

ABBOTT JACOB

WILLIAM THE
CONQUEROR

Jacob Abbott

William the Conqueror

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Jacob Abbott

William the Conqueror / Makers of History

PREFACE

In selecting the subjects for the successive volumes of this series, it has been the object of the author to look for the names of those great personages whose histories constitute useful, and not merely entertaining, knowledge. There are certain names which are familiar, as names, to all mankind; and every person who seeks for any degree of mental cultivation, feels desirous of informing himself of the leading outlines of their history, that he may know, in brief, what it was in their characters or their doings which has given them so widely-extended a fame. This knowledge, which it seems incumbent on every one to obtain in respect to such personages as Hannibal, Alexander, Cæsar, Cleopatra, Darius, Xerxes, Alfred, William the Conqueror, Queen Elizabeth, and Mary Queen of Scots, it is the design and object of these volumes to communicate, in a faithful, and, at the same time, if possible, in an attractive manner. Consequently, great historical names alone are selected; and it has been the writer's aim to present the prominent and leading traits in their characters, and all the important events in their lives, in a bold and free manner, and yet in the plain and simple language which is so obviously required in works which aim at permanent and practical usefulness.

Chapter I. Normandy

A.D. 870-912

The Norman Conquest.
Claim of William to the throne.
The right of the strongest.

One of those great events in English history, which occur at distant intervals, and form, respectively, a sort of bound or landmark, to which all other events, preceding or following them for centuries, are referred, is what is called the Norman Conquest. The Norman Conquest was, in fact, the accession of William, duke of Normandy, to the English throne. This accession was not altogether a matter of military force, for William claimed a *right* to the throne, which, if not altogether perfect, was, as he maintained, at any rate superior to that of the prince against whom he contended. The rightfulness of his claim was, however, a matter of little consequence, except so far as the moral influence of it aided him in gaining possession. The right to rule was, in those days, rather more openly and nakedly, though not much more really, than it is now, the right of the strongest.

Map of Normandy.

Normandy, William's native land, is a very rich and beautiful province in the north of France. The following map shows its situation:



Map of England and part of France, showing the situation of Normandy.

The English Channel.

Nature of the French coast.

Nature of the English coast.

It lies, as will be seen upon the map, on the coast of France, adjoining the English Channel. The Channel is here irregular in form, but may be, perhaps, on the average, one hundred miles wide. The line of coast on the southern side of the Channel, which forms, of course, the northern border of Normandy, is a range of cliffs, which are almost perpendicular toward the sea, and which frown forbiddingly upon every ship that sails along the shore. Here and there, it is true, a river opens a passage for itself among these cliffs from the interior, and these river mouths would form harbors into which ships might enter from the offing, were it not that the northwestern winds prevail so generally, and drive such a continual swell of rolling surges in upon the shore, that they choke up all these estuary openings, as well as every natural indentation of the land, with shoals and bars of sand and shingle. The reverse is the case with the northern, or English shore of this famous channel. There the harbors formed by the mouths of the rivers, or by the sinuosities of the shore, are open and accessible, and at the same time sheltered from the winds and the sea. Thus, while the northern or English shore has been, for many centuries, all the time enticing the seaman in and out over the calm, deep, and sheltered waters which there penetrate the land, the southern side has been an almost impassable barrier, consisting of a long line of frowning cliffs, with every opening through it choked with shoals and sand-banks, and guarded by the rolling and tumbling of surges which scarcely ever rest.

Northmen and Danes.

Character of the Northmen.

Their descendants.

It is in a great measure owing to these great physical differences between the two shores, that the people who live upon the one side, though of the same stock and origin with those who live upon the other, have become so vastly superior to them in respect to naval exploits and power. They are really of the same stock and origin, since both England and the northern part of France were overrun and settled by what is called the Scandinavian race, that is, people from Norway, Denmark, and other countries on the Baltic. These people were called the *Northmen* in the histories of those times. Those who landed in England are generally termed *Danes*, though but a small portion of them came really from Denmark. They were all, however, of the same parent stock, and possessed the same qualities of courage, energy, and fearless love of adventure and of danger which distinguish their descendants at the present day. They came down in those early times in great military hordes, and in fleets of piratical ships, through the German Ocean and the various British seas, braving every hardship and every imaginable danger, to find new regions to dwell in, more genial, and fertile, and rich than their own native northern climes. In these days they evince the same energy, and endure equal privations and hardships, in hunting whales in the Pacific Ocean; in overrunning India, and seizing its sources of wealth and power; or in sallying forth, whole fleets of adventurers at a time, to go more than half round the globe, to dig for gold in California. The times and circumstances have changed, but the race and spirit are the same.

The Dukes of Normandy.

Normandy takes its name from the Northmen. It was the province of France which the Northmen made peculiarly their own. They gained access to it from the sea by the River Seine, which, as will be seen from the map, flows, as it were, through the heart of the country. The lower part of this river, and the sea around its mouth, are much choked up with sand and gravel, which the waves have been for ages washing in. Their incessant industry would result in closing up the passage entirely, were it not that the waters of the river must have an outlet; and thus the current, setting outward, wages perpetual war with the surf and surges which are continually breaking in. The expeditions of the Northmen, however, found their way through all these obstructions. They ascended the river with their ships, and finally gained a permanent settlement in the country. They had occupied the country for some centuries at the time when our story begins—the province being governed by a line of princes—almost, if not quite, independent sovereigns—called the *Dukes of Normandy*.

The first duke, Rollo.

The first Duke of Normandy, and the founder of the line—the chieftain who originally invaded and conquered the country—was a wild and half-savage hero from the north, named *Rollo*. He is often, in history, called Rollo the Dane. Norway was his native land. He was a chieftain by birth there, and, being of a wild and adventurous disposition, he collected a band of followers, and committed with them so many piracies and robberies, that at length the king of the country expelled him.

History of Rollo.

Rollo seems not to have considered this banishment as any very great calamity, since, far from interrupting his career of piracy and plunder, it only widened the field on which he was to pursue it. He accordingly increased the equipment and the force of his fleet, enlisted more followers, and set sail across the northern part of the German Ocean toward the British shores.

His rendezvous on the Scottish coast.

Expedition of Rollo.

Off the northwestern coast of Scotland there are some groups of mountainous and gloomy islands, which have been, in many different periods of the world, the refuge of fugitives and outlaws. Rollo made these islands his rendezvous now; and he found collected there many other similar spirits,

who had fled to these lonely retreats, some on account of political disturbances in which they had become involved, and some on account of their crimes. Rollo's impetuous, ardent, and self-confident character inspired them with new energy and zeal. They gathered around him as their leader. Finding his strength thus increasing, he formed a scheme of concentrating all the force that he could command, so as to organize a grand expedition to proceed to the southward, and endeavor to find some pleasant country which they could seize and settle upon, and make their own. The desperate adventurers around him were ready enough to enter into this scheme. The fleet was refitted, provisioned, and equipped. The expedition was organized, arms and munitions of war provided, and when all was ready they set sail. They had no definite plan in respect to the place of their destination, their intention being to make themselves a home on the first favorable spot that they should find.

His descent upon Flanders.
Difficulties encountered.

They moved southward, cruising at first along the coast of Scotland, and then of England. They made several fruitless attempts to land on the English shores, but were every where repulsed. The time when these events took place was during the reign of Alfred the Great. Through Alfred's wise and efficient measures the whole of his frontier had been put into a perfect state of defense, and Rollo found that there was no hope for him there. He accordingly moved on toward the Straits of Dover; but, before passing them, he made a descent upon the coast of Flanders. Here there was a country named Hainault. It was governed by a potentate called the Count of Hainault. Rollo made war upon him, defeated him in battle, took him prisoner, and then compelled the countess his wife to raise and pay him an immense sum for his ransom. Thus he replenished his treasury by an exploit which was considered in those days very great and glorious. To perpetrate such a deed now, unless it were on a *very* great scale, would be to incur the universal reprobation of mankind; but Rollo, by doing it then, not only enriched his coffers, but acquired a very extended and honorable fame.

