

Normandy, Part 1 - The Scenery & Romance Of Its Ancient Towns

Gordon Home

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The Scenery & Romance Of Its Ancient Towns

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NORMANDY:

THE SCENERY & ROMANCE OF ITS ANCIENT TOWNS:

DEPICTED BY GORDON HOME

Part 1.

PREFACE

This book is not a guide. It is an attempt to convey by pictures and description a clear impression of the Normandy which awaits the visitor.

The route described could, however, be followed without covering the same ground for more than five or six miles, and anyone choosing to do this would find in his path some of the richest architecture and scenery that

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the province possesses.

As a means of reviving memories of past visits to Normandy, I may perhaps venture to hope that the illustrations of this book--as far as the reproductions are successful--may not be ineffectual.

GORDON HOME

EPSOM, _October_ 1905

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This is typical of the poplar-bordered roads of Normandy.

THE CHATEAU GAILLARD FROM THE ROAD BY THE SEINE

The village of Le Petit Andely appears below the castle rock, and is partly hidden by the island. The chalk cliffs on the left often look like ruined walls.

A TYPICAL REACH OF THE SEINE BETWEEN ROUEN AND LE PETIT ANDELY

On one side great chalk cliffs rise precipitously, and on the other are broad flat pastures.

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THE TOUR DE LA GROSSE HORLOGE, ROUEN

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Showing a peep of the Portail de la Calende, and some of the quaint houses of the oldest part of the City.

THE CATHEDRAL OF EVREUX SEEN FROM ABOVE

On the right, just where the light touches some of the roofs of the houses, the fine old belfry can be seen.

A TYPICAL FARMYARD SCENE IN NORMANDY

The curious little thatched mushroom above the cart is to be found in most of the Norman farms.

THE BRIDGE AT BEAUMONT-LE-ROGER

On the steep hill beyond stands the ruined abbey church.

IN THE RUE AUX FEVRES, LISIEUX

The second tiled gable from the left belongs to the fine sixteenth century house called the Manoir de Francois I.

THE CHURCH OF ST JACQUES AT LISIEUX

One of the quaint umber fronted houses for which the town is famous appears on the left.

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The favourite stronghold of William the Conqueror.

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A thirteenth century gateway that overlooks the steep valley of the Ante.

THE CHATEAU D'O

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THE GREAT WESTERN TOWERS OF THE CHURCH OF NOTRE DAME AT ST LO

They are of different dates, and differ in the arcading and other ornament.

THE NORMAN TOWERS OF BAYEUX CATHEDRAL

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OUISTREHAM

LIST OF LINE ILLUSTRATIONS

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THE OLD MARKET HOUSE AT ECOUCHE

ONE OF THE TOWERS IN THE WALLS OF DOMFRONT

THE CHETELET AND LA MERVFILLE AT MONT ST MICHEL

The dark opening through the archway on the left is the main entrance to the Abbey. On the right can be seen the tall narrow windows that light the three floors of Abbot Jourdain's great work.

AN ANCIENT HOUSE IN THE RUE ST MALO, BAYEUX

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CHAPTER I

Some Features of Normandy

Very large ants, magpies in every meadow, and coffee-cups without handles, but of great girth, are some of the objects that soon become familiar to

strangers who wander in that part of France which was at one time as much part of England as any of the counties of this island. The ants and the coffee-cups certainly give one a sense of being in a foreign land, but when one wanders through the fertile country among the thatched villages and farms that so forcibly remind one of Devonshire, one feels a friendliness in the landscapes that scarcely requires the stimulus of the kindly attitude of the peasants towards *_les anglais_*.

If one were to change the dark blue smock and the peculiar peaked hat of the country folk of Normandy for the less distinctive clothes of the English peasant, in a very large number of cases the Frenchmen would pass as English. The Norman farmer so often has features strongly typical of the southern counties of England, that it is surprising that with his wife and his daughters there should be so little resemblance. Perhaps this is because the French women dress their hair in such a different manner to those on the northern side of the Channel, and they certainly, taken as a whole, dress with better effect than their English neighbours; or it may be that the similar ideas prevailing among the men as to how much of the face should be shaved have given the stronger sex an artificial resemblance.

In the towns there is little to suggest in any degree that the mediaeval kings of England ruled this large portion of France, and at Mont St Michel the only English objects besides the ebb and flow of tourists are the two great iron *_michelettes_* captured by the French in 1433. Everyone who comes to the wonderful rock is informed that these two guns are English; but as they have been there for nearly five hundred years, no one feels much shame at seeing them in captivity, and only a very highly specialised antiquary would be able to recognise any British features in them. Everyone, however, who visits Normandy from England with any enthusiasm, is familiar with the essential features of Norman and early pointed architecture, and it is thus with distinct pleasure that the churches are often found to be strikingly similar to some of the finest examples of the earlier periods in England.

When we remember that the Norman masons and master-builders had been improving the crude Saxon architecture in England even before the Conquest, and that, during the reigns of the Norman kings, "Frenchmen," as the Saxons called them, were working on churches and castles in every part of our island, it is no matter for surprise to find that buildings belonging to the eleventh, twelfth, and even the thirteenth century, besides being of similar general design, are often covered with precisely the same patterns of ornament. When the period of Decorated Gothic began to prevail towards the end of the thirteenth century, the styles on each side of the Channel gradually diverged, so that after that time the English periods do not agree with those of Normandy. There is also, even in the churches that most resemble English structures, a strangeness that assails one unless familiarity has taken the edge off one's perceptions. Though not the case with all the fine churches and cathedrals of Normandy, yet with an unpleasantly large proportion--unfortunately including the magnificent Church of St Ouen at Rouen--there is beyond the gaudy tinsel that crowds the altars, an untidiness that detracts from the sense of reverence that stately Norman or Gothic does not fail to inspire. In the north transept of St Ouen, some of the walls and pillars have at various times been made to bear large printed notices which have been pasted down, and when out of date they have been only roughly torn off, leaving fragments that soon become discoloured and seriously mar the dignified antiquity of the stone-work. But beyond this, one finds that the great black stands for candles that burn beside the altars are generally streaked with the wax that has guttered from a dozen flames, and that even the floor is covered with lumps of wax--the countless stains of only partially scraped-up

