolised by a kind of dome standing on an arch. The army passes by Mont St Michel, and at the river Couesnon, which forms the boundary between Normandy and Brittany, many of the soldiers come to grief. The towns of Dol and Rennes are next passed, and Dinan is besieged. In it Conan is caught, and is forced to yield to hand out the keys of the besieged town. Harold is knighted by William for his prowess on the field. In this section we have the local touch which gives Bayeux her representation in the tapestry, for at Bayeux is held a solemn parliament, whereat Harold acknowledges William heir to King Edward. 135

At this time also took place the formal ceremonial of betrothal between himself and Adeliza, which made so undying an impression on the child; and which seemed to Harold merely a part of the game he had to play, as he took no account of it whatever, marrying almost directly after his return to England. The ceremony of the oath, by which he swore to uphold William's claim to the English throne, was, if chroniclers can be believed, of more importance in his eyes. For a book of the New Testament having been laid before him, he swore upon it with a sacred oath, and then the gold cloth on which it had been laid was lifted, and there, disclosed to his 136

astounded eyes, were relics of great sanctity and value, apparently to him of far more import than the Gospels, for he started and trembled violently.

Having thus committed himself, he returns to England and gives an account of his enterprise to Edward, who soon afterwards dies. There are several deathbed scenes; indeed we are never quite sure that we have seen the last of Edward. Two of these scenes, for reasons of space, are put into one compartment; that is to say, those representing Edward on his deathbed, and Edward at the point of death addressing his courtiers.

It is said that William was hunting in the forest of Rouvray, near Rouen, when the fact of Harold's having assumed the crown was made known to him by no less a messenger than Tostig, Harold's own rebellious brother. William was not the man to submit quietly; the next scene in the tapestry shows us the diligent preparations made for the invasion of England. Normandy maintained no standing navy: it was necessary to build one. We see men chopping down trees, which have a striking resemblance to barnacles upside down. It was in January the news was brought, and not till the following autumn was the fleet ready to sail. The smallest details are given faithfully on the tapestry; we see the ships, when ready, being drawn down to the shore by ropes, and floated on sinuous waves. The conveyance of the horses to the English shore threatened a difficulty from the tapestry-workers' point of view, but they did not shirk it. They represented a row of horses' heads projecting in regular array from the edges of the boats, and the bodies were left to the imagination, supposed to be neatly packed away in a space that would have conveniently held their tails! The flotilla set sail on September 12th from Dives, but was driven into St Valery, where it lay until the 27th, then once more set forward with a favourable wind.

Harold had himself been by no means idle, his fleet had cruised the Channel during the summer months, waiting for the expected foe; but in September there bore down upon the Yorkshire coast his brother Tostig, in force, with the support of Harold Hardrada, so Harold hastened northward to engage with him, and while he was facing and subduing this new foe, his fleet, left without a head, dispersed, and William landed without opposition. He landed at Pevensey, and we see in the tapestry the horses, restored to their full size, led ashore; the ships drawn up in array on the beach, and the establishment of a camp, with arrangements for plenteous eating and drinking. On one side we have the killing of an ox, who regards his executioner with an expression of pained surprise. This is deliberate; the lady who worked that ox could have made him wear any expression she chose. A sheep is also sacrificed, and red tongues of flame start up beneath the cauldrons wherein the food is cooked. Then we see tables spread, groaning with provender. "The duke sat down to eat, and the barons and knights had food in plenty; for they had brought ample store. All ate and drank enough, and were right glad that they were ashore." The fortifying of the camp is done symmetrically; the men raising the earthworks take care to have three little dabs or mounds of earth of equal size upon their spades;—indeed the mixture of symmetry and fidelity to detail is remarkable throughout the work; we generally find that in following design, truth is lost sight of. A messenger comes from Harold to William, and in the next scene hostilities have begun in the burning of a house, in which are a woman and child—the third woman in the piece, the second being present at King Edward's deathbed.

Then after all these preliminaries we come to the climax, the *mêlée* at Hastings, which occupies fully a quarter of the whole length of the canvas. These scenes are extraordinarily fine. All the vigour of mixed action is shown in the most uncompromising of materials, wool-work. We have the deaths of Harold's two brothers, Leofwine and Gurth; the encouragement of Bishop Odo of Bayeux; the scene where William raises his visor to show himself unhurt; the *mêlée* where Harold's army is cut to pieces. The border consists of a line of more or less dismembered men lying prostrate, and the ladies' highly-developed sense of humour shows itself at every turn. It is unfortunate that some of these, the most brilliant of the scenes, are on the inside of the frame as the tapestry now stands, and cannot be photographed for lack of light and space.

At last we see Harold in agony drawing the fatal arrow from his eye; and though he lived for some hours longer, the news of his death when it came was the signal for flight, leaving the Normans victors in a fight which had lasted the whole day. Of Earl Godwin's seven sons, two still remained alive after the battle, but both ended their lives in the seclusion of a religious house. As we draw to the close of the great drama the stitches are unfinished, the work left in many places merely indicated, and the roll is worn.

We feel a debt of gratitude toward the workers difficult to express. The tapestry thrills with life: it is not a mere strip of worked linen, but what we in these latter days would call a "human document," and it has come down through nine hundred years bearing more detail, more history, on its folds than has ever been told to us by any monkish parchment or royal scroll.

137

138

139

140

CHAPTER IX

AN ABBEY ON A ROCK

In spite of all that has been said of the glory of Mont St Michel, not the half has been told. This magnificent abbey, palace, citadel, church, remains unique, no less in its situation than in its stupendous strength, in its intricate variety than in its architectural beauty. The solidity and awe-inspiring grandeur of the Norman work is softened and enhanced by the delicate tracery of the thirteenth century; the towering citadel impresses as much by its elegance as by its strength.

From the heights of Avranches the cliff-fortress is seen as in a miniature, clearly outlined against the sapphire sea of summer, set off by the long, rolling, richly-wooded slopes of the shore. Three rivers flow into this bay, the Sée, the Sélune, and the Couesnon, and their channels make long tracks of shining water over the sands at low tide. The island of Tombelaine, resembling a couched lion, serves the same purpose to the Mount as the spire of St Dunstan's on Ludgate Hill does to St Paul's, it gives a unit by which to measure the height of the grander island. But it is impossible to approach St Michel from Avranches. The only feasible road is over the sands from the Pontorson side, and to attain this it is necessary to circle round the forked bay from Avranches, a proceeding which, as the way is as bow to string to that across the bay, makes in all some sixteen miles to be traversed. But a more startling effect is gained from the new view thus obtained. For there, growing larger with every yard we advance toward it, is the most graceful, most striking, and most wonderful island in the world! Within the last thirty or forty years a tower and spire, rising high into the air, bearing a gilt figure of St Michael, has been erected at the summit of the rock, and this has altered the outline considerably, drawing the eye upward at an angle ending in a sharp point, instead of to the conical or blunt summit familiar from old representations. It is impossible to deny that from an artistic point of view this is an improvement, however much one may revolt against modern work being patched on to antiquity.

From the Pontorson road we approach the island, facing northward, and if we are fortunate enough to arrive in the evening when the sun is setting behind the line of sea in the west, we shall see a gorgeous vision,

“One gleam like a bloodshot swordblade swims on
The sky line, staining the green gulf crimson.”