Rollo passes the Straits of Dover.

For some reason or other, Rollo did not attempt to take permanent possession of Hainault, but, after receiving his ransom money, and replenishing his ammunition and stores, he sailed away with his fleet, and, turning westward, he passed through the Straits of Dover, and cruised along the coast of France. He found that the country on the French side of the channel, though equally rich and beautiful with the opposite shore, was in a very different state of defense. He entered the mouth of the Seine. He was embarrassed at first by the difficulties of the navigation in entering the river; but as there was no efficient enemy to oppose him, he soon triumphed over these difficulties, and, once fairly in the river, he found no difficulty in ascending to Rouen.¹

Charles the Simple.

In the mean time, the King of France, whose name was Charles, and who is generally designated in history as Charles the Simple, began to collect an army to meet the invader. Rollo, however, had made himself master of Rouen before Charles was able to offer him any effectual opposition. Rouen was already a strong place, but Rollo made it stronger. He enlarged and repaired the fortifications, built store-houses, established a garrison, and, in a word, made all the arrangements requisite for securing an impregnable position for himself and his army.

Defeated by Rollo.

A long and obstinate war followed between Rollo and Charles, Rollo being almost uniformly victorious in the combats that took place. Rollo became more and more proud and imperious in proportion to his success. He drove the French king from port to port, and from field to field, until

¹ See the [map](#) at the commencement of this chapter.

he made himself master of a large part of the north of France, over which he gradually established a regular government of his own. Charles struggled in vain to resist these encroachments. Rollo continually defeated him; and finally he shut him up and besieged him in Paris itself. At length Charles was compelled to enter into negotiations for peace. Rollo demanded that the large and rich tract on both sides of the Seine, next the sea—the same, in fact, that now constitutes Normandy—should be ceded to him and his followers for their permanent possession. Charles was extremely unwilling thus to alienate a part of his kingdom. He would not consent to cede it absolutely and entirely, so as to make it an independent realm. It should be a *dukedom*, and not a separate *kingdom*, so that it might continue still a part of his own royal domains—Rollo to reign over it as a duke, and to acknowledge a general allegiance to the French king. Rollo agreed to this. The war had been now protracted so long that he began himself to desire repose. It was more than thirty years since the time of his landing.

Treaty of peace.

Its conditions.

The three ceremonies.

Charles had a daughter named Giselle, and it was a part of the treaty of peace that she should become Rollo's wife. He also agreed to become a Christian. Thus there were, in the execution of the treaty, three ceremonies to be performed. First, Rollo was to *do homage*, as it was called, for his duchy; for it was the custom in those days for subordinate princes, who held their possessions of some higher and more strictly sovereign power, to perform certain ceremonies in the presence of their superior lord, which was called doing homage. These ceremonies were of various kinds in different countries, though they were all intended to express the submission of the dependent prince to the superior authority and power of the higher potentate of whom he held his lands. This act of homage was therefore to be performed, and next to the homage was to come the baptism, and after the baptism, the marriage.

Rollo's pride.

When, however, the time came for the performance of the first of these ceremonies, and all the great chieftains and potentates of the respective armies were assembled to witness it, Rollo, it was found, would not submit to what the customs of the French monarchy required. He ought to kneel before the king, and put his hands, clasped together, between the king's hands, in token of submission, and then to kiss his foot, which was covered with an elegantly fashioned slipper on such occasions. Rollo would do all except the last; but that, no remonstrances, urgencies, or persuasions would induce him to consent to.

And yet it was not a very unusual sign or token of political subordination to sovereign power in those days. The pope had exacted it even of an emperor a hundred years before; and it is continued by that dignitary to the present day, on certain state occasions; though in the case of the pope, there is embroidered on the slipper which the kneeling suppliant kisses, a *cross*, so that he who humbles himself to this ceremony may consider, if he pleases, that it is that sacred symbol of the divine Redeemer's sufferings and death that he so reverently kisses, and not the human foot by which it is covered.

Kissing the king's foot.

Rollo could not be made to consent, himself, to kiss King Charles's foot; and, finally, the difficulty was compromised by his agreeing to do it by proxy. He ordered one of his courtiers to perform that part of the ceremony. The courtier obeyed, but when he came to lift the foot, he did it so rudely and lifted it so high as to turn the monarch over off his seat. This made a laugh, but Rollo was too powerful for Charles to think of resenting it.

The baptism and marriage.

Rollo's peaceful and prosperous reign.

A few days after this Rollo was baptized in the cathedral church at Rouen, with great pomp and parade; and then, on the following week, he was married to Giselle. The din of war in which he had lived for more than thirty years was now changed into festivities and rejoicings. He took full and peaceable possession of his dukedom, and governed it for the remainder of his days with great wisdom, and lived in great prosperity. He made it, in fact, one of the richest and most prosperous realms in Europe, and laid the foundations of still higher degrees of greatness and power, which were gradually developed after his death. And this was the origin of Normandy.

Description of Normandy.

Scenery.

Hamlets.

Chateaux.

Peasantry.

Public roads.

It appears thus that this part of France was seized by Rollo and his Northmen partly because it was nearest at hand to them, being accessible from the English Channel through the River Seine, and partly on account of its exceeding richness and fertility. It has been famous in every age as the garden of France, and travelers at the present day gaze upon its picturesque and beautiful scenery with the highest admiration and pleasure. And yet the scenes which are there presented to the view are wholly unlike those which constitute picturesque and beautiful rural scenery in England and America. In Normandy, the land is not inclosed. No hedges, fences, or walls break the continuity of the surface, but vast tracts spread in every direction, divided into plots and squares, of various sizes and forms, by the varieties of cultivation, like a vast carpet of an irregular tessellated pattern, and varied in the color by a thousand hues of brown and green. Here and there vast forests extend, where countless thousands of trees, though ancient and venerable in form, stand in rows, mathematically arranged, as they were planted centuries ago. These are royal demesnes, and hunting grounds, and parks connected with the country palaces of the kings or the chateaux of the ancient nobility. The cultivators of the soil live, not, as in America, in little farm-houses built along the road-sides and dotting the slopes of the hills, but in compact villages, consisting of ancient dwellings of brick or stone, densely packed together along a single street, from which the laborers issue, in picturesque dresses, men and women together, every morning, to go miles, perhaps, to the scene of their daily toil. Except these villages, and the occasional appearance of an ancient chateau, no habitations are seen. The country seems a vast solitude, teeming everywhere, however, with fertility and beauty. The roads which traverse these scenes are magnificent avenues, broad, straight, continuing for many miles an undeviating course over the undulations of the land, with nothing to separate them from the expanse of cultivation and fruitfulness on either hand but rows of ancient and venerable trees. Between these rows of trees the traveler sees an interminable vista extending both before him and behind him. In England, the public road winds beautifully between walls overhung with shrubbery, or hedge-rows, with stiles or gateways here and there, revealing hamlets or cottages, which appear and disappear in a rapid and endlessly varied succession, as the road meanders, like a rivulet, between its beautiful banks. In a word, the public highway in England is beautiful; in France it is grand.

Rouen.

Its situation.

The port of Rouen.

Its name of Le Havre de Grace.