gutterings of past offerings. There is also that peculiarly unpleasant smell so often given out by the burning wax that greets one on entering the cool twilight of the building. The worn and tattered appearance of the rush-seated chairs in the churches is easily explained when one sees the almost constant use to which they are put. In the morning, or even as late as six in the evening, one finds classes of boys or girls being catechised and instructed by priests and nuns. The visitor on pushing open the swing door of an entrance will frequently be met by a monotonous voice that echoes through the apparently empty church. As he slowly takes his way along an aisle, the voice will cease, and suddenly break out in a simple but loudly sung Gregorian air, soon joined by a score or more of childish voices; then, as the stranger comes abreast of a side chapel, he causes a grave distraction among the rows of round, closely cropped heads. The rather nasal voice from the sallow figure in the cassock rises higher, and as the echoing footsteps of the person who does nothing but stare about him become more and more distant, the sing-song tune grows in volume once more, and the rows of little French boys are again in the way of becoming good Catholics. In another side chapel the confessional box bears a large white card on which is printed in bold letters, "M. le Cure." He is on duty at the present time, for, from behind the curtained lattices, the stranger hears a soft mumble of words, and he is constrained to move silently towards the patch of blazing whiteness that betokens the free air and sunshine without. The cheerful clatter of the traffic on the cobbles is typical of all the towns of Normandy, as it is of the whole republic, but Caen has reduced this form of noise by exchanging its omnibuses, that always suggested trams that had left the rails, for swift electric trams that only disturb the streets by their gongs. In Rouen, the electric cars, which the Britisher rejoices to discover were made in England--the driver being obliged to read the positions of his levers in English--are a huge boon to everyone who goes sight-seeing in that city. Being swept along in a smoothly running car is certainly preferable to jolting one's way over the uneven paving on a bicycle, but it is only in the largest towns that one has such a choice.

Although the only road that is depicted in this book is as straight as any built by the Romans and is bordered by poplars, it is only one type of the great routes nationales that connect the larger towns. In the hilly parts of Normandy the poplar bordered roads entirely disappear, and however straight the engineers may have tried to make their ways, they have been forced to give them a zig-zag on the steep slopes that breaks up the monotony of the great perspectives so often to be seen stretching away for great distances in front and behind. It must not be imagined that Normandy is without the usual winding country road where every bend has beyond it some possibilities in the way of fresh views. An examination of a good road map of the country will show that although the straight roads are numerous, there are others that wind and twist almost as much as the average English turnpike. As a rule, the route nationale is about the same width as most main roads, but it has on either side an equal space of grass. This is frequently scraped off by the cantoniers, and the grass is placed in great piles ready for removal. When these have been cleared away the thoroughfare is of enormous width, and in case of need, regiments could march in the centre with artillery on one side, and a supply train on the other, without impeding one another.

Level crossings for railways are more frequent than bridges. The gates are generally controlled by women in the family sort of fashion that one sees at the lodge of an English park where a right-of-way exists, and yet accidents do not seem to happen.

The railways of Normandy are those of the Chemin de Fer de l'Ouest, and one soon becomes familiar with the very low platforms of the stations that are raised scarcely above the rails. The porters wear blue smocks and trousers of the same material, secured at the waist by a belt of perpendicular red and black stripes. The railway carriages have always two foot-boards, and the doors besides the usual handles have a second one half-way down the panels presumably for additional security. It is really in the nature of a bolt that turns on a pivot and falls into a bracket. On the doors, the class of the carriages is always marked in heavy Roman numerals. The third-class compartments have windows only in the doors, are innocent of any form of cushions and are generally only divided half-way up. The second and first-class compartments are always much better and will bear comparison with those of the best English railways, whereas the usual third-class compartment is of that primitive type abandoned twenty or more years ago, north of the Channel. The locomotives are usually dirty and black with outside cylinders, and great drum-shaped steam-domes. They seem to do the work that is required of them efficiently, although if one is travelling in a third-class compartment the top speed seems extraordinarily slow. The railway officials handle bicycles with wonderful care, and this is perhaps remarkable when we realize that French railways carry them any distance simply charging a penny for registration.

The hotels of Normandy are not what they were twenty years ago. Improvements in sanitation have brought about most welcome changes, so that one can enter the courtyard of most hotels without being met by the aggressive odours that formerly jostled one another for space. When you realize the very large number of English folk who annually pass from town to town in Normandy it may perhaps be wondered why the proprietors of hotels do not take the trouble to prepare a room that will answer to the drawing-room of an English hotel. After dinner in France, a lady has absolutely no choice between a possible seat in the courtyard and her bedroom, for the estaminet generally contains a group of noisy Frenchmen, and even if it is vacant the room partakes too much of the character of a bar-parlour to be suitable for ladies. Except in the large hotels in Rouen I have only found one which boasts of any sort of room besides the estaminet; it was the Hotel des Trois Marie at Argentan. When this defect has been remedied, I can imagine that English people will tour in Normandy more than they do even at the present time. The small washing basin and jug that apologetically appears upon the bedroom washstand has still an almost universal sway, and it is not sufficiently odd to excuse itself on the score of picturesqueness. Under that heading come the tiled floors in the bedrooms, the square and mountainous eiderdowns that recline upon the beds, and the matches that take several seconds to ignite and leave a sulphurous odour that does not dissipate itself for several minutes.

CHAPTER II

By the Banks of the Seine

If you come to Normandy from Southampton, France is entered at the mouth of the Seine and you are at once introduced to some of the loveliest scenery that Normandy possesses. The headland outside Havre is composed of ochreish rock which appears in patches where the grass will not grow. The heights are occupied by no less than three lighthouses only one of which is now in use. As the ship gets closer, a great spire appears round the cliff in the

silvery shimmer of the morning haze and then a thousand roofs reflect the sunlight.