MONT ST MICHEL—SUNSET

The flame-coloured glowing background shows up the Mount dark and sombre, yet not wholly unrelieved, because lit by gleams that catch the facets and angles innumerable that stud its surface. The wide stretch of level water gently heaving round the base gives a strange mystical sense of illimitable space, and this with the majesty of the rock fills any who have imagination at all with the same emotion and sensation of eternity and infinity as is aroused by the sound of grand music. Yet in the morning light, glowing with an extraordinary amethyst hue, the Mount is mystic and wonderful too; it has then a more joyous and softened beauty; seen in storm and rain it is forbidding, and the grandeur alone is predominant; in every season, in every phase of weather, one or the other of the characteristics that combine to make up its unsurpassable glory, its mystery, its grandeur, or its wonder, start out and proclaim themselves supreme. So that according to a man's luck at his first approach will he be ready to exclaim, "How grand it is!" "How wonderful!" or "How beautiful!" The actual road over the sands is about a mile and a quarter in length. It was made in 1880, before which time the sands could only be crossed at low tide. It is built up high, and hedged on either side by a low wall. It is bare, exposed, and dusty. Around it lie the wide flats of half-uncovered sand, resembling those of the Northumbrian coast near

Coquet Island. Yet though this approach in itself is slightly chilling to feelings of enthusiasm, its deficiencies are lost in the vision ahead, which grows each minute more and more detailed, more and more vivid. There is in reality only one hotel on the island to which any ordinary tourist would think of going. Its message has been proclaimed half a mile away, for directly mystery began to give way to detail, it could be seen, in letters six feet high, on every building of any size that rises up on the precipitous face of the cliff, that Hotel Poulard Ainé and its *dépendances* occupied all the prominent houses that were available. Some rival establishments have been set up by other members of the same family, but their light is a candle to the electric arc compared with the original Poulard, famous for its excellent and Brobdingnagian omelets. 143

No vehicles enter the gateway of the island, they stop at the end of the causeway; it would be impossible for them to effect an entrance, and if they could they would be of no use in the steep, narrow, broken street like a Scottish wynd, which is all the island boasts.

At the end of the causeway a rough platform of raised boards carries the traveller over an expanse of slimy mud, and from this he descends by steps to the gateway.

Once inside the gateway there is a narrow street with the entrance of the Poulard Hotel on one side, and small recesses with seats and tables for refreshments on the other; while the street itself is spanned a little higher up by a massive gateway called La Porte du Roi. In the season the hotel is generally crammed, and largely by the English. It is frequently necessary to get put up in one of the *dépendances*, and for sheer wonder it is hard to beat that which stands some fifty feet higher up the cliff. Entering the main hotel to go to this, one traverses many flights of stairs, and finally, coming out by a wholly unexpected door in the wall, finds oneself on the rugged face of the cliff, with rough-hewn stone steps stretching higher still to the number of fifty or sixty. These lead to a terrace whereon is a large white and red house; and from the terrace what a view! Sea and sky, and the great green scimitar of the French coast, low-lying in the distance, are the principal components. The *dépendance* is built absolutely plumb with the rock, so by leaning out of one of the long French windows in the front, one might fling a pebble into the murmuring lapping water below; and at night when above gleams "the intense clear star-sown vault of heaven," and below the tide steals up, and there arises the gentle sucking of the tethered boats, one might well imagine oneself in Mohammed's coffin, swung between heaven and earth. 144



LA PORTE DU ROI

Such are a few of the glories of the Mount when first approached; but the reverse side of the medal quickly shows itself. It is impossible to be there for a couple of hours without feeling oneself in a cage. To begin with, the mountain, like the moon, shows only one face, and try as one will, it is but unsatisfactory glimpses one can get of the other. Full of the ardour of discovery the visitor starts out. The little, crooked, narrow main street, if 145

street it can be called, is full of picturesque bits, of visions of blue sky of an intense and dazzling brightness, framed in towering irregular walls. But no time is allowed for enjoyment of these peeps, for in the tiny shops full of penknives, trinkets, paperweights, and every atrocity that has ever been perpetrated under the name of souvenir, the women are waiting to pounce like spiders on any visitor, and pester him to buy their wares. There is no escape. One may pass on quickly, only within a very short time to be brought up by a high blank wall, baffled and annoyed, as visions of sitting on a rocky promontory, and enjoying the quiet evening light grow more remote. The result of a fresh start is to find oneself back on a higher level on the terrace of the *dépendance*, stopped by the hotel wall, and the entrance to a Musée, where two officials are no less persistent than the women in pressing visitors to come in. One may repeat the experiment, only to realise that, like Sterne's starling, one "can't get out." In despair, one goes on to the walls, broad and flat, and free from shops, with bastion towers at intervals. For a moment irritation is quieted by the repetition of the view, for in front lies the sea, behind, towering into the air, that marvellous fortress of masonry. At the very end of the promenade there is a glimpse, over the high boundary wall, which hems one in so exasperatingly on the east, of growing trees and cool greenness, but admittance to this paradise is apparently unattainable.

146

In the middle of the day the odours rising from the insanitary pavements is intolerable; oh for a torrent of rain! It is marvellous the inhabitants do not suffer from typhoid fever, but they, like the rest of their countrymen, seem absolutely impervious to any ill-effects arising from lack of sanitation.

By this time one has realised that only a strip of the island, the front facing shorewards, is available; that the whole of the other side is cut off, and can only be seen by descending through the main entrance, and making one's way at low tide across the wet sands, and fording numerous tidal rivers *en route*. It is difficult to see why doors should not be pierced in that horrible encircling barrier; a small charge might even be made, and visitors allowed access to the slopes beyond; steep they may be, but it is not beyond human power to cut a few terrace paths for walking.



THE STREET, MONT ST MICHEL

Yet there is still the abbey to be explored, with its endless ramifications. The wonder grows as it is examined, how could monks of the thirteenth century, with no mechanical contrivances, bring the ponderous blocks of stone across the sands, so treacherous and often impassable, raise them up five hundred feet, and plant them so that they stand with an air of finality, impregnable, unshakable? So steep, so massive are those walls, that to look up at them produces almost the same sensation as looking down over a great height: it makes one giddy. Over one corner there peeps a bit of lace work in stone, flying buttresses and decorated pinnacles; old also, older than the marvellous abbey itself. Below this are two rounded towers that guard the entrance to the chatelet. Abbey, fortress, church, and castle, St Michel comprises them all, and the masonry of the various

147

buildings is so interwoven, so intricate, that it is impossible to separate one from the other by mere external looking. The island is small, but its abbey is vast, and much as has been said about it, familiar as are the representations of the Mount, very little has been written about its internal beauties; consequently most people go there expecting to find a ruin, but here is an almost perfect bit of masonry, perfect in construction and in repair.

The oldest part is the church, which is the pinnacle or crown of the island, standing at its highest point, more than four hundred feet above the sea-level. The first church on this lonely and windswept spot was built in the eighth century by the Bishop of Avranches, named Aubert, who declared that St Michael had appeared to him in a dream, and commanded him to undertake this task: before that time the islet had been called Mont de la Tombe, a name recalled in the isle of Tombelaine near. The place is called in old charters "St Michel au péril de la Mer," and the name must have seemed more fitting then in its loneliness than now, when connected by the solid causeway to the mainland. The bishop's church was a mere grotto, and of it nothing remains, though the good man's own name is preserved in a little chapel of St Aubert on the inaccessible southern face of the rock. The incredible difficulty of the task was quite sufficient to ensure its repetition, for what man has done man will do. But the succeeding church, built in the reign of Duke Richard the Fearless, was swept away by fire, and the present one is the third on the same site, built in the course of the eleventh century. The surprising difficulty of the task may be gauged by the fact that only a very small part of the building rests on the solid rock, most of it being founded on a platform or platforms. It seems curious that the apex of the rock was not cut down to make a basis instead of being built up to the required level, but from whatever reason, the more arduous method was chosen. The choir fell down in 1421, and was rebuilt, so that it is of later date than the rest.

148

Pilgrims had flocked to the shrine built by St Aubert, and in time a few rough houses clung like limpets to the sides of the rock, and became the nucleus of the present village.



A VIEW FROM THE TOP OF MONT ST MICHEL

Below and on each side of the church is the abbey, justly called La Merveille. This is composed of two vast buildings, backing on the rock and facing landward. It was built in the first half of the thirteenth century, and is one of the most perfect specimens of the architecture of the time in existence. Of the same date are the fortifications, ramparts, and bastions, which transformed the mount into a fortress and citadel. This tiny rugged island has had a chequered career. The Mount was the only spot in the whole of Normandy which defied England when she ruled the rest of the territory. It was besieged and attacked again and again without success. The ancient monks, with as much of the church militant as the church penitent in them, clung to their bare sharp rock, and defied the would-be invaders.