The greatest city in Normandy in modern times is Rouen, which is situated, as will be seen by referring to the map at the commencement of this chapter, on the Seine, half way between Paris and

the sea. At the mouth of the Seine, or, rather, on the northern shore of the estuary which forms the mouth of the river, is a small inlet, which has been found to afford, on the whole, the best facilities for a harbor that can be found on the whole line of the coast. Even this little port, however, is so filled up with sand, that when the water recedes at low tide it leaves the shipping all aground. The inlet would, in fact, probably become filled up entirely were it not for artificial means taken to prevent it. There are locks and gateways built in such a manner as to retain a large body of water until the tide is down, and then these gates are opened, and the water is allowed to rush out all together, carrying with it the mud and sand which had begun to accumulate. This haven, being, on the whole, the best and most commodious on the coast, was called *the* harbor, or, as the French expressed it in their language, *le havre*, the word *havre* meaning harbor. In fact, the name was in full *le havre de grace*, as if the Normans considered it a matter of special good luck to have even such a chance of a harbor as this at the mouth of their river. The English world have, however, dropped all except the principal word from this long phrase of designation, and call the port simply Havre.

Intermingling of races.

Superiority of the Norman stock.

From Rollo the line of Dukes of Normandy continued in uninterrupted succession down to the time of William, a period of about a hundred and fifty years. The country increased all the time in wealth, in population, and in prosperity. The original inhabitants were not, however, expelled; they remained as peasants, herdsmen, and agriculturists, while the Norman chieftains settled over them, holding severally large estates of land which William granted them. The races gradually became intermingled, though they continued for many centuries to evince the superior spirit and energy which was infused into the population by the Norman stock. In fact, it is thought by many observers that that superiority continues to the present day.

Chapter II.

Birth of William

A.D. 912-1033

Castle at Falaise.
Present ruins of the castle.

Although Rouen is now very far before all the other cities of Normandy in point of magnitude and importance, and though Rollo, in his conquest of the country, made it his principal head-quarters and his main stronghold, it did not continue exclusively the residence of the dukes of Normandy in after years. The father of William the Conqueror was Robert, who became subsequently the duke, the sixth in the line. He resided, at the time when William was born, in a great castle at Falaise. Falaise, as will be seen upon the map, is west of Rouen, and it stands, like Rouen, at some distance from the sea. The castle was built upon a hill, at a little distance from the town. It has long since ceased to be habitable, but the ruins still remain, giving a picturesque but mournful beauty to the eminence which they crown. They are often visited by travelers, who go to see the place where the great hero and conqueror was born.

Scenery of the town and castle.
Wall and buildings.
Watch-towers.
Sentinels.
Enchanting prospect.

The hill on which the old castle stands terminates, on one side, at the foot of the castle walls, in a precipice of rocks, and on two other sides, also, the ascent is too steep to be practicable for an enemy. On the fourth side there is a more gradual declivity, up which the fortress could be approached by means of a winding roadway. At the foot of this roadway was the town. The access to the castle from the town was defended by a ditch and draw-bridge, with strong towers on each side of the gateway to defend the approach. There was a beautiful stream of water which meandered along through the valley, near the town, and, after passing it, it disappeared, winding around the foot of the precipice which the castle crowned. The castle inclosures were shut in with walls of stone of enormous thickness; so thick, in fact, they were, that some of the apartments were built in the body of the wall. There were various buildings within the inclosure. There was, in particular, one large, square tower, several stories in height, built of white stone. This tower, it is said, still stands in good preservation. There was a chapel, also, and various other buildings and apartments within the walls, for the use of the ducal family and their numerous retinue of servants and attendants, for the storage of munitions of war, and for the garrison. There were watch-towers on the corners of the walls, and on various lofty projecting pinnacles, where solitary sentinels watched, the livelong day and night, for any approaching danger. These sentinels looked down on a broad expanse of richly-cultivated country, fields beautified with groves of trees, and with the various colors presented by the changing vegetation, while meandering streams gleamed with their silvery radiance among them, and hamlets of laborers and peasantry were scattered here and there, giving life and animation to the scene.

Chronological history of the Norman line.

We have said that William's father was Robert, the sixth Duke of Normandy, so that William himself, being his immediate successor, was the seventh in the line. And as it is the design of these

narratives not merely to amuse the reader with what is entertaining as a tale, but to impart substantial historical knowledge, we must prepare the way for the account of William's birth, by presenting a brief chronological view of the whole ducal line, extending from Rollo to William. We recommend to the reader to examine with special attention this brief account of William's ancestry, for the true causes which led to William's invasion of England can not be fully appreciated without thoroughly understanding certain important transactions in which some members of the family of his ancestors were concerned before he was born. This is particularly the case with the Lady Emma, who, as will be seen by the following summary, was the sister of the third duke in the line. The extraordinary and eventful history of her life is so intimately connected with the subsequent exploits of William, that it is necessary to relate it in full, and it becomes, accordingly, the subject of one of the subsequent chapters of this volume.

Chronological History of the Norman Line

Rollo, first Duke of Normandy

From A.D. 912 to A.D. 917

Rollo.

It was about 870 that Rollo was banished from Norway, and a few years after that, at most, that he landed in France. It was not, however, until 912 that he concluded his treaty of peace with Charles, so as to be fully invested with the title of Duke of Normandy.

He was advanced in age at this time, and, after spending five years in settling the affairs of his realm, he resigned his dukedom into the hands of his son, that he might spend the remainder of his days in rest and peace. He died in 922, five years after his resignation.

William I., second Duke of Normandy

From 917 to 942

William I., second duke.

William was Rollo's son. He began to reign, of course, five years before his father's death. He had a quiet and prosperous reign of about twenty-five years, but he was assassinated at last by a political enemy, in 942.

Richard I., third Duke of Normandy

From 942 to 996

Richard I., third duke.

He was only ten years old when his father was assassinated. He became involved in long and arduous wars with the King of France, which compelled him to call in the aid of more Northmen from the Baltic. His new allies, in the end, gave him as much trouble as the old enemy, with whom they came to help William contend; and he found it very hard to get them away. He wanted, at length, to make peace with the French king, and to have them leave his dominions; but they said, "That was not what they came for."

Richard had a beautiful daughter, named Emma, who afterward became a very important political personage, as will be seen more fully in a subsequent chapter.

Richard died in 996, after reigning fifty-four years.

Richard II., fourth Duke of Normandy

From 996 to 1026

Richard II., fourth duke.

Richard II. was the son of Richard I., and as his father had been engaged during his reign in contentions with his sovereign lord, the King of France, he, in his turn, was harassed by long-continued struggles with his vassals, the barons and nobles of his own realm. He, too, sent for Northmen to come and assist him. During his reign there was a great contest in England between the Saxons and the Danes, and Ethelred, who was the Saxon claimant to the throne, came to Normandy, and soon afterward married the Lady Emma, Richard's sister. The particulars of this event, from which the most momentous consequences were afterward seen to flow, will be given in full in a future chapter. Richard died in 1026. He left two sons, Richard and Robert. William the Conqueror was the son of the youngest, and was born two years before this Richard II. died.

Richard III., fifth Duke of Normandy

From 1026 to 1028

Richard III., fifth duke.

Intrigues of Robert.

He was the oldest brother, and, of course, succeeded to the dukedom. His brother Robert was then only a baron—his son William, afterward the Conqueror, being then about two years old. Robert was very ambitious and aspiring, and eager to get possession of the dukedom himself. He adopted every possible means to circumvent and supplant his brother, and, as is supposed, shortened his days by the anxiety and vexation which he caused him; for Richard died suddenly and mysteriously only two years after his accession. It was supposed by some, in fact, that he was poisoned, though there was never any satisfactory proof of this.

Robert, sixth Duke of Normandy

From 1028 to 1035

He becomes the sixth duke.
Robert and Henry.