There are boats from Havre that take passengers up the winding river to Rouen and in this way much of the beautiful scenery may be enjoyed. By this means, however, the country appears as only a series of changing pictures and to see anything of the detail of such charming places as Caudebec, and Lillebonne, or the architectural features of Tancarville Castle and the Abbey of Jumieges, the road must be followed instead of the more leisurely river.

Havre with its great docks, its busy streets, and fast electric tramcars that frighten away foot passengers with noisy motor horns does not compel a very long stay, although one may chance to find much interest among the shipping, when such vessels as Mr Vanderbilt's magnificent steam yacht, without a mark on its spotless paint, is lying in one of the inner basins. If you wander up and down some of the old streets by the harbour you will find more than one many-storied house with shutters brightly painted, and dormers on its ancient roof. The church of Notre Dame in the Rue de Paris has a tower that was in earlier times a beacon, and it was here that three brothers named Raoulin who had been murdered by the governor Villars in 1599, are buried.

On the opposite side of the estuary of the Seine, lies Honfleur with its extraordinary church tower that stands in the market-place quite detached from the church of St Catherine to which it belongs. It is entirely constructed of timber and has great struts supporting the angles of its walls. The houses along the quay have a most paintable appearance, their overhanging floors and innumerable windows forming a picturesque background to the fishing-boats.

Harfleur, on the same side of the river as Havre, is on the road to Tancarville. We pass through it on our way to Caudebec. The great spire of the church, dating from the fifteenth century, rears itself above this ancient port where the black-sailed ships of the Northmen often appeared in the early days before Rollo had forced Charles the Simple (he should have been called "The Straightforward") to grant him the great tract of French territory that we are now about to explore.

The Seine, winding beneath bold cliffs on one side and along the edge of flat, rich meadowlands on the other, comes near the magnificent ruin of Tancarville Castle whose walls enclose an eighteenth century chateau. The situation on an isolated chalk cliff one hundred feet high was more formidable a century ago than it is to-day, for then the Seine ran close beneath the forbidding walls, while now it has changed its course somewhat. The entrance to the castle is approached under the shadow of the great circular corner tower that stands out so boldly at one extremity of the buildings, and the gate house has on either side semi-circular towers fifty-two feet in height. Above the archway there are three floors sparingly lighted by very small windows, one to each storey. They point out the first floor as containing the torture chamber, and in the towers adjoining are the hopelessly strong prisons. The iron bars are still in the windows and in one instance the positions of the rings to which the prisoners were chained are still visible.

There are still floors in the Eagle's tower that forms the boldest portion of the castle, and it is a curious feature that the building is angular inside although perfectly cylindrical on the exterior. Near the chateau you may see the ruined chapel and the remains of the Salle des Chevaliers with

its big fireplace. Then higher than the entrance towers is the Tour Coquesart built in the fifteenth century and having four storeys with a fireplace in each. The keep is near this, but outside the present castle and separated from it by a moat. The earliest parts of the castle all belong to the eleventh century, but so much destruction was wrought by Henry V. in 1417 that the greater part of the ruins belong to a few years after that date. The name of Tancarville had found a place among the great families of England before the last of the members of this distinguished French name lost his life at the battle of Agincourt. The heiress of the family married one of the Harcourts and eventually the possessions came into the hands of Dunois the Bastard of Orleans.

From Tancarville there is a road that brings you down to that which runs from Quilleboeuf, and by it one is soon brought to the picturesquely situated little town of Lillebonne, famous for its Roman theatre. It was the capital of the Caletes and was known as Juliabona, being mentioned in the iters of Antoninus. The theatre is so well known that no one has difficulty in finding it, and compared to most of the Roman remains in England, it is well worth seeing. The place held no fewer than three thousand people upon the semi-circular tiers of seats that are now covered with turf. Years ago, there was much stone-work to be seen, but this has largely disappeared, and it is only in the upper portions that many traces of mason's work are visible. A passage runs round the upper part of the theatre and the walls are composed of narrow stones that are not much larger than bricks.

The great castle was built by William the Norman, and it was here that he gathered together his barons to mature and work out his project which made him afterwards William the Conqueror. It will be natural to associate the fine round tower of the castle with this historic conference, but unfortunately, it was only built in the fourteenth century. From more than one point of view Lillebonne makes beautiful pictures, its roofs dominated by the great tower of the parish church as well as by the ruins of the castle.

We have lost sight of the Seine since we left Tancarville, but a ten-mile run brings us to the summit of a hill overlooking Caudebec and a great sweep of the beautiful river. The church raises its picturesque outline against the rolling white clouds, and forms a picture that compels admiration. On descending into the town, the antiquity and the quaintness of sixteenth century houses greet you frequently, and you do not wonder that Caudebec has attracted so many painters. There is a wide quay, shaded by an avenue of beautiful trees, and there are views across the broad, shining waters of the Seine, which here as in most of its length attracts us by its breadth. The beautiful chalk hills drop steeply down to the water's edge on the northern shores in striking contrast to the flatness of the opposite banks. On the side of the river facing Caudebec, the peninsula enclosed by the windings of the Seine includes the great forest of Brotonne, and all around the town, the steep hills that tumble picturesquely on every side, are richly clothed with woods, so that with its architectural delights within, and its setting of forest, river and hill, Caudebec well deserves the name it has won for itself in England as well as in France.

Just off the road to Rouen from Caudebec and scarcely two miles away, is St Wandrille, situated in a charming hollow watered by the Fontanelle, a humble tributary of the great river. In those beautiful surroundings stand the ruins of the abbey church, almost entirely dating from the thirteenth century. Much destruction was done during the Revolution, but there is

enough of the south transept and nave still in existence to show what the complete building must have been. In the wonderfully preserved cloister which is the gem of St Wandrille, there are some beautiful details in the doorway leading from the church, and there is much interest in the refectory and chapter house.