149

The abbot was a personage of great importance; at the time of the Conquest he fitted out six vessels for the Norman duke, and for this he was well rewarded, for monks of the abbey were raised to the highest ecclesiastical dignities in England. One became abbot of St Hilda, another of St Peter at Gloucester, another of Canterbury. Coins, bearing the image of the Archangel Michael, were struck also in commemoration of the Conquest.

In the fifteenth century the abbot had attained almost regal power, holding not only the adjacent isles of Tombelaine and Jersey and Guernsey, but even the sister isle of Mount St Michael off the Cornish coast, which had been given to the monastery by Edward the Confessor.

Tombelaine has a history of its own, independently of Mont St Michel. In 1048 two monks came and took up their abode here to live the contemplative life, and nearly a hundred years later a priory was founded on the rock, which was very popular with the abbots of the neighbouring monastery, so that one of them was buried here by his own request. After a while fortifications grew up around the cloistral walls of the priory, and thus

150

the island was fitted to become an important strategic base. When the English seized it in Edward III.'s reign, they saw its possibilities, and strengthened the fortifications immensely.

What fortifications there were, remained till 1669, when they were demolished by order of the King of France. During the fourteenth century, when war flamed continually between England and France, they played a notable part. Mont St Michel itself was menaced, and though the pilgrims were allowed to pass to it over the yellow sands without hindrance, the inhabitants of the Mount were for a year more or less in a state of siege. But it was not until 1423 that the grand siege began, when pilgrims were intercepted and turned back, and sallies and counter-sallies passed between the large and small rock, crouching like two lions about to spring. Then the investment became more strict, English vessels appeared in the shallow waters of the bay, and the English soldiers thus reinforced, might probably have succeeded in cracking this very hard nut, had not the Bretons come to the assistance of the garrison, and sailing into the bay engaged the English in combat. There is little to be gathered of the details of the fight, but the effect was to make the English retire hastily to their entrenchments. This was by no means their last attempt, however, on the island fastness, for in 1427 a great attack was made under Lord Scales. It was at this time that the two cannons which now stand within the gate of the Mount were taken by the French. 151

A strange incident is the pilgrimage of 400 children, in the middle of the fifteenth century, to the Mount, from Germany and Flanders. These children had left their homes without the consent, and in many cases against the wishes, of their parents. The sight must have been an impressive one as the little pilgrims, travel-worn and stained, saw at length their goal, and crossed the shifting sands toward it. What became of them afterwards is not recorded, whether they returned to their homes or settled down in the country near, but the actual fact of the pilgrimage seems well attested, though the numbers taking part in it must be received with caution.

In the reign of Louis the Eleventh, the island was made into a state prison, and continued to be so more or less until 1863. During the French Revolution many of those called "enemies of the Republic" were incarcerated here, in deep and vaulted dungeons from which there was no possibility of escape. The buildings are now government property, and admittance is nominally free, as the officials who show strangers round are paid by the State; but a tip is also expected! The system is another of those annoying little arrangements which so mar the pleasure of a visit to the island. The guardian of the abbey waits until he has collected a sufficient party, say thirty or forty people, and then leads them through from room to room, locking each door behind him, and pouring forth a voluble string of monotonous words in the very worst "guide" style. 152

So intricate is the architecture, so numerous the rooms, halls, and corridors, that a description in detail of the whole of the building is impossible, nevertheless one or two points stand vividly out in the mind. One is the marvellous flight of steps beneath the archway by which entrance is obtained; another, the winding stone staircase, called L'Escalier de Dentelle, by which one mounts to a platform running round the exterior of the choir beneath the flying buttresses, with their delicate turrets and pinnacles; another, the wide panorama seen from any of the platforms around the church. The church itself is half Norman, half Pointed, and the nave, with its solid pillars and rounded arches contrasts with the later decorative work in the choir. Nor is the crypt beneath—rightly called the Crypt of the Great Pillars—less interesting. These stupendous columns, planted in couples, support the whole fabric, and their colossal strength strikes one with wonder and awe.

The abbey is in three stories, the highest containing the dormitory and cloister, and the second two vast halls, while in the lowest are the almonry, and endless vaults. 153

The cloisters are the most perfect of their kind in Europe, and strike one the more imperiously from their delicate and almost fragile beauty amid much that is so stern and massive. They were made in the early part of the thirteenth century, and the twenty-first abbot, Raoul de Villedieu, was the designer. The cloisters consist of a double row of slender columns of polished granite round an interior courtyard, and the rows are placed so that the columns in each do not coincide with one another in the line of vision, but interlace. Within the narrow passage between the rows are ribs, admirably and symmetrically disposed, connecting the two, and in the spandrils of the exterior rows there is carving of fruit and foliage of such fairy-like delicacy, that it is almost impossible to believe it was executed seven centuries ago. The cloister was "restored" 1877-81.

The dormitory, which is reached from the cloister, is vast, and has an arcade of deeply-set lancet windows on each side, to the numbers of thirty-one and twenty-six. This is of slightly later date than the cloister. In the Salle des Chevaliers on the floor below a raised terrace runs along one side, and there are two carved mantelpieces, while the ribbed roof is supported by pillars with carved capitals. The same profusion of space and detail is noticeable everywhere. The refectory adjoining shows fireplace, ribbed roof, and graceful columns also, and was finished about 1215. There are nine large mullioned windows. Each hall varies, yet all are animated by the same spirit of artistic loving care. In the lowest storey there is the ancient cloister, superseded by the work of Villedieu, and also a beautiful crypt with short thick pillars, and a delicately groined roof. 154

One carries away loving memories of all this beauty, embodying so much strength and thought and care; one forgets, as one always does forget, the herding together, the sense of imprisonment, the disagreeable sights and sounds; and one thinks of this island, standing alone, and rising from the bosom of the sea, as one thinks of some glorious picture well-known and loved. It is said that once all this bay was clothed with wood; that the island was no island; and rumour whispers now that the bay is to be reclaimed, the land planted and cultivated, and the island be an island no more; may it be but lying rumour, and not based on any foundation, for the day that St Michel ceases to be an island, that day will she have been robbed of half her beauty and nearly all her charm. Long may it stand, that church-citadel, graceful, stern, and solitary "St Michel in peril of the Sea."

THE STORMY CÔTENTIN

This is an age of travel, and many persons are searching diligently for some district intrinsically interesting and desirable, not too much overrun by their kind, and above all not too inaccessible, wherein they may take a holiday. Such a district there is in the Côtentin peninsula jutting out from the north coast of France, one of the only two peninsulas in Europe, by the way, which do point in that direction. It is not only in position that the Côtentin resembles Denmark, but also in race; here and here alone in Normandy may still be found men of the same blood as the Conqueror.

In conformation the Côtentin peninsula is akin to Brittany, being almost entirely of granite, which ancient formation extends over the whole district, with the exception of a strip south of La Hogue, on the western coast. The landscape is such as is generally found in granite countries, broken and varied, with stern coasts and massive cliffs, which are continually breaking away and letting the sea eat into the land. It is said that at one time Jersey was divided by only a narrow river from the mainland, and now with the recession of the coast it is far out to sea. Not only in scenery is the Côtentin a delightful place for a holiday, but in more unusual attractions. Its heights and hollows are studded with architectural remains, proud and stern chateaux, now for the most part occupied as farmhouses; its annals are as full of skirmishes and romantic stories as our own border country. Within a ten-mile radius of Valognes to the west and south, we find the chateaux of St Martin le Hebert, Bricbecque, Nehou, Vicomte St Sauveur, Crosville, Urville, and Flottemanville. Further south are the ruins of the ancient castle of La Haye du Puits. Of all these, Bricbecque and St Sauveur are the best known. Bricbecque stands up stern and strong still, a majestic ruin; in its courtyard is the hotel, and the far-stretching walls tell of its previous extent. The Sire of Bricbecque was nearly always at enmity with the Sire of St Sauveur, and the two regarded each other with great jealousy. St Sauveur was the more powerful, and in the time of the Conqueror its chieftain Neel, or Nigel, held the title of Premier Baron or Vicomte of the Côtentin. He it was who joined the conspiracy against William, to whom his father had been a loyal and true vassal; and he was among those horsemen who entered Valognes by stealth in order to seize William unawares and assassinate him. The story of the duke's escape and the subsequent fight at Val-ès-Dunes has already been told. Yet after Neel had made his submission, William forgave him, and in time restored him to his castle, though the lands which Neel had held in Guernsey were handed over to the Church as an act of reparation. In this was only completed what his father had begun, for the elder Neel had given largely to the Church.