Robert, of course, succeeded his brother, and then, with the characteristic inconsistency of selfishness and ambition, he employed all the power of his realm in helping the King of France to subdue his younger brother, who was evincing the same spirit of seditiousness and insubmission that he had himself displayed. His assistance was of great importance to King Henry; it, in fact, decided the contest in his favor; and thus one younger brother was put down in the commencement of his career of turbulence and rebellion, by another who had successfully accomplished a precisely similar course of crime. King Henry was very grateful for the service thus rendered, and was ready to do all in his power, at all times, to co-operate with Robert in the plans which the latter might form. Robert died in 1035, when William was about eleven years old.

And here we close this brief summary of the history of the ducal line, as we have already passed the period of William's birth; and we return, accordingly, to give in detail some of the particulars of that event.



William and Arlotte.

William's mother.

Although the dukes of Normandy were very powerful potentates, reigning, as they did, almost in the character of independent sovereigns, over one of the richest and most populous territories of the globe, and though William the Conqueror was the son of one of them, his birth was nevertheless very ignoble. His mother was not the wife of Robert his father, but a poor peasant girl, the daughter of an humble tanner of Falaise; and, indeed, William's father, Robert, was not himself the duke at

this time, but a simple baron, as his father was still living. It was not even certain that he ever would be the duke, as his older brother, who, of course, would come before him, was also then alive. Still, as the son and prospective heir of the reigning duke, his rank was very high.

Robert's first meeting with Arlotte.
He is captivated.

The circumstances of Robert's first acquaintance with the tanner's daughter were these. He was one day returning home to the castle from some expedition on which he had been sent by his father, when he saw a group of peasant girls standing on the margin of the brook, washing clothes. They were barefooted, and their dress was in other respects disarranged. There was one named Arlotte,² the daughter of a tanner of the town, whose countenance and figure seem to have captivated the young baron. He gazed at her with admiration and pleasure as he rode along. Her complexion was fair, her eyes full and blue, and the expression of her countenance was frank, and open, and happy. She was talking joyously and merrily with her companions as Robert passed, little dreaming of the conspicuous place on the page of English history which she was to occupy, in all future time, in connection with the gay horseman who was riding by.

Robert sends for Arlotte.

The etiquette of royal and ducal palaces and castles in those days, as now, forbade that a noble of such lofty rank should marry a peasant girl. Robert could not, therefore, have Arlotte for his wife; but there was nothing to prevent his proposing her coming to the castle and living with him—that is, nothing but the law of God, and this was an authority to which dukes and barons in the Middle Ages were accustomed to pay very little regard. There was not even a public sentiment to forbid this, for a nobility like that of England and France in the Middle Ages stands so far above all the mass of society as to be scarcely amenable at all to the ordinary restrictions and obligations of social life. And even to the present day, in those countries where dukes exist, public sentiment seems to tolerate pretty generally whatever dukes see fit to do.

Scruples of her father.
Arlotte sent to the castle.

Accordingly, as soon as Robert had arrived at the castle, he sent a messenger from his retinue of attendants down to the village, to the father of Arlotte, proposing that she should come to the castle. The father seems to have had some hesitation in respect to his duty. It is said that he had a brother who was a monk, or rather hermit, who lived a life of reading, meditation and prayer, in a solitary place not far from Falaise. Arlotte's father sent immediately to this religious recluse for his spiritual counsel. The monk replied that it was right to comply with the wishes of so great a man, whatever they might be. The tanner, thus relieved of all conscientious scruples on the subject by this high religious authority, and rejoicing in the opening tide of prosperity and distinction which he foresaw for his family through the baron's love, robed and decorated his daughter, like a lamb for the sacrifice, and sent her to the castle.

Robert's affection for her.
Birth of William.
The nurse's prediction.

Arlotte had one of the rooms assigned her, which was built in the thickness of the wall. It communicated by a door with the other apartments and inclosures within the area, and there were narrow windows in the masonry without, through which she could look out over the broad expanse of beautiful fields and meadows which were smiling below. Robert seems to have loved her with sincere

² Her name is spelled variously, Arlette, Arlotte, Harlotte, and in other ways.

and strong affection, and to have done all in his power to make her happy. Her room, however, could not have been very sumptuously furnished, although she was the favorite in a ducal castle—at least so far as we can judge from the few glimpses we get of the interior through the ancient chroniclers' stories. One story is, that when William was born, his first exploit was to grasp a handful of straw, and to hold it so tenaciously in his little fist that the nurse could scarcely take it away. The nurse was greatly delighted with this infantile prowess; she considered it an omen, and predicted that the babe would some day signalize himself by seizing and holding great possessions. The prediction would have been forgotten if William had not become the conqueror of England at a future day. As it was, it was remembered and recorded; and it suggests to our imagination a very different picture of the conveniences and comforts of Arlotte's chamber from those presented to the eye in ducal palaces now, where carpets of velvet silence the tread on marble floors, and favorites repose under silken canopies on beds of down.

The babe was named William, and he was a great favorite with his father. He was brought up at Falaise. Two years after his birth, Robert's father died, and his oldest brother, Richard III., succeeded to the ducal throne. In two years more, which years were spent in contention between the brothers, Richard also died, and then Robert himself came into possession of the castle in his own name, reigning there over all the cities and domains of Normandy.

William's childhood.

William was, of course, now about four years old. He was a bright and beautiful boy, and he grew more and more engaging every year. His father, instead of neglecting and disowning him, as it might have been supposed he would do, took a great deal of pride and pleasure in witnessing the gradual development of his powers and his increasing attractiveness, and he openly acknowledged him as his son.

He is a universal favorite.

In fact, William was a universal favorite about the castle. When he was five and six years old he was very fond of playing the soldier. He would marshal the other boys of the castle, his playmates, into a little troop, and train them around the castle inclosures, just as ardent and aspiring boys do with their comrades now. He possessed a certain vivacity and spirit too, which gave him, even then, a great ascendancy over his playfellows. He invented their plays; he led them in their mischief; he settled their disputes. In a word, he possessed a temperament and character which enabled him very easily and strongly to hold the position which his rank as son of the lord of the castle so naturally assigned him.

Robert determines to visit the Holy Land.

Dangers of the journey.

A few years thus passed away, when, at length, Robert conceived the design of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This was a plan, not of humble-minded piety, but of ambition for fame. To make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land was a romantic achievement that covered whoever accomplished it with a sort of sombre glory, which, in the case of a prince or potentate, mingled with, and hallowed and exalted, his military renown. Robert determined on making the pilgrimage. It was a distant and dangerous journey. In fact, the difficulties and dangers of the way were perhaps what chiefly imparted to the enterprise its romance, and gave it its charms. It was customary for kings and rulers, before setting out, to arrange all the affairs of their kingdoms, to provide a regency to govern during their absence, and to determine upon their successors, so as to provide for the very probable contingency of their not living to return.

Maneuvering among the chieftains.

As soon, therefore, as Robert announced his plan of a pilgrimage, men's minds were immediately turned to the question of the succession. Robert had never been married, and he had

consequently no son who was entitled to succeed him. He had two brothers, and also a cousin, and some other relatives, who had claims to the succession. These all began to maneuver among the chieftains and nobles, each endeavoring to prepare the way for having his own claims advanced, while Robert himself was secretly determining that the little William should be his heir. He said nothing about this, however, but he took care to magnify the importance of his little son in every way, and to bring him as much as possible into public notice. William, on his part, possessed so much personal beauty, and so many juvenile accomplishments, that he became a great favorite with all the nobles, and chieftains, and knights who saw him, sometimes at his father's castle, and sometimes away from home, in their own fortresses or towns, where his father took him, from time to time, in his train.

A council of nobles.

Robert announces his design.