Down in the piece of country included in a long and narrow loop of the river stand the splendid ruins of the abbey of Jumieges with its three towers that stand out so conspicuously over the richly wooded country. When you get to the village and are close to the ruins of the great Benedictine abbey, you are not surprised that it was at one time numbered amongst the richest and most notable of the monastic foundations. The founder was St Philibert, but whatever the buildings which made their appearance in the seventh century may have been, is completely beyond our knowledge, for Jumieges was situated too close to the Seine to be overlooked by the harrying ship-loads of pirates from the north, who in the year 851 demolished everything. William Longue-Epee, son of Rollo the great leader of these Northmen, curiously enough commenced the rebuilding of the abbey, and it was completed in the year of the English conquest. Nearly the whole of the nave and towers present a splendid example of early Norman architecture, and it is much more inspiring to look upon the fine west front of this ruin than that of St Etienne at Caen which has an aspect so dull and uninspiring. The great round arches of the nave are supported by pillars which have the early type of capital distinguishing eleventh century work. The little chapel of St Pierre adjoining the abbey church is particularly interesting on account of the western portion which includes some of that early work built in the first half of the tenth century by William Longue-Epee. The tombstone of Nicholas Lerour, the abbot who was among the judges by whom the saintly Joan of Arc was condemned to death, is to be seen with others in the house which now serves as a museum. Associated with the same tragedy is another tombstone, that of Agnes Sorel, the mistress of Charles VII., that heartless king who made no effort to save the girl who had given him his throne.

Jumieges continued to be a perfectly preserved abbey occupied by its monks and hundreds of persons associated with them until scarcely more than a century ago. It was then allowed to go to complete ruin, and no restrictions seem to have been placed upon the people of the neighbourhood who as is usual under such circumstances, used the splendid buildings as a storehouse of ready dressed stone.

Making our way back to the highway, we pass through beautiful scenery, and once more reach the banks of the Seine at the town of Duclair which stands below the escarpment of chalk hills. There are wharves by the river-side which give the place a thriving aspect, for a considerable export trade is carried on in dairy produce.

After following the river-side for a time, the road begins to cut across the neck of land between two bends of the Seine. It climbs up towards the forest of Roumare and passes fairly close to the village of St Martin de Boscherville where the church of St George stands out conspicuously on its hillside. This splendid Norman building is the church of the Abbey built in the middle of the eleventh century by Raoul de Tancarville who was William's Chamberlain at the time of the conquest of England. The abbey buildings are now in ruins but the church has remained almost untouched during the eight centuries and more which have passed during which Normandy was often bathed in blood, and when towns and castles were sacked two or three times over. When the forest of Roumare, has been left behind, you come to Canteleu, a little village that stands at the top of a steep hill,

commanding a huge view over Rouen, the historic capital of Normandy. You can see the shipping lying in the river, the factories, the spire of the cathedral, and the many church towers as well as the light framework of the modern moving bridge. This is the present day representative of the fantastic mediaeval city that witnessed the tragedy of Joan of Arc's trial and martyrdom. We will pass Rouen now, returning to it again in the next chapter.

The river for some distance becomes frequently punctuated with islands. Large extents of forest including those of Rouvray, Bonde and Elbeuf, spread themselves over the high ground to the west. The view from above Elbeuf in spite of its many tall chimney shafts includes such a fine stretch of fertile country that the scene is not easily forgotten.

Following the windings of the river through Pont-de-L'Arche and the forest of Louviers we come to that pleasant old town; but although close to the Seine, it stands on the little river Eure. Louviers remains in the memory as a town whose church is more crowded with elaborately carved stone-work than any outside Rouen. There is something rather odd, in the close juxtaposition of the Hotel Mouton d'Argent with its smooth plastered front and the almost overpowering mass of detail that faces it on the other side of the road. There is something curious, too, in the severe plainness of the tower that almost suggests the unnecessarily shabby clothing worn by some men whose wives are always to be seen in the most elaborate and costly gowns. Internally the church shows its twelfth century origin, but all the intricate stone-work outside belongs to the fifteenth century. The porch which is, if possible, richer than the buttresses of the aisles, belongs to the flamboyant period, and actually dates from the year 1496. In the clerestory there is much sixteenth century glass and the aisles which are low and double give a rather unusual appearance.

The town contains several quaint and ancient houses, one of them supported by wooden posts projects over the pavement, another at the corner of the Marche des Oeufs has a very rich though battered piece of carved oak at the angle of the walls. It seems as if it had caught the infection of the extraordinary detail of the church porch. Down by the river there are many timber-framed houses with their foundations touching the water, with narrow wooden bridges crossing to the warehouses that line the other side. The Place de Rouen has a shady avenue of limes leading straight down to a great house in a garden beyond which rise wooded hills. Towards the river runs another avenue of limes trimmed squarely on top. These are pleasant features of so many French towns that make up for some of the deficiencies in other matters.

We could stay at Louviers for some time without exhausting all its attractions, but ten miles away at the extremity of another deep loop of the Seine there stands the great and historic Chateau-Gaillard that towers above Le Petit-Andely, the pretty village standing invitingly by a cleft in the hills. The road we traverse is that which appears so conspicuously in Turner's great painting of the Chateau-Gaillard. It crosses the bridge close under the towering chalk cliffs where the ruin stands so boldly. There is a road that follows the right bank of the river close to the railway, and it is from there that one of the strangest views of the castle is to be obtained. You may see it thrown up by a blaze of sunlight against the grassy heights behind that are all dark beneath the shadow of a cloud. The stone of the towers and heavily buttressed walls appears almost as white as the chalk which crops out in the form of cliffs along the river-side. An island crowded with willows that overhang the water partially hides the village of Le Petit-Andely, and close at hand above the

steep slopes of grass that rise from the roadway tower great masses of gleaming white chalk projecting from the vivid turf as though they were the worn ruins of other castles. The whiteness is only broken by the horizontal lines of flints and the blue-grey shadows that fill the crevices.