A HOLIDAY HEAD-DRESS

Neel's line ended in a daughter, who carried the castle by marriage to Tesson Jourdain, and from the Jourdain it passed, also by marriage, to the Harcourts. In the reign of Edward III. of England, the chieftain Harcourt rebelled against the French king, and joined Edward in his attempts on France. He was once pardoned, but again turned traitor, and was finally killed fighting gallantly enough with his back against a tree, all alone in the midst of the soldiers sent to take him by the King of France. After his death the castle continued in the hands of the English, under Sir John Chandos, who built the splendid keep or tower which still stands; and when Sir John fell, his company held on until, in 1372, the whole force of France was brought to bear on them, and the men who had ravaged the country and behaved like robber barons for three years were forced to come to an agreement. They were allowed to go out with the honours of war, however. Once again, in the reign of Henry V., the castle was in English hands, but with the rest of Normandy became French in 1450. 158

The fine abbey founded by Neel still remains, though it has been so largely restored as to be almost new built; one splendid aisle arcade remains to tell us of its ancient origin. It now is the home of the Sisters de la Miséricorde, while the castle, after its stormy career, has settled into a peaceful old age as a hospice for old people and children. Bricbecque belonged to the Bertrands, from whom the earls of Huntley and Dudley claim descent; then to the Paisnels, and then to the D'Estoutevilles. The castle is now a splendid ruin, with a high and massive donjon keep, a deep, dark, tunnel archway, a smaller tower, and a great part of the encircling wall. In the courtyard, enclosed within part of the ruin, is the Hotel des Voyageurs.

Of the older part of La Haye du Puits there is only a ruined donjon, but the castles of Crosville and Flottemanville stand in good preservation, though fallen from their high estate to the condition of farmhouses. The splendid tower at Crosville, with its bastion turret, is well worth seeing, and the large room, probably the banqueting-hall, is still decorated on ceiling and frieze and panels with paintings done in the sixteenth century, showing that up till then it still remained the dwelling of the great ones of the land. Flottemanville is as attractive in a rather different style. They all have features in common these castles: the keep or tower for defence, their proximity to the church, and their massive walls, probably dating in their foundations from William's own time, but rebuilt at a later date, as by his order all these strongholds were destroyed after Val-ès-Dunes. But those we have mentioned are only a few of the principal survivals amid the numerous castles that stud the district. 159

Valognes itself has been from very early times a centre of gaiety, and this reputation lasted up to the eighteenth century. At present it is a quiet yet busy town. It is built on no fixed plan; its streets run anyhow. In the centre is the church, which is quite peculiar, being surmounted by both a spire and a dome of different dates. The main part is of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but the dome was added in 1612. Inside there is some superb wood-carving.

In the streets of Valognes, and everywhere in the neighbourhood, may be seen a curious cap worn by the women. It is edged in front by a high upstanding ruche of black and white, with the ends frayed out, giving the appearance of feathers, and the whole at a little distance is not unlike an Indian headdress. Everywhere in the Côtentin one meets among the strong-faced farmers men who might have been blood-brothers to William, men with square faces, thin lips, and stern features. They are often of massive build, and though not excessively tall, certainly of greater height than the ordinary French agricultural class. The Danish blood has remained here with strange persistency throughout generation after generation: these men are not Frenchmen at all. You feel it the moment you encounter them; they are a northern race with northern characteristics. 160

Not far from Valognes, in its suburb Alleaumes, are the ruins of the castle where William was staying when he made his midnight escape. Besides the history connected with its castles, the peninsula has annals of its own. As the northern coast was a very convenient landing-place from England, it was often the Côtentin which bore the first brunt of an English engagement. Edward the Confessor landed here on mischief bent, but was driven back by the inhabitants, who rose as one man under Neel the Elder.



CHERBOURG

While William the Red reigned in England, and the feeble Robert was nominal Duke of Normandy, Henry Beauclerc descended upon the Côtentin, and ruled it for many years. His rule was firm and good, and he was popular, and the peninsula consequently enjoyed far more prosperity than the rest of distracted Normandy. Henry's power extended as far south as Domfront, for the titles of Count of Mortain and Count of the Côtentin still went together. When Henry became King of England he yielded the Côtentin to Robert, until he won it back again by his sword. When Edward III. swooped down upon France he passed through the whole district capturing, burning, and destroying, and none could stand up against his army. Again, when Henry V. made an effort to retrieve the domains which had belonged to his forefathers, the Côtentin was swept from end to end. In the religious wars, once again the town was in the midst of turmoil, but it yielded to Henri IV. after the battle of Ivry. 161

We have specialised only on a very small part of the Côtentin, and that the least known, but it is impossible to leave without mention of the famous port of Cherbourg, the finest harbour in France. The records of Cherbourg go back to the sixth century, when a saint named Scubilion is said to have resided here, and even before Scubilion's day, a still mistier and a nameless saint had landed here, and converted the inhabitants. The breakwater at Cherbourg, finished in 1853, can hold a fleet at anchor, and is guarded by forts.

The town of Cherbourg is said to derive its name from Cæsar's Bourg, but the derivation is very doubtful. William the Conqueror founded here a college, which his granddaughter, Matilda or Maude, incorporated into a new monastery of her own. The castle was a great favourite with Henry I. It was here he had been staying in November 1120, when he set sail from Barfleur, leaving the merry company of young nobles to follow with his son and daughter in the *White Ship*. History gives it that the prince himself might have been saved after the fatal wreck had he not returned at the cry of his sister, who had been left on the wreck, whereupon so many leapt into the boat that it was swamped. How persistently the fact that only a butcher of Rouen was saved, impresses itself upon the childish mind, so that years after, when we have forgotten far more important things, we still remember it! 162

Before we leave the Côtentin altogether, we may mention that delightful chronicler Wace, to whom we owe so much, and who wrote with the ease and picturesqueness of a Pepys, in an age when composition was a serious and dry-as-dust matter. Wace was born in Jersey about 1100-20, therefore he was a native of the Côtentin, in which Jersey was then included. He is reported to have lived to the age of eighty-four, and to have died in England. His life was contemporary with the reigns of Henry I., Stephen, Henry II., and Richard I., and that which he records before 1100 was told to him by word of mouth, partly by his father, to whom he makes reference. His chronicle, which is in the form of a poem, is called the *Roman de Rou* (or Rollo), and the English translation of it goes no further back than William I. Wace is the most delightful and interesting of chroniclers in an age which was singularly rich. Robert of Jumièges, Ordericus Vitalis, and others have left us accounts as full as any modern newspaper report, of what happened in their days, and they are only the leaders among a host of lesser men.

CHAPTER XI

DIEPPE AND THE COAST

Passengers who land at Dieppe may perhaps be conveniently divided into two classes—those who pass through, intent on tours further inland or in other countries, and those who go to Dieppe, as they would to Brighton. It is pretty safe to say that very few of either class really know the place.

But Dieppe deserves some consideration apart from its harbour and its beach; it is no mushroom town of villadom, but has an old-world flavour, and a delightful mingling of simplicity with its fashion. We can see in it a series of charming pictures. There is, for instance, a long, narrow, cobble-paved street passing through the middle, running more or less parallel with the front, and cut off from it by a double wall of houses. But, alas, there are few old houses, for gable end and ancient woodwork went down before the furious bombardment of the combined English and Dutch fleets in 1694, when the bombs, falling in all directions, set the place on fire. 164 After having done such damage that the whole town had to be rebuilt, the fleet sailed away to Havre. It is said that some of the rich inhabitants at the first sign of danger hid their valuables in the caves, which may be seen in numbers along the limestone cliffs, and that 4000 houses in all were burnt. Thus it is that there is nothing to be seen in the streets anterior to this date. Nevertheless there is a quaint irregularity in the nondescript architecture that is very charming. And on a Saturday morning the long street is lined by the market women, who come in to dispose of their country produce. They have no stalls, but sit on the edge of the pavement on the sunny side, each one with her basket or baskets ranged beside her. Dazed hens with tied legs, faintly expostulating ducks, baskets of pearly eggs, wedges of butter under cool green leaves, great masses of roses and other flowers—such are the goods for sale, and each one represents a large amount of hard work and patience. The women chatter gaily, comparing produce and prices, their pleasant, brown faces shining the while in the sun, until perhaps the babel is for an instant stilled by a funeral passing down the narrow street. The walking priests, in their birettas, lead the procession, followed by the acolytes and the silent coffin; they wind slowly over the cobbles, and the solemn dirge rises on the summer air; but it has passed, and is forgotten, and all is happy tumult once more.