At length, when affairs were ripe for their consummation, Duke Robert called together a grand council of all the subordinate dukes, and earls, and barons of his realm, to make known to them the plan of his pilgrimage. They came together from all parts of Normandy, each in a splendid cavalcade, and attended by an armed retinue of retainers. When the assembly had been convened, and the preliminary forms and ceremonies had been disposed of, Robert announced his grand design.

As soon as he had concluded, one of the nobles, whose name and title was Guy, count of Burgundy, rose and addressed the duke in reply. He was sorry, he said, to hear that the duke, his cousin, entertained such a plan. He feared for the safety of the realm when the chief ruler should be gone. All the estates of the realm, he said, the barons, the knights, the chieftains and soldiers of every degree, would be all without a head.

He makes William his heir.

"Not so," said Robert: "I will leave you a master in my place." Then, pointing to the beautiful boy by his side, he added, "I have a little fellow here, who, though he is little now, I acknowledge, will grow bigger by and by, with God's grace, and I have great hopes that he will become a brave and gallant man. I present him to you, and from this time forth I give him *seizin*³ of the Duchy of Normandy as my known and acknowledged heir. And I appoint Alan, duke of Brittany, governor of Normandy in my name until I shall return, and in case I shall not return, in the name of William my son, until he shall become of manly age."

Surprise of the assembly.

The nobles do homage to William.

The assembly was taken wholly by surprise at this announcement. Alan, duke of Brittany, who was one of the chief claimants to the succession, was pleased with the honor conferred upon him in making him at once the governor of the realm, and was inclined to prefer the present certainty of governing at once in the name of others, to the remote contingency of reigning in his own. The other claimants to the inheritance were confounded by the suddenness of the emergency, and knew not what to say or do. The rest of the assembly were pleased with the romance of having the beautiful boy for their feudal sovereign. The duke saw at once that every thing was favorable to the accomplishment of his design. He took the lad in his arms, kissed him, and held him out in view of the assembly. William gazed around upon the panoplied warriors before him with a bright and beaming eye. They knelt down as by a common accord to do him homage, and then took the oath of perpetual allegiance and fidelity to his cause.

William is taken to Paris.

He is presented to the French king.

³ Seizin, an ancient feudal term denoting the inducting of a party to a legal possession of his right.

Robert thought, however, that it would not be quite prudent to leave his son himself in the custody of these his rivals, so he took him with him to Paris when he set out upon his pilgrimage, with view of establishing him there, in the court of Henry, the French king, while he should himself be gone. Young William was presented to the French king, on a day set apart for the ceremony, with great pomp and parade. The king held a special court to receive him. He seated himself on his throne in a grand apartment of his palace, and was surrounded by his nobles and officers of state, all magnificently dressed for the occasion. At the proper time, Duke Robert came in, dressed in his pilgrim's garb, and leading young William by the hand. His attendant pilgrim knights accompanied him. Robert led the boy to the feet of their common sovereign, and, kneeling there, ordered William to kneel too, to do homage to the king. King Henry received him very graciously. He embraced him, and promised to receive him into his court, and to take the best possible care of him while his father was away. The courtiers were very much struck with the beauty and noble bearing of the boy. His countenance beamed with an animated, but yet very serious expression, as he was somewhat awed by the splendor of the scene around him. He was himself then nine years old.

Chapter III. The Accession

A.D. 1035-1040

Robert departs on his pilgrimage.
He visits Rome and Constantinople.

After spending a little time at Paris, Robert took leave of the king, and of William his son, and went forth, with a train of attendant knights, on his pilgrimage. He had a great variety of adventures, which can not be related here, as it is the history of the son, and not of the father, which is the subject of this narrative. Though he traveled strictly as a pilgrim, it was still with great pomp and parade. After visiting Rome, and accomplishing various services and duties connected with his pilgrimage there, he laid aside his pilgrim's garb, and, assuming his proper rank as a great Norman chieftain, he went to Constantinople, where he made a great display of his wealth and magnificence. At the time of the grand procession, for example, by which he entered the city of Constantinople, he rode a mule, which, besides being gorgeously caparisoned, had shoes of gold instead of iron; and these shoes were purposely attached so slightly to the hoofs, that they were shaken off as the animal walked along, to be picked up by the populace. This was to impress them with grand ideas of the rider's wealth and splendor. After leaving Constantinople, Robert resumed his pilgrim's garb, and went on toward the Holy Land.

Robert's illness.
Litter bearers.

The journey, however, did not pass without the usual vicissitudes of so long an absence and so distant a pilgrimage. At one time Robert was sick, and, after lingering for some time in a fever, he so far recovered his strength as to be borne on a litter by the strength of other men, though he could not advance himself, either on horseback or on foot; and as for traveling carriages, there had been no such invention in those days. They made arrangements, therefore, for carrying the duke on a litter. There were sixteen Moorish slaves employed to serve as his bearers. This company was divided into sets, four in each, the several sets taking the burden in rotation. Robert and his attendant knights looked down with great contempt on these black pagan slaves. One day the cavalcade was met by a Norman who was returning home to Normandy after having accomplished his pilgrimage. He asked Duke Robert if he had any message to send to his friends at home. "Yes," said he; "tell them you saw me here, on my way to Paradise, carried by sixteen *demons*."

Death of Robert.
Claimants to the crown.

Robert reached Jerusalem, and set out on his return; and soon after rumors came back to Paris that he had died on his way home. The accounts of the manner of his death were contradictory and uncertain; but the fact was soon made sure, and the news produced every where a great sensation. It soon appeared that the brothers and cousins of Robert, who had claimed the right to succeed him in preference to his son William, had only suspended their claims—they had not abandoned them. They began to gather their forces, each in his own separate domain, and to prepare to take the field, if necessary, in vindication of what they considered their rights to the inheritance. In a word, their oaths of fealty to William were all forgotten, and each claimant was intent only on getting possession himself of the ducal crown.

Theroulde.

William's military education.

In the mean time, William himself was at Paris, and only eleven years of age. He had been receiving a careful education there, and was a very prepossessing and accomplished young prince. Still, he was yet but a mere boy. He had been under the care of a military tutor, whose name was Theroulde. Theroulde was a veteran soldier, who had long been in the employ of the King of France. He took great interest in his young pupil's progress. He taught him to ride and to practice all the evolutions of horsemanship which were required by the tactics of those days. He trained him, too, in the use of arms, the bow and arrow, the javelin, the sword, the spear, and accustomed him to wear, and to exercise in, the armor of steel with which warriors were used, in those days, to load themselves in going into battle. Young princes like William had suits of this armor made for them, of small size, which they were accustomed to wear in private in their military exercises and trainings, and to appear in, publicly, on great occasions of state. These dresses of iron were of course very heavy and uncomfortable, but the young princes and dukes were, nevertheless, very proud and happy to wear them.

The Earl of Arques.

While William was thus engaged in pursuing his military education in Paris, several competitors for his dukedom immediately appeared in Normandy and took the field. The strongest and most prominent among them was the Earl of Arques. His name was William too, but, to distinguish him from the young duke, we shall call him Arques. He was a brother of Robert, and maintained that, as Robert left no lawful heir, he was indisputably entitled to succeed him. Arques assembled his forces and prepared to take possession of the country.

William proclaimed duke.

It will be recollected that Robert, when he left Normandy in setting out on his pilgrimage, had appointed a nobleman named Alan to act as regent, or governor of the country, until he should return; or, in case he should never return, until William should become of age. Alan had a council of officers, called the council of regency, with whose aid he managed the administration of the government. This council, with Alan at their head, proclaimed young William duke, and immediately began to act in his name. When they found that the Earl of Arques was preparing to seize the government, they began to assemble their forces also, and thus both sides prepared for war.