From the hill above the Chateau there is another and even more striking view. It is the one that appears in Turner's picture just mentioned, and gives one some idea of the magnificent position that Richard Coeur de Lion chose, when in 1197 he decided to build an impregnable fortress on this bend of the Seine. It was soon after his return from captivity which followed the disastrous crusade that Richard commenced to show Philippe Auguste that he was determined to hold his French possessions with his whole strength. Philippe had warned John when the news of the release of the lion-hearted king from captivity had become known, that "the devil was unchained," and the building of this castle showed that Richard was making the most of his opportunities. The French king was, with some justification, furious with his neighbour, for Richard had recently given his word not to fortify this place, and some fierce fighting would have ensued on top of the threats which the monarchs exchanged, but for the death of the English king in 1199. When John assumed the crown of England, however, Philippe soon found cause to quarrel with him, and thus the great siege of the castle was only postponed for three or four years. The French king brought his army across the peninsula formed by the Seine, and having succeeded in destroying the bridge beneath the castle, he constructed one for himself with boats and soon afterwards managed to capture the island, despite its strong fortifications. The leader of the English garrison was the courageous Roger de Lacy, Constable of Chester. From his knowledge of the character of his new king, de Lacy would have expected little assistance from the outside and would have relied upon his own resources to defend Richard's masterpiece. John made one attempt to succour the garrison. He brought his army across the level country and essayed to destroy the bridge of boats constructed by the French. This one effort proving unsuccessful he took no other measures to distract the besieging army, and left Roger de Lacy to the undivided attention of the Frenchmen. Then followed a terrible struggle. The French king succeeded in drawing his lines closer to the castle itself and eventually obtained possession of the outer fortifications and the village of Le Petit-Andely, from which the inhabitants fled to the protection of the castle. The governor had no wish to have all his supplies consumed by non-combatants, and soon compelled these defenceless folk to go out of the protection of his huge walls. At first the besiegers seemed to have allowed the people to pass unmolested, but probably realizing the embarrassment they would have been to the garrison, they altered their minds, and drove most of them back to the castle. Here they gained a reception almost as hostile as that of the enemy, and after being shot down by the arrows of the French they remained for days in a starving condition in a hollow between the hostile lines. Here they would all have died of hunger, but Philippe at last took pity on the terrible plight of these defenceless women and children and old folks, and having allowed them a small supply of provisions they were at last released from their ghastly position. Such a tragedy as this lends terrible pathos to the grassy steeps and hollows surrounding the chateau and one may almost be astonished that such callousness could have existed in these days of chivalry.

The siege was continued with rigour and a most strenuous attack was made upon the end of the castle that adjoined the high ground that overlooks the ruins. With magnificent courage the Frenchmen succeeded in mining the walls, and having rushed into the breach they soon made themselves masters of the outer courtyard. Continuing the assault, a small party

of intrepid soldiers gained a foothold within the next series of fortifications, causing the English to retreat to the inner courtyard dominated by the enormous keep. Despite the magnificent resistance offered by de Lacy's men the besiegers raised their engines in front of the gate, and when at last they had forced an entry they contrived a feat that almost seems incredible--they cut off the garrison from their retreat to the keep. Thus this most famous of castles fell within half a dozen years of its completion.

In the hundred years' war the Chateau-Gaillard was naturally one of the centres of the fiercest fighting, and the pages of history are full of references to the sieges and captures of the fortress, proving how even with the most primitive weapons these ponderous and unscalable walls were not as impregnable as they may have seemed to the builders. Like the abbey of Jumieges, this proud structure became nothing more than a quarry, for in the seventeenth century permission was given to two religious houses, one at Le Petit-Andely and the other at Le Grand-Andely to take whatever stone-work they required for their monastic establishments. Records show how more damage would have been done to the castle but for the frequent quarrels between these two religious houses as to their rights over the various parts of the ruins. When you climb up to the ruined citadel and look out of the windows that are now battered and shapeless, you can easily feel how the heart of the bold Richard must have swelled within him when he saw how his castle dominated an enormous belt of country. But you cannot help wondering whether he ever had misgivings over the unwelcome proximity of the chalky heights that rise so closely above the site of the ruin. We ourselves, are inclined to forget these questions of military strength in the serene beauty of the silvery river flowing on its serpentine course past groups of poplars, rich pastures dotted with cattle, forest lands and villages set amidst blossoming orchards. Down below are the warm chocolate-red roofs of the little town that has shared with the chateau its good and evil fortunes. The church with its slender spire occupies the central position, and it dates from precisely the same years as those which witnessed the advent of the fortress above. The little streets of the town are full of quaint timber-framed houses, and it is not surprising that this is one of the spots by the beautiful banks of the Seine that has attained a name for its picturesqueness.

With scarcely any perceptible division Le Grand-Andely joins the smaller village. It stands higher in the valley and is chiefly memorable for its beautiful inn, the Hotel du Grand Cerf. It is opposite the richly ornamented stone-work of the church of Notre Dame and dates chiefly from the sixteenth century. The hall contains a great fireplace, richly ornamented with a renaissance frieze and a fine iron stove-back. The courtyard shows carved timbers and in front the elaborate moulding beneath the eaves is supported by carved brackets. Unlike that old hostelry at Dives which is mentioned in another chapter, this hotel is not over restored, although in the days of a past proprietor the house contained a great number of antiques and its fame attracted many distinguished visitors, including Sir Walter Scott and Victor Hugo.

In writing of the hotel I am likely to forget the splendid painted glass in the church, but details of the stories told in these beautiful works of the sixteenth century are given in all good guides.