Midway down the street, by the fountain, there curves off another, at the end of which is the magnificent church of St Jacques. It is only the west end we can see in this vista, with its two curious octagon turrets, gargoyle crowned, but as we draw nearer, the fine western tower comes into view. The church, like so many another, was begun in the thirteenth century, and completed in the sixteenth. The other notable church of Dieppe, St Remi, stands further west, and is hemmed in by houses; it was not begun until St Jacques was nearly finished. 165



THE GATEWAY, DIEPPE

If we go into St Jacques late in the afternoon, when the sun is flooding that glorious western rose-window, we shall find the whole building filled with opalescent light. Soft patches of transparent colour, amethyst and gold, far more glorious than even the rich blue and orange of the glass through which they filter, creep slowly across the aisle and climb the pillars. They rest upon the bowed shoulders of an old peasant woman, who sits with hanging head. Her plain stuff dress and the print cap tightly fitting her grey hair, the blue check apron telling of days of toil, are all suddenly transformed into something "rich and strange." But she sits there with

the dark beads falling one by one through her work-worn fingers, heedless of the glory in which she is bathed; and if you go nearer you will see that poor proud face drawn by lines of sorrow, and every now and then the fingers are interrupted in their work to wipe off those too insistent tears; evidently no ordinary case this, but a woman who has suffered trouble, and who comes to seek peace, though happiness has left the world so far as she is concerned. 166

It is a wonderful place this church, the mighty chancel and transept arches seem to hold the silence as a bowl holds water; one could not "strive or cry" aloud here. Yet outside, through the open door, one can see a patch full of life and movement—boys darting to and fro, a carter unloading a van, continual passers-by; and every now and then out of the light a boy or girl flits into the solemn spaces of the wonderful silence, gives never a glance at the gorgeous colours that make one feel as though one were in the heart of a jewel, but with a hasty genuflexion passes out at the other door into the market-place.

In the market-place there is medley and chatter, bargain and sale. All the usual things are here. Coloured curtains, masses of shoes, rows of shining utensils, piles of snowy draperies, sweets, flowers, toys, cakes in profusion. A yard of ribbon, a pair of stuff shoes, a bit of glittering jewellery from that fascinating stall where all goes at "quinze sous" the piece, this is the extent of most purchases that can be seen.

Behind the market-place rises one of the chapels of the transept, built by Ango, whose history is told in connection with the castle; its fellow is on the other side, and in its solid plainness of design, and with its worn stone, and two stages of red tiles, the chapel is in delightful contrast with the ornateness of the pinnacled and buttressed choir. 167

To the south and west of the church is another market, one of the most repulsive imaginable. Spread out on the open ground are old second-hand articles of every description, from loathsome rags to rusty iron.

If we pass down one of the narrow streets to the east of the church, we come quite suddenly upon a scene of a different order. Here is the basin where the steamers lie, and the swing-bridge which leads to the fishermen's quarter, Le Pollet, one of the two places in Normandy where the Celtic influence still lingers. There are some quaint superstitions and ideas held by these men, but they are not ready to speak of them. They are religious, and would not think of letting a boat go out unblest. One of the songs which is chanted at the lighting of a candle in the hold before a boat puts out to sea, is as follows:—

"La Chandelle de bon Dieu est allumée
Au saint nom de Dieu soit l'alizé-vent, unie, regulier
Au profit du maître et de l'équipage,
Bon temps, bon vent pour conduire la barge.
Si Dieu plaît!"

On the quay is the fish-market, and outside it a mass of fisher-folk broken up into groups. The men are nearly all rust-coloured in complexion, with hair that curls fiercely and thickly, and among the younger ones is to be seen not infrequently that type of face which, idealised, appears in the portrait of Gilliatt, in the English translation of *Les Travailleurs de Mer*, a face of a short oval, with small pointed chin, and mobile, sensitive lips. Yet others there are as square-jawed and bull-dog, as ruffianly in expression, as the lowest among the sailors in London by the river. 168

The chaffering goes on hotly; two fine mackerel are handed over at thirteen sous, four good ones, not quite so fine, at sixteen sous. All the dealing is in sous. Strange, evil-looking fish with large heads are sold for a song, and each customer as she gets them—for it is nearly always a she—slips them into her string bag, and goes on her way rejoicing, with a cheap and wholesome dinner for the young ones at home. High on the cliff across the water, is the stiff new little church—there is another in the town below—and behind it, on the windswept cliff, the Le Pollet cemetery, filled with the cheap wooden crosses laden with those tawdry ornaments that mean so much and tell so little. But the Le Pollet cemetery does not account for more than a fraction of its dead, for many a man and lad lie out beyond the point in the shifting sea, and the wives and mothers at home have no graves on which to lay their hardly bought offerings. On Le Pollet, under the renowned General Talbot, the English erected a fort called the Bastille, a name still retained by its site.



THE QUAY, DIEPPE

But in lingering by the town and along the quay, we have not yet visited the castle of Dieppe, which is at the other end, rearing itself steeply on its mighty cliff. For Dieppe lies in the valley between two heights, and occupies the space dipping down to the level of the sea, hence the name which signifies deep, and is related to our names of Deepdale and Deepdene. The castle hill was at first occupied by a mere fort, which Rollo rebuilt; and Rollo's fort lasted until the time of Henry II. of England, who rebuilt it entirely, but Henry's fort stood a very short time, for when Philip Augustus retook the country from John, one of his first acts was to raze any strong places which might afford the English a foothold, and this fort was among the number. Nevertheless his destruction was not entire, and some of the walls attributed to Henry still remain incorporated in the castle, which was begun by the Dauphin, after the historic fight of Arques in 1435. The four towers belong to this date, but various additions were made later. There is no admission to the castle now, and but little history to clothe its walls in an aroma of the past. The most interesting name connected with it is that of the merchant prince, Jean Ango, who died here in 1551. Ango was a native of Dieppe, and began life as a common sailor, but he had in him that curious ability to seize his opportunity, which goes to the making of a fortune more than any other quality. He soon rose to be a shipowner, and wealth bringing wealth, he owned a whole fleet of vessels, and was a power on the sea. When King François came to Dieppe, he was received and entertained by Ango in princely style. François made his host governor of Dieppe in return, and afterwards conferred upon him the dignity of a vicomte. It was in 1525 that Ango built a house of the old timber style, magnificently carved, on the site where the Lycée now stands, opposite the station, by the quay where the Newhaven boats arrive and depart. Shortly afterwards he followed this up by a country house at Varengeville, which is still standing (see p. 173). Ango is described by a contemporary as a big blonde man, with a large head and a gay expression. For long he ruled as a prince, both on sea and land; when the Portuguese had the audacity to harass French shipping, it was Ango who armed twelve ships and made war on his own account, capturing several of the Portuguese vessels. The king sent angrily to ask the French king why he had done this, as the two countries were then at peace, and the French king replied gaily that he must ask Ango, who alone was responsible.

But this big, cheery, bluff man, a sailor at heart, changed unaccountably in his old age; he grew morose, suspicious, and overbearing; he quarrelled with his neighbours, got himself entangled in lawsuits, and finally, ruined in pocket and credit, had to take refuge from his enemies within the castle walls, where he died.

The general idea is that Arques is the parent town of Dieppe, and that the men of Arques gradually established themselves on the sea-coast, for the purpose of fishing. Others, however, point to the Camp of Cæsar, anciently called the City of Limes, which is on the top of the hill near Puys, as an old Gaulish settlement before the advent of Cæsar, and say that this was the parent town, and that the settlement at Dieppe came later, when a great part of the cliff near the Gaulish town had fallen bodily into the sea.