The pilgrim knights.

Before they actually commenced hostilities, however, the pilgrim knights who had accompanied Robert on his pilgrimage, and who had been journeying home slowly by themselves ever since their leader's death, arrived in Normandy. These were chieftains and nobles of high rank and influence, and each of the contending parties were eager to have them join their side. Besides the actual addition of force which these men could bring to the cause they should espouse, the moral support they would give to it was a very important consideration. Their having been on this long and dangerous pilgrimage invested them with a sort of romantic and religious interest in the minds of all the people, who looked up to them, in consequence of it, with a sort of veneration and awe; and then, as they had been selected by Robert to accompany him on his pilgrimage, and had gone on the long and dangerous journey with him, continuing to attend upon him until he died, they were naturally regarded as his most faithful and confidential friends. For these and similar reasons, it was obvious that the cause which they should espouse in the approaching contest would gain a large accession of moral power by their adhesion.

They embrace William's cause.

Debates in the council on the propriety of William's return.

As soon as they arrived in Normandy, rejecting all proposals from other quarters, they joined young William's cause with the utmost promptitude and decision. Alan received them at once into his councils. An assembly was convened, and the question was discussed whether William should be sent for to come to Normandy. Some argued that he was yet a mere boy, incapable of rendering them any real service in the impending contest, while he would be exposed, more perhaps than they themselves, to be taken captive or slain. They thought it best, therefore, that he should remain, for the present, in Paris, under the protection of the French king.

Others, on the other hand, contended that the influence of William's presence, boy as he was, would animate and inspire all his followers, and awaken every where, throughout the country, a warm interest in his cause; that his very tenderness and helplessness would appeal strongly to every generous heart, and that his youthful accomplishments and personal charms would enlist thousands in his favor, who would forget, and perhaps abandon him, if he kept away. Besides, it was by no means certain that he was so safe as some might suppose in King Henry's custody and power. King Henry might himself lay claims to the vacant duchy, with a view of bestowing it upon some favorite of his own, in which case he might confine young William in one of his castles, in an honorable, but still rigid and hopeless captivity, or treacherously destroy his life by the secret administration of poison.

William's return to Normandy.

These latter counsels prevailed. Alan and the nobles who were with him sent an embassy to the court of King Henry to bring William home. Henry made objections and difficulties. This alarmed the nobles. They feared that it would prove true that Henry himself had designs on Normandy. They sent a new embassy, with demands more urgent than before. Finally, after some time spent in negotiations and delays, King Henry concluded to yield, and William set out on his return. He was now about twelve or thirteen years old. His military tutor, Theroulde, accompanied him, and he was attended likewise by the ambassadors whom Alan had sent for him, and by a strong escort for his protection by the way. He arrived in safety at Alan's head-quarters.

Its effects.

William's accomplishments.

Impression upon the army.

William's presence in Normandy had the effect which had been anticipated from it. It awakened every where a great deal of enthusiasm in his favor. The soldiers were pleased to see how handsome their young commander was in form, and how finely he could ride. He was, in fact, a very superior equestrian for one so young. He was more fond, even, than other boys of horses; and as, of course, the most graceful and the fleetest horses which could be found were provided for him, and as Theroulde had given him the best and most complete instruction, he made a fine display as he rode swiftly through the camp, followed by veteran nobles, splendidly dressed and mounted, and happy to be in his train, while his own countenance beamed with a radiance in which native intelligence and beauty were heightened by the animation and excitement of pride and pleasure. In respect to the command of the army, of course the real power remained in Alan's hands, but every thing was done in William's name; and in respect to all external marks and symbols of sovereignty, the beautiful boy seemed to possess the supreme command; and as the sentiment of loyalty is always the strongest when the object which calls for the exercise of it is most helpless or frail, Alan found his power very much increased when he had this beautiful boy to exhibit as the true and rightful heir, in whose name and for whose benefit all his power was held.

Claimants in the field.

Iron rule of the nobles.

Still, however, the country was very far from becoming settled. The Earl of Arques kept the field, and other claimants, too, strengthened themselves in their various castles and towns, as if

preparing to resist. In those days, every separate district of the country was almost a separate realm, governed by its own baron, who lived, with his retainers, within his own castle walls, and ruled the land around him with a rod of iron. These barons were engaged in perpetual quarrels among themselves, each plundering the dominions of the rest, or making hostile incursions into the territories of a neighbor to revenge some real or imaginary wrong. This turbulence and disorder prevailed every where throughout Normandy at the time of William's return. In the general confusion, William's government scarcely knew who were his friends or his enemies. At one time, when a deputation was sent to some of the barons in William's name, summoning them to come with their forces and join his standard, as they were in duty bound to do, they felt independent enough to send back word to him that they had "too much to do in settling their own quarrels to be able to pay any attention to his."

Almost a quarrel.

In the course of a year or two, moreover, and while his own realm continued in this unsettled and distracted state, William became involved in what was almost a quarrel with King Henry himself. When he was fifteen years old, which was two or three years after his return from Paris to Normandy, Henry sent directions to William to come to a certain town, called Evreux, situated about half way between Falaise and Paris, and just within the confines of Normandy,⁴ to do homage to him there for his duchy. There was some doubt among William's counselors whether it would be most prudent to obey or disobey this command. They finally concluded that it was best to obey. Grand preparations were accordingly made for the expedition; and, when all was ready, the young duke was conducted in great state, and with much pomp and parade, to meet his sovereign.

Interview between William and Henry.

The interview between William and his sovereign, and the ceremonies connected with it, lasted some days. In the course of this time, William remained at Evreux, and was, in some sense, of course, in Henry's power. William, having been so long in Henry's court as a mere boy, accustomed all the time to look up to and obey Henry as a father, regarded him somewhat in that light now, and approached him with great deference and respect. Henry received him in a somewhat haughty and imperious manner, as if he considered him still under the same subjection as heretofore.

Henry's demand.

William's indignation.

William had a fortress or castle on the frontiers of his dukedom, toward Henry's dominions. The name of the castle was Tellières, and the governor of it was a faithful old soldier named De Crespin. William's father, Robert, had intrusted De Crespin with the command of the castle, and given him a garrison to defend it. Henry now began to make complaint to William in respect to this castle. The garrison, he said, were continually making incursions into his dominions. William replied that he was very sorry that there was cause for such a complaint. He would inquire into it, and if the fact were really so, he would have the evil immediately corrected. Henry replied that that was not sufficient. "You must deliver up the castle to me," he said, "to be destroyed." William was indignant at such a demand; but he was so accustomed to obey implicitly whatever King Henry might require of him, that he sent the order to have the castle surrendered.

Henry destroys one of William's castles.

When, however, the order came to De Crespin, the governor of the castle, he refused to obey it. The fortress, he said, had been committed to his charge by Robert, duke of Normandy, and he should not give it up to the possession of any foreign power. When this answer was reported to William and his counselors, it made them still more indignant than before at the domineering tyranny of the

⁴ See [map](#) at the commencement of chapter ix.

command, and more disposed than ever to refuse obedience to it. Still William was in a great measure in the monarch's power. On cool reflection, they perceived that resistance would then be vain. New and more authoritative orders were accordingly issued for the surrender of the castle. De Crespin now obeyed. He gave up the keys and withdrew with his garrison. William was then allowed to leave Evreux and return home, and soon afterward the castle was razed to the ground.

Difficulties which followed.

War with Henry.

This affair produced, of course, a great deal of animosity and irritation between the governments of France and Normandy; and where such a state of feeling exists between two powers separated only by an imaginary line running through a populous and fertile country, aggressions from one side and from the other are sure to follow. These are soon succeeded by acts of retaliation and revenge, leading, in the end, to an open and general war. It was so now. Henry marched his armies into Normandy, seized towns, destroyed castles, and, where he was resisted by the people, he laid waste the country with fire and sword. He finally laid siege to the very castle of Falaise.