There is a pleasant valley behind Les Andelys running up towards the great plateau that occupies such an enormous area of this portion of Normandy. The scenery as you go along the first part of the valley, through the little village of Harquency with its tiny Norman church, and cottages with

thatched roofs all velvety with moss, is very charming. The country is entirely hedge-less, but as you look down upon the rather thirsty-looking valley below the road, the scenery savours much of Kent; the chalky fields, wooded uplands and big, picturesque farms suggesting some of the agricultural districts of the English county. When we join the broad and straight national road running towards Gisors we have reached the tableland just mentioned. There are perhaps, here and there, a group of stately elms, breaking the broad sweep of arable land that extends with no more undulations for many leagues than those of a sheet of old-fashioned glass. The horizon is formed by simply the same broad fields, vanishing in a thin, blue line over the rim of the earth.

[Illustration: THE FORTIFIED FARM NEAR GISORS]

At Les Thilliers, a small hamlet that, owing to situation at cross-roads figures conspicuously upon the milestones of the neighbourhood, the road to Gisors goes towards the east, and after crossing the valley of the Epte, you run down an easy gradient, passing a fine fortified farm-house with circular towers at each corner of its four sides and in a few minutes have turned into the historic old town of Gisors. It is as picturesque as any place in Normandy with the exception of Mont St Michel. The river Epte gliding slowly through its little canals at the sides of some of the streets, forms innumerable pictures when reflecting the quaint houses and gardens whose walls are generally grown over with creepers. Near the ascent to the castle is one of the washing places where the women let their soap suds float away on the translucent water as they scrub vigorously. They kneel upon a long wooden platform sheltered by a charming old roof supported upon a heavy timber framework that is a picture in itself.

If you stay at the Hotel de l'Ecu de France you are quite close to the castle that towers upon its hill right in the middle of the town. Most people who come to Gisors are surprised to find how historic is its castle, and how many have been the conflicts that have taken place around it. The position between Rouen and Paris and on the frontier of the Duchy gave it an importance in the days of the Norman kings that led to the erection of a most formidable stronghold. In the eleventh century, when William Rufus was on the throne of England, he made the place much stronger. Both Henry I. and Henry II. added to its fortifications so that Gisors became in time as formidable a castle as the Chateau Gaillard. During the Hundred Years' War, Gisors, which is often spoken of as the key to Normandy, after fierce struggles had become French. Then again, a determined assault would leave the flag of England fluttering upon its ramparts until again the Frenchmen would contrive to make themselves masters of the place. And so these constant changes of ownership went on until at last about the year 1450, a date which we shall find associated with the fall of every English stronghold in Normandy, Gisors surrendered to Charles VII. and has remained French ever since.

The outer baileys are defended by some great towers of massive Norman masonry from which you look all over the town and surrounding country. But within the inner courtyard rises a great mound dominated by the keep which you may still climb by a solid stone staircase. From here the view is very much finer than from the other towers and its commanding position would seem to give the defenders splendid opportunities for tiring out any besieging force. The concierge of the castle, a genial old woman of gipsy-like appearance takes you down to the fearful dungeon beneath one of the great towers on the eastern side, known as the Tour des Prisonniers. Here you may see the carvings in the stone-work executed by some of the prisoners who had been cast into this black abyss. These carvings include

representations of crucifixes, St Christopher, and many excellently conceived and patiently wrought figures of other saints.

We have already had a fine view of the splendid Renaissance exterior of the church which is dedicated to the Saints Gervais and Protais. The choir is the earliest part of the building. It belongs to the thirteenth century, while the nave and most of the remaining portions date from the fifteenth or sixteenth century. It is a building of intense architectural interest and to some extent rivals the castle in the attention it deserves.

CHAPTER III

Concerning Rouen, the Ancient Capital of Normandy

When whole volumes have been written on Rouen it would be idle to attempt even a fragment of its history in a book of this nature. But all who go to Rouen should know something of its story in order to be able to make the most of the antiquities that the great city still retains. How much we would give to have an opportunity for seeing the Rouen which has vanished, for to-day as we walk along the modern streets there is often nothing to remind us of the centuries crowded with momentous events that have taken place where now the electric cars sweep to and fro and do their best to make one forget the Rouen of mediaeval times.

Of course, no one goes to the city expecting to find ancient walls and towers, or a really strong flavour of the middle ages, any more than one expects to obtain such impressions in the city of London. Rouen, however, contains sufficient relics of its past to convey a powerful impression upon the minds of all who have strong imaginations. There is the cathedral which contains the work of many centuries; there is the beautiful and inspiring church of St Ouen; there is the archway of the Grosse Horloge; there is the crypt of the church of St Gervais, that dates from the dim fifth century; and there are still in the narrow streets between the cathedral and the quays along the river-side, many tall, overhanging houses, whose age appears in the sloping wall surfaces and in the ancient timbers that show themselves under the eaves and between the plaster-work.

Two of the most attractive views in Rouen are illustrated here. One of them shows the Portail de la Calende of the cathedral appearing at the end of a narrow street of antique, gabled houses, while overhead towers the stupendous fleche that forms the most prominent feature of Rouen. The other is the Grosse Horloge and if there had been space for a third it would have shown something of the interior of the church of St Ouen. The view of the city from the hill of Bon Secours forms another imposing feature, but I think that it hardly equals what we have already seen on the road from Caudebec.

When you come out of the railway station known as the _Rive Droite_ a short street leads up to one of the most important thoroughfares, the Rue Jeanne d'Arc. It is perfectly straight and contains nothing in it that is not perfectly modern, but at the highest point you may see a marble tablet affixed to a wall. It bears a representation in the form of a gilded outline of the castle towers as they stood in the time of the Maid of Orleans, and a short distance behind this wall, but approached from another street, there still remains the keep of Rouen's historic castle. The

circular tower contains the room which you may see to-day where Joan was brought before her judges and the instruments of torture by which the saintly maiden was to be frightened into giving careless answers to the questions with which she was plied by her clever judges. This stone vaulted room, although restored, is of thrilling interest to those who have studied the history of Joan of Arc, for, as we are told by Mr Theodore Cook in his "Story of Rouen," these are the only walls which are known to have echoed with her voice.