With the siege of the castle of Arques by William the Conqueror we have dealt elsewhere. But the castle of Arques, always a stronghold, underwent a yet more terrible ordeal in the attack by Henri IV. in 1589, when it was held by the Duc de Mayenne. The king had 4000 men against 30,000 of the Leaguers, but the smaller force was victorious, and the battle was long spoken of as a miraculous event.

Having so far dealt with the immediate surroundings of Dieppe, we turn now the coast-line. The great white cliffs which rise vertically on both sides of Dieppe have their counterparts in the white cliffs of England, so exactly similar in structure that no one can doubt they once joined across what is now the Channel. Even were there no other means of judging, the great friability of these cliffs and the masses which continually fall off into the sea, driving the coast-lines further and further apart, would alone answer the suggestion in the affirmative.

All the way to Tréport stretches this grand rampart. Tréport is situated in the embouchure of the river Bresle, and above it rise the cliffs. It has a modern part with first-class hotels, a casino, and other of the usual attractions, and the older village nestles in the narrow valley ascending from the beach. The beach is limited by the river to the east, beyond which begins the beach of Mer. 172

Eu is a place of considerable importance in Norman history. It is the outlying border town of Normandy in this direction, and beyond it was the vexed country of Ponthieu, between whose counts and the Norman dukes there was so much fighting. All those who have followed the chapter on the Bayeux tapestry will remember that it was on the territory of Ponthieu that the unfortunate Harold was blown by wind and tide, and that it was Guy, Count of Ponthieu, who brought his captive proudly to William. He did not, however, do so until he had been repeatedly commanded by William, who also bribed him, though Guy was "his man," having done homage to him five or six years previously. Eu had also been the scene of the Conqueror's marriage about ten years before, when his Flemish bride, his own first cousin, had met him here. The church which witnessed that famous ceremony has disappeared, but the present one, a fine building of the thirteenth century, worthily replaces it.

In the Chapelle du College, a splendid building, are some fine monuments to the Guises, whose name was associated with Eu in the sixteenth century. The elder Guise, François, was called Le Balafré, because he bore on his face a horrible scar from a sword-cut received at Boulogne; he was assassinated in 1563, and succeeded by his son Henri, also assassinated in 1588. 173

The whole coast-line is shingly, and its chief characteristic is the up and down sweep of the contour, which continually rises to the top of tall white cliffs, and almost immediately falls again right down to the sea-level, only to rise once more. This peculiarity is admirable for its variety, and it affords fine shelter to the seaside places in the folds, but it renders any attempt at passing along near the coast on foot or bicycle very tedious work. The white cliffs, however, and the shingly beaches make eminently beautiful foregrounds for a sea so often blue in the sunlight which France seems to attract so much more than England, and some of the cliffs are crowned by fine trees or blooming gorse.

Going westward from Dieppe, we come to the little village of Varengeville, standing high on the top of the cliffs. It has two great attractions—one its shady lanes, arched by beeches so as to resemble veritable cathedral aisles, a thing unique in Normandy; and the other the fine Maison d'Ango, now a farmhouse. This is built round four sides of a courtyard, and the walls are worked with marvellous skill into various intricate patterns with the materials of flint and brick. The latter, which adorn the cowbyres, are set in even patterns, and the effect with the red tiles and thatch is pretty and curious. On one side of the mansion itself is an open loggia or arcade, raised above the ground-level. But the most striking and notable detail is the columbier standing in the yard, one of the very few remaining. It is cylindrical, and the walls are worked in patterns of lines and bands in the same way as those of the house. It terminates in a curved dome-like roof. The whole is well worth going to see, in spite of the churlish, and we must add, in France, very unusual, spirit that animates the present occupants. We pass many little places ever growing in popularity, such as Veules and St Valery en Caux, bearing family resemblance to Dieppe in their situation in the breaks formed by streams cutting through the chalk cliffs, and come to Fécamp, which is a bit of a health resort, a bit of a manufacturing town, and a bit of a fishing harbour, without being particularly distinguished in any one of the three things. From Fécamp, as from all these northern fishing towns, there annually sets forth that fleet for the cold waters near Iceland so touchingly described in Pierre Lôt's *Pêcheurs d'Islande*. 174



FISHERMEN AT FÉCAMP

Fécamp stands at the foot of cliffs from 300 feet to 400 feet in height, around the base of which are scattered the great blocks of débris with which the seas play like footballs. The memory of the terrible storm of 1663, when the whole of the valley or chine was blocked by these stones, hurled up by the terrific power of the sea, is still preserved. The chief claim of Fécamp to notice, however, is its splendid abbey, of which the church still remains; it was built in the Conqueror's reign, burnt and rebuilt, so that the greater part is of the thirteenth century, and some dates from the reconstruction in the fifteenth. What is left of the abbey has been built into the public offices of the town. 175

But the strange legend of La Fontaine du Precieux-Sang should come before mention of the abbey, for it was because of this relic St Waneng erected here the first religious house for nuns. The story goes that a case containing some of the blood of our Lord had been placed in the cleft of a fig-tree by Isaac, the nephew of Nicodemus, but in some way the stump had been cut down, and reached the sea, from whence it floated unaided all the way to Fécamp, and a well in the courtyard of a house is pointed out as the actual spot where it stranded. During a great conflagration this precious relic was lost, but an angel brought it back, saying, "Voici le prix de la redemption du monde, qui vient de Jerusalem." Needless to say, this priceless relic drew thousands of pilgrims to the shrine at Fécamp. They came in spite of wind and weather; as the quaint old Norman song has it:—

"Rouge rosée au matin,
Beau temps pour le pèlerin
Pluie de matin
N'arrete pas le pèlerin."

And the monks reaped a rich reward from their ingenuity! Passing Valmont, with its old castle of the D'Estoutevilles, we come to Etretat, a much more fashionable bathing-place than Fécamp. 176

The coast at Etretat is grand and beautiful, though the beach is stony. The sea with its ceaseless work has carved caverns in the high cliffs. The three principal headlands, standing grandly out to sea, all end in a natural arch. Here, as elsewhere, fishermen mingle with the gay crowd that increases the population some five hundred per cent. in the summer.



HAVRE

The wall of cliff continues right on to Havre, where the Cape de la Hève feels the full shock of the resistless north winds. Also the cliff is always crumbling, with that law of nature that ordains that the sea shall gain on the land on the rocky coasts, and the land shall advance out to sea on sandy beaches. Once or twice, more than

mere crumbling has taken place, for with a noise like the rumbling of artillery the face of the cliff has broken away, and fallen headlong into the sea, sending gigantic spouts of water heavenwards, while the roar attracted attention even at Havre. Havre has a population of 120,000, and is a self-respecting busy town. It has a very large traffic, and it is also favourably situated for inland trade, being connected by a dredged-out canal with Tancarville, and thence by the Seine to Rouen. The mouth of the Seine is here so treacherous and shifty, that without constant dredging navigation would be impossible. There is only one more remark to make before leaving Havre, and that is, to tell how it earned its secondary title of Le Havre de Grace. One of those terrible high tides that about once in a generation sweep through the Channel, appeared on the coast and overwhelmed the breakwater, flooding it to such a height that it seemed to the inhabitants nothing remained for them but utter ruin, even if they managed to preserve their own lives; when, as they were momentarily expecting to see the town swept from end to end by the lowering mass of water, a new channel burst suddenly through one of the walls which prevented the escape, and the water flowed away into the bed of the Seine. This was considered a special miracle in favour of the town, which was henceforth known as Le Havre de Grace. 177

A more complete contrast than that presented by the next two coast towns could hardly be made. We have Honfleur, old, picturesque, tumble-down, full of fishermen, with a church which for quaintness could hardly be surpassed, and we have the villa-ed and elegant Trouville, resembling one of the most gaily dressed of Parisians, where not a line is out of order, nothing is left to chance, every fold, so to speak, is arranged, every movement self-conscious.