William rescues Falaise.

William received with acclamations.

Punishment of the governor.

William and his government were for a time nearly overwhelmed with the tide of disaster and calamity. The tide turned, however, at length, and the fortune of war inclined in their favor. William rescued the town and castle of Falaise; it was in a very remarkable manner, too, that this exploit was accomplished. The fortress was closely invested with Henry's forces, and was on the very eve of being surrendered. The story is, that Henry had offered bribes to the governor of the castle to give it up to him, and that the governor had agreed to receive them and to betray his trust. While he was preparing to do so, William arrived at the head of a resolute and determined band of Normans. They came with so sudden an onset upon the army of besiegers as to break up their camp and force them to abandon the siege. The people of the town and the garrison of the castle were extremely rejoiced to be thus rescued, and when they came to learn through whose instrumentality they had been saved, and saw the beautiful horseman whom they remembered as a gay and happy child playing about the precincts of the castle, they were perfectly intoxicated with delight. They filled the air with the wildest acclamations, and welcomed William back to the home of his childhood with manifestations of the most extravagant joy. As to the traitorous governor, he was dealt with very leniently. Perhaps the general feeling of joy awakened emotions of leniency and forgiveness in William's mind—or perhaps the proof against the betrayer was incomplete. They did not, therefore, take his life, which would have been justly forfeited, according to the military ideas of the times, if he had been really guilty. They deprived him of his command, confiscated his property, and let him go free.

The Earl of Arques.

Advance of Henry.

After this, William's forces continued for some time to make head successfully against those of the King of France; but then, on the other hand, the danger from his uncle, the Earl of Arques, increased. The earl took advantage of the difficulty and danger in which William was involved in his contests with King Henry, and began to organize his forces again. He fortified himself in his castle at Arques,⁵ and was collecting a large force there. Arques was in the northeastern part of Normandy, near the sea, where the ruins of the ancient castle still remain. The earl built an almost impregnable tower for himself on the summit of the rock on which the castle stood, in a situation so inaccessible that he thought he could retreat to it in any emergency, with a few chosen followers, and bid defiance

⁵ See [map](#), chapter ix.

to any assault. In and around this castle the earl had got quite a large army together. William advanced with his forces, and, encamping around them, shut them in. King Henry, who was then in a distant part of Normandy, began to put his army in motion to come to the rescue of Arques.

Things being in this state, William left a strong body of men to continue the investment and siege of Arques, and went off himself, at the head of the remainder of his force, to intercept Henry on his advance. The result was a battle and a victory, gained under circumstances so extraordinary, that William, young as he was, acquired by his exploits a brilliant and universal renown.

A dangerous defile.
Henry's order of march.

It seems that Henry, in his progress to Arques, had to pass through a long and gloomy valley, which was bounded on either side by precipitous and forest-covered hills. Through this dangerous defile the long train of Henry's army was advancing, arranged and marshaled in such an order as seemed to afford the greatest hope of security in case of an attack. First came the vanguard, a strong escort, formed of heavy bodies of soldiery, armed with battle-axes and pikes, and other similar weapons, the most efficient then known. Immediately after this vanguard came a long train of baggage, the tents, the provisions, the stores, and all the munitions of war. The baggage was followed by a great company of servants—the cooks, the carters, the laborers, the camp followers of every description—a throng of non-combatants, useless, of course, in a battle, and a burden on a march, and yet the inseparable and indispensable attendant of an army, whether at rest or in motion. After this throng came the main body of the army, with the king, escorted by his guard of honor, at the head of it. An active and efficient corps of lancers and men-at-arms brought up the rear.

William's ambushade.

William conceived the design of drawing this cumbrous and unmanageable body into an ambushade. He selected, accordingly, the narrowest and most dangerous part of the defile for the purpose, and stationed vast numbers of Norman soldiers, armed with javelins and arrows, upon the slopes of the hill on either side, concealing them all carefully among the thickets and rocks. He then marshaled the remainder of his forces in the valley, and sent them up the valley to meet Henry as he was descending. This body of troops, which was to advance openly to meet the king, as if they constituted the whole of William's force, were to fight a pretended battle with the vanguard, and then to retreat, in hopes to draw the whole train after them in a pursuit so eager as to throw them into confusion; and then, when the column, thus disarranged, should reach the place of ambushade, the Normans were to come down upon them suddenly from their hiding-places, and complete their discomfiture.

Its success.
Pretended flight of the Normans.

The plan was well laid, and wisely and bravely executed; and it was most triumphantly successful in its result. The vanguard of Henry's army were deceived by the pretended flight of the Norman detachment. They supposed, too, that it constituted the whole body of their enemies. They pressed forward, therefore, with great exultation and eagerness to pursue them. News of the attack, and of the apparent repulse with which the French soldiers had met it, passed rapidly along the valley, producing every where the wildest excitement, and an eager desire to press forward to the scene of conflict. The whole valley was filled with shouts and outcries; baggage was abandoned, that those who had charge of it might hurry on; men ran to and fro for tidings, or ascended eminences to try to see. Horsemen drove at full speed from front to rear, and from rear on to the front again; orders and counter orders were given, which nobody would understand or attend to in the general confusion and din. In fact, the universal attention seemed absorbed in one general and eager desire to press forward with headlong impetuosity to the scene of victory and pursuit which they supposed was enacting in the van.

Disarray of the French.
Rout of the French.

The army pressed on in this confused and excited manner until they reached the place of ambuscade. They went on, too, through this narrow passage, as heedlessly as ever; and, when the densest and most powerful portion of the column was crowding through, they were suddenly thunderstruck by the issuing of a thousand weapons from the heights and thickets above them on either hand—a dreadful shower of arrows, javelins, and spears, which struck down hundreds in a moment, and overwhelmed the rest with astonishment and terror. As soon as this first discharge had been effected, the concealed enemy came pouring down the sides of the mountain, springing out from a thousand hiding-places, as if suddenly brought into being by some magic power. The discomfiture of Henry's forces was complete and irremediable. The men fled every where in utter dismay, trampling upon and destroying one another, as they crowded back in terrified throngs to find some place of safety up the valley. There, after a day or two, Henry got together the scattered remains of his army, and established something like a camp.

William's embassy to Henry.

It is a curious illustration of the feudal feelings of those times in respect to the gradation of ranks, or else of the extraordinary modesty and good sense of William's character, that he assumed no airs of superiority over his sovereign, and showed no signs of extravagant elation after this battle. He sent a respectful embassy to Henry, recognizing his own acknowledged subjection to Henry as his sovereign, and imploring his protection! He looked confidently to him, he said, for aid and support against his rebellious subjects.

The castle at Arques taken.

Though he thus professed, however, to rely on Henry, he really trusted most, it seems, to his own right arm; for, as soon as this battle was fairly over, and while the whole country was excited with the astonishing brilliancy of the exploit performed by so young a man, William mounted his horse, and calling upon those to follow him who wished to do so, he rode at full speed, at the head of a small cavalcade, to the castle at Arques. His sudden appearance here, with the news of the victory, inspirited the besiegers to such a degree that the castle was soon taken. He allowed the rebel earl to escape, and thus, perhaps, all the more effectually put an end to the rebellion. He was now in peaceable possession of his realm.

William crowned at Falaise.

He went in triumph to Falaise, where he was solemnly crowned with great ceremony and parade, and all Normandy was filled with congratulations and rejoicings.

Chapter IV.

William's Reign in Normandy

A.D. 1040-1060

A lapse of twenty years.