Those who have made a careful study of the ancient houses in the older streets of Rouen have been successful in tracing other buildings associated with the period of Joan of Arc's trial. The Rue St Romain, that narrow and not very salubrious thoroughfare that runs between the Rue de la Republique and the west front of the cathedral, has still some of the old canons' lodgings where some of the men who judged Joan of Arc actually lived. Among them, was Canon Guillaume le Desert who outlived all his fellow judges. There is still to be seen the house where lived the architect who designed the palace for Henry V. near Mal s'y Frotte. Mr Cook mentions that he has discovered a record which states that the iron cage in which Joan of Arc was chained by her hands, feet and neck was seen by a workman in this very house.

In the quaint and narrow streets that are still existing near the Rue St Romain, many strange-looking houses have survived to the present day. They stand on the site of the earliest nucleus of the present city, and it is in this neighbourhood that one gets most in touch with the Rouen that has so nearly vanished.

In this interesting portion of the city you come across the marvellously rich Grosse Horloge already mentioned. A casual glance would give one the impression that the structure was no older than the seventeenth century, but the actual date of its building is 1529, and the clock itself dates from about 1389, and is as old as any in France. The dial you see to-day is brilliantly coloured and has a red centre while the elaborate decoration that covers nearly the whole surface of the walls is freely gilded, giving an exceedingly rich appearance. The two fourteenth century bells, one known as La Rouvel or the Silver Bell on account of the legend that silver coins were thrown into the mould when it was cast, and the other known as Cache-Ribaut, are still in the tower, La Rouvel being still rung for a quarter of an hour at nine o'clock in the evening. It is the ancient Curfew, and the Tower de la Grosse Horloge is nothing more than the historic belfry of Rouen, although one might imagine by the way it stands over the street on an elliptical arch, that it had formed one of the gates of the city.

At the foot of the belfry is one of those richly sculptured fountains that are to be seen in two or three places in the older streets. The carving is very much blackened with age, and the detail is not very easily discernible, but a close examination will show that the story of Arethusa, and Alpheus, the river-god, is portrayed. The fountain was given to Rouen by the Duke of Luxembourg early in the eighteenth century.

Adjoining the imposing Rue Jeanne d'Arc is the fine Gothic Palais de Justice, part of which was built by Louis XII. in the year 1499, the central portion being added by Leroux, sixteen years later. These great buildings were put up chiefly for the uses of the Echiquier--the supreme court of the Duchy at that time--but it was also to be used as an exchange for merchants who before this date had been in the habit of transacting much of their business in the cathedral. The historic hall where the

Echiquier met is still to be seen. The carved oak of the roof has great gilded pendants that stand out against the blackness of the wood-work, and the Crucifixion presented by Louis XII. may be noticed among the portraits in the Chambre du Conseille.

The earliest portions of the great cathedral of Notre Dame date from the twelfth century, the north tower showing most palpably the transition from Norman work to the Early French style of Gothic. By the year 1255 when Louis IX. came to Rouen to spend Christmas, the choir, transepts and nave of the cathedral, almost as they may be seen to-day, had been completed. The chapel to St Mary did not make its appearance for some years, and the side _portails_ were only added in the fifteenth century. The elaborate work on the west front belongs to the century following, and although the ideas of modern architects have varied as to this portion of the cathedral, the consensus of opinion seems to agree that it is one of the most perfect examples of the flamboyant style so prevalent in the churches of Normandy. The detail of this masterpiece of the latest phase of Gothic architecture is almost bewildering, but the ornament in every place has a purpose, so that the whole mass of detail has a reposeful dignity which can only have been retained by the most consummate skill. The canopied niches are in many instances vacant, but there are still rows of saints in the long lines of recesses. The rose window is a most perfect piece of work; it is filled with painted glass in which strong blues and crimsons are predominant. Above the central tower known as the Tour de Pierre, that was built partially in the thirteenth century, there rises the astonishing iron spire that is one of the highest in the world. Its weight is enormous despite the fact that it is merely an open framework. The architect of this masterly piece of work whose name was Alavoine seems to have devoted himself with the same intensity as Barry, to whom we owe the Royal Courts of Justice in London, for he worked upon it from 1823, the year following the destruction of the wooden spire by lightning, until 1834, the year of his death. The spire, however, which was commenced almost immediately after the loss of the old one, remained incomplete for over forty years and it was not entirely finished until 1876. The flight of eight hundred and twelve steps that is perfectly safe for any one with steady nerves goes right up inside the spire until, as you look out between the iron framework, Rouen lies beneath your feet, a confused mass of detail cut through by the silver river.

The tower of St Romain is on the north side of the cathedral. It was finished towards the end of the fifteenth century, but the lower portion is of very much earlier date for it is the only portion of the cathedral that was standing when Richard I. on his way to the Holy Land knelt before Archbishop Gautier to receive the sword and banner which he carried with him to the Crusade.

The Tour de Beurre is on the southern side--its name being originated in connection with those of the faithful who during certain Lents paid for indulgences in order to be allowed to eat butter. It was commenced in 1485, and took twenty-two years to complete. In this great tower there used to hang a famous bell. It was called the Georges d'Amboise after the great Cardinal to whom Rouen owes so much, not only as builder of the tower and the facade, but also as the originator of sanitary reforms and a thousand other benefits for which the city had reason to be grateful. The great bell was no less than 30 feet in circumference, its weight being 36,000 lbs. The man who succeeded in casting it, whose name was Jean Le Machon, seems to have been so overwhelmed at his success that scarcely a month later he died. At last when Louis XVI. came to Rouen, they rang Georges d'Amboise so loudly that a crack appeared, and a few years later, during the Revolution,

Le Machon's masterpiece was melted down for cannon.