I confess that to me such towns as Trouville exercise a repulsive effect; the moment I arrive there I want to flee, and yet it is impossible to overlook a place so patronised, so praised, so entirely self-satisfied. Trouville is not Norman; it is a little bit of Paris by the sea, and it is French entirely; it does not share in the old Norman history, "C'est le monde frivole, joyeux et bruyant qui s'agite et s'amuse et dont les petit cris, les chants quelquefois vulgaires et de gout douteux, et tous les bruits de fêtes se percent dans le grand murmure de la mer." Hardly more than fifty years ago, Trouville was a mere collection of fishing-huts; then someone saw the advantages of the situation, the high cliff-like hills, the surrounding woods, the flat sands, and almost at once sprang up the hotels, the casinos, the shops, and the other accompaniments of a fashionable resort. Fishing is now the least of its sources of wealth, or rather, perhaps, we may say it is replaced by angling of another sort. Deauville is a kind of offshoot of Trouville, situated on the other side of the Fouques, a lesser Trouville, a shade quieter, but after the same pattern. 178

The next point to notice along the coast is the mouth of the river Dives, where William assembled his ships before setting out to conquer England. They remained here waiting for a favourable wind, and finally put into St Valery, at the mouth of the Somme, from whence they made their real start. The number of ships is estimated very variously; Wace puts it at six hundred and ninety-six, a number which he had heard from his father, but he says he saw it stated in writing to have exceeded three thousand, a number which may have likely included every boat or flat-bottomed raft which crossed over. William's own ship, made like the others of a boat-shape, with high prow, was propelled by oars. It was brilliantly decorated; its sails were crimson, and its metal parts were gilded; the figure-head was a child armed with bow and arrow, aimed at England. The whole was a present from his duchess Matilda, and it is said that the figure of the child had been copied from that of their son Robert, a boy who was to cause them both so much sore grief. 179

Then we come to the mouth of the Orne, on which stands Caen. From the Dives to the Orne we have had flat sands and sand dunes, a state of things which continues still. Back from the coast is one of the most splendid pasturage lands in Normandy, only rivalled by those about the drained lands behind Carentan. Ouistreham and the minor seaside resorts near Caen are much patronised, and contain hotels and villas to suit all purses. After passing Courseulles, the hotels and shops and bathing stations are left behind, and little fishing-hamlets take the place of coast resorts. Port en Bessin is situated in the fracture of a cliff, and there are in the neighbourhood formidable rocks. Then we come to the great angular Bay de Veys, in shape not unlike our own Wash. Here stands Carentan, and before the land was drained Carentan was almost surrounded with water, for the tides ran far inland, making any attempt to pass that way from the Côtentin hazardous and difficult. A grand scheme was once mooted to build a large dike which should protect these meadows, but the much more reasonable scheme of drainage was tried, and has succeeded. Instead of being marsh land, the flat stretches now serve for pasturage. The town has been no less than twelve times taken by the English, in addition to which it suffered in the religious wars of the seventeenth century. It is now a flourishing port, carrying on an enormous trade in butter, of which the exports in one year to Southampton alone were equal to 15,000,000 francs! Isigny, which stands a little eastward, is the chief butter-producer, so much so that the name Isigny butter has come to be a synonym for good quality. We have now reached that strange peninsula, which, with exception of a strip along the eastern side, is almost all of granite; the coast town La Hogue marks the transition from the one sort of coast to the other. We have dealt so fully with the Côtentin and with its continuation on the west to the little stream Couesnon, that it is of no use to say more here. We would merely remark that the action of waste by the sea can be seen strikingly on the western side, where the peninsula meets the full winds of the Atlantic. History says, though the statement may be accepted with caution, that at one time Jersey was severed only by a narrow channel from the mainland; if this is so, then without doubt, at some far distant geological epoch, the whole of the peninsula will be worn away to one thin strip of sandy beach, like those arms we see extending for miles along the northern coasts of Germany. 180

181

CHAPTER XII

UP THE SEINE

A great river always exercises an attraction upon a certain class of people, and when that river is lined by historic towns and flows through beautiful country, it cannot fail to be attractive to everyone. As we have said, the Seine belongs to France rather than Normandy; very French are the views of its olive green flood, with the blue-green fringe of poplars, and the cliff-like scarred banks to be seen so continually in its course; but yet in some of the towns we shall pass, especially the smaller ones, there still lingers the breath of things Norman.



QUAI ST CATHERINE, HONFLEUR

The mouth between the two similarly named towns of Harfleur and Honfleur is very wide, but not good for navigation, for it is filled with perpetually shifting sandbanks, which try the mariners' patience to the utmost. For this reason there was made that canal from Havre to Tancarville which ensures at all events a certain passage. The wide funnel-like mouth narrowing suddenly near at the corner by Quillebœuf, and again below, is the cause of the great mascaret, or wave of the high tide which sweeps up occasionally as far as Caudebec; this is a great wall of water, higher or lower according to the force of the wind and the strength of the tide, which together combine to produce it. The bar or line which sweeps up first is the advance-guard of an unusually high tide, which will carry destruction to all small or badly managed boats. The mascaret is regularly reckoned among the sights of Caudebec. 183

It is magnificent in its impetuous flow, coming on in irresistible force, the water turning, writhing, and twisting under the impetus, with a fringe of foam outlined on the indigo slopes—a strenuous thing, living, growling, hungry for its prey.

As the wide mouth of the river contracts a little, the ruined castle of Tancarville is seen standing on its precipitous cliff. This belonged to the Sires de Tancarville, one of the proud Norman families who held the hereditary chamberlainship of the dukedom of Normandy. The last of the line was killed on the field of Agincourt, and the name, disguised as Tankerville, is held by an English peer. The chateau as it is now, consists partly of the ruins of the ancient chateau, to which is attached the new chateau, so called. The older parts date from the twelfth century, the newer from the eighteenth. The gateway is still imposing, with its two flanking towers; and the small dungeon-like rooms with iron-barred windows, in which the unhappy prisoners were kept, can be seen. Most of the building is, however, of the later date. The towers, by their name, suggest the wild, stirring days of old; we have la Tour de l'Aigle, la Tour du Diable or du Lion, and la Tour Coquesart. In the keep is a well three hundred feet deep. Quillebœuf, from its position on a rock stretching out into the flood, was at one time a place of no small strategic importance. 184

Opposite is Lillebonne, charmingly situated amid woods, and owning one event of historical importance which gives it dignity. It was in the castle of Lillebonne that William held the celebrated council, in which it was finally decided he should attempt the subjugation of England. That Lillebonne has been of importance from very ancient times, is shown by its splendidly preserved Roman theatre, which is celebrated throughout all the world of antiquaries. The ruins are now overgrown, but that the place could easily accommodate 3000 spectators is apparent. Near the theatre are the remains of William's castle; but ruins of this sort are so common in Normandy, that they hardly provoke comment. After this the river takes its first great bend before Caudebec;

nothing is more curious than the amazing sinuosity of the Seine, which forms loops and horseshoes of extraordinary length.

Caudebec is one of the most charming of the small Norman towns, and is beloved of artists; unfortunately, as it advances in fame it loses that unsophisticated innocence which was one of its delights. The church is so magnificent that it merits the designation cathedral, and the quaintness of the ancient timber houses leaning over the narrow street, down which, as in all mediæval cities, a stream runs to carry off the refuse and drainage, is part of the delight of this little place. 185

The forests that line the Seine, sometimes on one side and sometimes on another, from this point onward, merit a special word. Wonderful are they, rising high on wooded slopes or stretching over acres of flat country. Some, as those opposite Jumièges, are of beech almost entirely, with a sprinkling of dark evergreens; others are varied. There are forests of firs penetrated by "rides cut as straight as rulers" through a chunk of solid tree-growth; there are others so mixed up with intertwining creeper that to penetrate them would be impossible.

Jumièges is in exactly the place where you would expect to find an abbey. They loved a broad encircling river those old monks, they loved to be surrounded by wide forests, to build on low ground: their idea was defence, not aggression; the peace of those who are passed by, not of those whose strength defies invaders.