From the time of William's obtaining quiet possession of his realm to his invasion of England, a long period intervened. There was a lapse of more than twenty years. During this long interval, William governed his duchy, suppressed insurrections, built castles and towns, carried on wars, regulated civil institutions, and, in fact, exercised, in a very energetic and successful manner, all the functions of government—his life being diversified all the time by the usual incidents which mark the career of a great military ruler of an independent realm in the Middle Ages. We will give in this chapter a description of some of these incidents.

Conspiracy of Guy of Burgundy.
The fool or jester.

On one occasion a conspiracy was formed to take his life by secret assassination. A great chieftain, named Guy of Burgundy, William's uncle, was the leader of it, and a half-witted man, named Galet, who occupied the place of jester or fool in William's court, was the means of discovering and exposing it. These jesters, of whom there was always one or more in the retinue of every great prince in those days, were either very eccentric or very foolish, or half-insane men, who were dressed fantastically, in gaudy colors and with cap and bells, and were kept to make amusement for the court. The name of William's jester was Galet.

Meetings of the conspirators.

Guy of Burgundy and his fellow-conspirators occupied certain gloomy castles, built in remote and lonely situations on the confines of Normandy. Here they were accustomed to assemble for the purpose of concocting their plans, and gathering their men and their resources—doing every thing in the most cunning and secret manner. Before their scheme was fully ripe for execution, it happened that William made a hunting excursion into the neighborhood of their territory with a small band of followers—such as would be naturally got together on such a party of pleasure. Galet, the fool, was among them.

As soon as Guy and his fellow-conspirators learned that William was so near, they determined to precipitate the execution of their plan, and waylay and assassinate him on his return.

Final plans of the conspirators.

They accordingly left their secret and lonely rendezvous among the mountains one by one, in order to avoid attracting observation, and went to a town called Bayeux, through which they supposed that William would have to pass on his return. Here they held secret consultations, and formed their final plans. They sent out a part of their number, in small bands, into the region of country which William would have to cross, to occupy the various roads and passes, and thus to cut off all possibility of his escape. They made all these arrangements in the most secret and cautious manner, and began to think that they were sure of their prey.

Discovered by Galet.
Galet sets out in search of William.
He finds him asleep.

It happened, however, that some of William's attendants, with Galet the fool among them, had preceded William on his return, and had reached Bayeux⁶ at the time when the conspirators arrived there. The townspeople did not observe the coming of the conspirators particularly, as many horsemen and soldiers were coming and going at that time, and they had no means of distinguishing the duke's friends from his enemies; but Galet, as he sauntered about the town, noticed that there were many soldiers and knights to be seen who were not of his master's party. This attracted his attention; he began to watch the motions of these strangers, and to listen, without seeming to listen, in order to catch the words they spoke to each other as they talked in groups or passed one another in the streets. He was soon satisfied that some mischief was intended. He immediately threw aside his cap and bells, and his fantastic dress, and, taking a staff in his hand, he set off on foot to go back as fast as possible in search of the duke, and give him the alarm. He found the duke at a village called Valonges. He arrived there at night. He pressed forward hastily into his master's chamber, half forcing his way through the attendants, who, accustomed to the liberties which such a personage as he was accustomed to take on all occasions, made only a feeble resistance to his wishes. He found the duke asleep, and he called upon him with a very earnest voice to awake and arise immediately, for his life was in danger.

William's flight.

His narrow escape.

William was at first inclined to disbelieve the story which Galet told him, and to think that there was no cause to fear. He was, however, soon convinced that Galet was right, and that there was reason for alarm. He arose and dressed himself hastily; and, inasmuch as a monarch, in the first moments of the discovery of a treasonable plot, knows not whom to trust, William wisely concluded not to trust any body. He went himself to the stables, saddled his horse with his own hand, mounted him, and rode away. He had a very narrow escape; for, at the same time, while Galet was hastening to Valonges to give his master warning of his danger, the conspirators had been advancing to the same place, and had completely surrounded it; and they were on the eve of making an attack upon William's quarters at the very hour when he set out upon his flight. William had accordingly proceeded only a little way on his route before he heard the footsteps of galloping horses, and the clanking of arms, on the road behind him. It was a troop of the conspirators coming, who, finding that William had fled, had set off immediately in pursuit. William rode hastily into a wood, and let them go by.

⁶ See [map](#), chapter ix.



William's Escape.

William is recognized.

He remained for some time in his hiding-place, and then cautiously emerged from it to continue his way. He did not dare to keep the public road, although it was night, but took a wild and circuitous route, in lanes and bypaths, which conducted him, at length, to the vicinity of the sea. Here, about day-break, he was passing a mansion, supposing that no one would observe him at so early an hour, when, suddenly, he perceived a man sitting at the gate, armed and equipped, and in an attitude of waiting. He was waiting for his horse. He was a nobleman named Hubert. He recognized William immediately as the duke, and accosted him in a tone of astonishment, saying, "Why, my lord duke, is it possible that this is you?" He was amazed to see the ruler of the realm out at such an hour, in such a condition, alone, exhausted, his dress all in disorder from the haste with which he had put it on, and his steed breathless and covered with dust, and ready, apparently, to drop down with fatigue and exhaustion.

Hubert's castle.

Hubert's sons.

William, finding that he was recognized, related his story. It appeared, in the end, that Hubert held his own castle and village as a tenant of one of the principal conspirators, and was bound, according to the feudal ideas of the time, to espouse his landlord's cause. He told William, however, that he had nothing to fear. "I will defend your life," said he, "as if it were my own." So saying, he called his three sons, who were all athletic and courageous young men, and commanded them to mount their horses and get ready for a march. He took William into his castle, and gave him the food and refreshment that he needed. Then he brought him again into the court-yard of the house, where William found the three young horsemen mounted and ready, and a strong and fleet steed prepared for himself. He mounted. Hubert commanded his sons to conduct the prince with all dispatch to Falaise, without traveling at all upon the highway or entering a town. They took, accordingly, a straight course across the country—which was probably then, as now, nearly destitute of inclosures—and conducted William safely to his castle at Falaise.

Pursuit of the conspirators.

In the course of the morning, William's pursuers came to Hubert's castle, and asked if the duke had been seen going by. Hubert replied in the affirmative, and he mounted his steed with great readiness to go and show them the road which the fugitive had taken. He urged them to ride hard, in hopes of soon overtaking the object of their pursuit. They drove on, accordingly, with great impetuosity and ardor, under Hubert's guidance; but, as he had purposely taken a wrong road, he was only leading them further and further astray. Finally they gave up the chase, and Hubert returned with the disappointed pursuers to his fortress, William having in the mean time arrived safely at Falaise.

Defeat of the rebels.

Their punishment.

The conspirators now found that it was useless any longer to attempt to conceal their plans. In fact, they were already all exposed, and they knew that William would immediately summon his troops and come out to seize them. They must, therefore, either fly from the country or attempt an open rebellion. They decided on the latter—the result was a civil war. In the end, William was victorious. He took a large number of the rebels prisoners, and he adopted the following very singular plan for inflicting a suitable punishment upon them, and at the same time erecting a permanent monument of his victory. He laid out a public road across the country, on the line over which he had been conducted by the sons of Hubert, and compelled the rebels to make it. A great part of this country was low and marshy, and had been for this reason avoided by the public road, which took a circuitous course around it. The rebel prisoners were now, however, set at work to raise a terrace or embankment, on a line surveyed by William's engineers, which followed almost exactly the course of his retreat. The high road was then laid out upon this terrace, and it became immediately a public thoroughfare of great importance. It continued for several centuries one of the most frequented highways in the realm, and was known by the name of the Raised Road—*Terre levée*

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