Inside the cathedral there are, besides the glories of the splendid Gothic architecture, the tombs of Henry Plantagenet, the eldest son of Henry II., and Richard I. There are also the beautifully carved miserere seats in the choir which are of particular interest in the way they illustrate many details of daily life in the fifteenth century. The stone figure representing Richard Coeur de Lion lies outside the railings of the sanctuary. The heart of the king which has long since fallen into dust is contained in a casket that is enclosed in the stone beneath the effigy. The figure of Henry Plantagenet is not the original--you may see that in the museum, which contains so many fascinating objects that are associated with the early history of Rouen. The splendid sixteenth century monument of the two Cardinals d'Amboise is to be seen in the Chapelle de la Sainte Vierge. The kneeling figures in the canopied recess represent the two Cardinals--that on the right, which is said to be a very good portrait, represents the famous man who added so much to the cathedral--the one on the left shows his nephew, the second Cardinal Georges d'Amboise. In the middle of the recess there is a fine sculpture showing St George and the Dragon, and most of the other surfaces of the tomb are composed of richly ornamented niches, containing statuettes of saints, bishops, the Virgin and Child, and the twelve Apostles. Another remarkable tomb is that of Louis de Breze, considered to be one of the finest specimens of Renaissance work. It is built in two storeys--the upper one showing a thrilling representation of the knight in complete armour and mounted upon his war-horse, but upon the sarcophagus below he is shown with terrible reality as a naked corpse. The sculptor was possibly Jean Goujon, whose name is sometimes associated with the monument to the two Cardinals, which is of an earlier date.

The tomb of Rollo, the founder of the Duchy of Normandy, and the first of the Normans to embrace the Christian religion, lies in a chapel adjoining the south transept. The effigy belongs to the fourteenth century, but the marble tablet gives an inscription which may be translated as follows: "Here lies Rollo, the first Duke and founder and father of Normandy, of which he was at first the terror and scourge, but afterwards the restorer. Baptised in 912 by Francon, Archbishop of Rouen, and died in 917. His remains were at first deposited in the ancient sanctuary, at present the upper end of the nave. The altar having been removed, the remains of the prince were placed here by the blessed Maurille, Archbishop of Rouen in the year 1063." The effigy of William Longsword, Rollo's son, is in another chapel of the nave, that adjoining the north transept. His effigy, like that of his father, dates from the fourteenth century. It is in surroundings of this character that we are brought most in touch with the Rouen of our imaginations.

We have already in a preceding chapter seen something of the interior of the church of St Ouen, which to many is more inspiring than the cathedral. The original church belonged to the Abbey of St Ouen, established in the reign of Clothaire I. When the Northmen came sailing up the river, laying waste to everything within their reach, the place was destroyed, but after Rollo's conversion to Christianity the abbey was renovated, and in 1046 a new church was commenced, which having taken about eighty years to complete was almost immediately burnt down. Another fire having taken place a century later, Jean Roussel, who was Abbot in 1318, commenced this present building. It was an enormous work to undertake but yet within twenty-one years the choirs and transepts were almost entirely completed. This great Abbot was buried in the Mary chapel behind the High Altar. On the tomb he is called Marc d'Argent and the date of his death is given as December 7, 1339. After this the building of the church went on all through the

century. The man who was master mason in this period was Alexandre Barneval, but he seems to have become jealous of an apprentice who built the rose window that is still such a splendid feature of the north transept, for in a moment of passion he killed the apprentice and for this crime was sentenced to death in the year 1440. St Ouen was completed in the sixteenth century, but the west front as it appears to-day has two spires which made their appearance in recent times. The exterior, however, is not the chief charm of St Ouen; it is the magnificent interior, so huge and yet so inspiring, that so completely satisfies one's ideas of proportion. Wherever you stand, the vistas of arches, all dark and gloomy, relieved here and there by a blaze of coloured glass, are so splendid that you cannot easily imagine anything finer. A notable feature of the aisles is the enormous space of glass covering the outer walls, so that the framework of the windows seems scarcely adequate to support the vaulted roof above. The central tower is supported by magnificent clustered piers of dark and swarthy masonry, and the views of these from the transepts or from the aisles of the nave make some of the finest pictures that are to be obtained in this masterpiece of Gothic architecture. The tower that rises from the north transept belongs, it is believed, to the twelfth century church that was burnt. On the western front it is interesting to find statues of William the Conqueror, Henry II. and Richard Coeur de Lion among other dukes of Normandy, and the most famous Archbishops of Rouen.

Besides the cathedral and St Ouen there is the splendid church of St Maclou. Its western front suddenly appears, filling a gap in the blocks of modern shops on the right hand side as you go up the Rue de la Republic. The richness of the mass of carved stone-work arrests your attention, for after having seen the magnificent facade of the cathedral you would think the city could boast nothing else of such extraordinary splendour. The name Maclou comes from Scotland, for it was a member of this clan, who, having fled to Brittany, became Bishop of Aleth and died in 561. Since the tenth century a shrine to his memory had been placed outside the walls of Rouen. The present building was designed by Pierre Robin and it dates from between 1437 and 1520, but the present spire is modern, having replaced the old one about the time of the Revolution. The richly carved doors of the west front are the work of Jean Goujon. The organ loft rests on two columns of black marble, which are also his work; but although the dim interior is full of interest and its rose windows blaze with fifteenth century glass, it is the west front and carved doors that are the most memorable features of the building.

In the Place du Marche Vieux you may see the actual spot where Joan of Arc was burnt, a stone on the ground bearing the words "Jeanne Darc, 30 Mai, 1431." To all who have really studied the life, the trial and the death of the Maid of Orleans--and surely no one should visit Rouen without such knowledge--this is the most sacred spot in the city, for as we stand here we can almost hear her words addressed to Cauchon, "It is you who have brought me to this death." We can see her confessor holding aloft the cross and we seem to hear her breathe the Redeemer's name before she expires.

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