We must cross the Seine somewhere, and we cross it at Jumièges, in an open boat, for there is no bridge. And not long before the crossing we have caught our first glimpse of those twin towers, so unlike anything we have seen before. And when we reach the abbey and walk in that grand ruined nave, the feeling is rather one of increased exaltation than of the disappointment nearer vision so often brings. If we had to choose one word to express the quality here wrought into stone, it would be stateliness. The abbey stands roofless and serene, a mighty nave with two western towers, which, beginning squarely, end by being octagonal, with the walls in four stages, and with a chancel arch which, for height and grace, has hardly ever been surpassed. 186

Long before the days of the mighty William whose name overshadows the land, before the time when his ancestors had taken root in the country, a monk named Philibert settled in this place with his small following, to lead a life of peace and order, amid the wildness and ignorance of the ninth century.

But even this well-chosen spot was not secluded enough to save him from the marauding northmen; the very river, which had seemed a safeguard, was its undoing, for the pirates came up the river and found the spot, and utterly destroyed all Philibert's labour. But as the years passed, and the northmen settled down, no longer as pirates but landholders; as Christianity claimed their king, William Longsword, the abbey was rebuilt on a much grander scale. Edward the Confessor spent his exiled boyhood at Jumièges, and when he came to the throne he made the learned abbot Robert, Bishop of London, and subsequently Archbishop of Canterbury, an appointment that did not prove a success.



CAUDEBEC-EN-CAUX

In the fourteenth century the library at Jumièges was one of the most notable in the land. Till 1790 this abbey continued whole, and sheltered a household of five hundred persons, including monks. It is now the property of a French lady, who permits visitors to see over the ruins with a caretaker. Not far off is Duclair, and the greater part of Duclair lies along the front of the river. It certainly lacks beauty, and after Caudebec the contrast is striking; but Duclair has interest. Its high chalk cliffs are imposing in their sheer precipitousness, and the deep, dark caverns, used as dwellings which are made in their sides, are weird and uncanny. One of these cliffs, from its size and shape, is called the Chair of Gargantua. With another immense dip southward, and corresponding rise, we come to Rouen, with its islands, and its bridges, and its busy life. 187

The end of the next horseshoe brings us within a few kilometres of the preceding one, and once more we double back on our tracks to reach Pont de l'Arche, an attractive place, much patronised by artists, above which the Eure joins the Seine. On the former river, only about nine miles away, is Louviers, with a magnificent church, celebrated for its decorated porch, which rivals those at Rouen. Continuing in the main stream of the Seine, we come soon to the range of chalk cliffs which leads up to Chateau-Gaillard. Many of these might be castles themselves, so curious is the effect of the rough, grey rock, outcropping suddenly from the green turf. The even strata look remarkably like lines of stonework laid by hand, and the general ruggedness and hoariness are just that which ruins gain by time and exposure, and at first it is difficult to distinguish the castle itself, so closely does it resemble the rock on which it stands. 188

Chateau-Gaillard was built by Richard I., as an outpost or defence on the Seine below Rouen, and it was instantly recognised by the King of France as being the key to Normandy; while the castle stood untaken, no one could hope to approach Rouen with any chance of success. Standing as it did on the borders of Normandy and France, it was many times a meeting-place for the two kings, when fair words were spoken and promises made, only to be broken and renewed. It was not until after the death of Richard, when John's dastardly act had alienated from him all who were not dependent on him, that Philip advanced against it. It was held by Roger de Lacy, a man of known courage, and it was well prepared for a siege. Among the defences were a stockade across the river and a fort upon the island in midstream. But by encamping on the further shore of the river, Philip managed to break down the stockade, and replace it by a pontoon or bridge, thus he could surround the island fort; but even John the Shifty could not see one of the noblest castles in his dominions so attacked without an effort at succour. He planned well. A part of his force was to fall by night upon the French camp on the left bank of the Seine, and at the same time a flotilla of boats was to attack the pontoon. Unfortunately the ebbing tide, combined with the strong current, prevented the flotilla's arrival in time. The land troops did their part, and so fiercely were the French attacked that they fled across their bridge, but they rallied and returned, and, overcoming their foes, were ready to meet the English boats when they appeared. It is a gallant fight to 189

picture, under the clear sky of an August night. The first alarm, the scurried retreat, the stumbling, and slipping, and scrambling of the terrified fugitives. The straining into the darkness of the men on the island-fort, who could not conjecture what was going on. The clash of steel, the splash of water, the cry as one went down, the breathless expectation in the air. Then the pulling together of the demoralised Frenchmen by one or two strong officers, the reforming and recrossing the now swaying and half-broken bridge, the stringing up of those half-beaten troops to face the foe, the struggle, the sense of victory, the final rout; but that was not the end; after having reformed and repulsed the boats, the Frenchmen, drunk with the wine of victory, set fire to the island-fort, and seized it also, while the defenders fled in terror, and joined by the whole population of the little village, now left defenceless, demanded admittance and refuge at the castle gates. A desperate picture truly. And above, overhanging the flood on its rock, the saucy castle was watching, crouching, eager, expectant. Had friend or foe won the fight? Was relief at hand? There would be no eye closed within the walls that night, and then would come the hurried knocking, the parley, the admittance of the fugitives with their disastrous tidings, and with the first grey light would come the confirmation of despair, when the French bridge was seen repaired and intact; and alas, not the bridge only, but the island in the hands of the enemy!

190

After this one attempt—in which, however, he seems to have played no personal part—John made no effort to relieve his gallant castle; though he was at Rouen in November, and sent a letter to the commander in ambiguous language, a letter to chill the hearts of those who bore arms for him. Nevertheless, the garrison held out until March 6th in the next year, 1204, and with its fall the fate of Normandy was sealed. Chateau-Gaillard is the jewel that makes the fame of both Les Andelys, but there are other things to be seen here also, a fine church in each place, and at Le Grand Andely a splendid old sixteenth-century house, now used as an hotel. Poussin the painter was a native; he was born in 1594, and he must have had plenty of opportunity for the exercise of his talent in the scenery around his home.

It is impossible to mention Les Andelys without at the same time referring to Gisors, which lies some fifteen miles eastward, on a feeder of the Seine, called the Epte. Gisors is not in itself an interesting town; its main street is dull, its river is of the sluggish, canal-like variety, its streets lack pretty peeps; but all is atoned for by the beautiful ruin of its castle, which is well and worthily made use of. It stands high behind the main street, and is not readily seen. But the grounds enclosed by the still strong and perfect wall are open as a public park, and on the soft green grass, beneath many shady trees, countless hosts of children daily play. There is no attempt to keep the place too stringently; the grass grows long, and may be trodden underfoot. The grey hoary keep rises high, to give character and dignity to the scene; and behind, outside the walls, is a magnificent wood. The castle was built by Rufus, added to by his successor, and repaired by Henry II. It, with Chateau-Gaillard, was one of the castles on the outer line of defence of the duchy lying in that much-disputed ground, with the appropriate name of Le Vexin, and it stood many a siege. There were two surrounding walls to be taken before the stronghold; the keep could even be assailed, and Gisors must have been a tough nut to crack. The whole district is full of the ruins of castles showing the perpetual state of warfare and uncertainty which must have prevailed.

191

Returning to our river, we soon come to Vernon, the very last town in Normandy, chiefly known on account of its forest and its seven-arched bridge. With this we take leave of Normandy, over which we have wandered in so desultory a way, gathering impressions, examining some things in detail, leaving others aside, but all the while intent on gaining an insight into that character and individuality which marks the country. We have found it in the west still preserving traces of its rulers, who made its fame; to the east, almost wholly French. We have found it full of variety and delight, full of historical interest, and that mostly of a far past generation.

192

Transcribers' Notes

Simple typographical errors were corrected.

Punctuation, hyphenation, and spelling were made consistent when a predominant preference was found in this book; otherwise they were not changed, except as noted below.

Page [3](#): “probably be surprise at” was printed that way.

Page [10](#): “par un bras” was misquoted as “pas un bras”, and “Son voisin” was misquoted as “Se voisin”; both changed here.

Page [167](#): “Si Dieu plaît” was misprinted as “plâit”; changed here.

Page [174](#): “Pierre Lôtis” perhaps should be “Pierre Loti’s”.

Page [177](#): “lowering mass” was printed that way.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NORMANDY ***

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