NORMANDY.
LAND OF INVASIONS

By PAUL-FRANÇOIS CARCOPINO

It would seem as if certain places were predestined to be used as battlefields. The names of places in Normandy we read today in our newspapers are the same as those that our ancestors used to hear in the legendary songs through which the history of ancient times up to the Middle Ages has come down to us.

As far as we know, Titurius Sabinius, one of Caesar's lieutenants, won a battle against Viridovix in 56 B.C.—near the forest of Écouves according to legend; near Montebourg in the Valognes district according to some recent discoveries. At the time of the Roman invasion there were nine tribes living in what was then the province of Neustrie. The names of eight of these tribes are preserved in the names by which the inhabitants of some of these towns are known to this day as, for example, "Bajo-cessens" (those of Bayeux) or "Lexoviens" (of Lisieux), or in the names of the towns themselves or the districts. The name of the ninth tribe, the "Unelles," was changed into "Constantins" after the founding of Constantia (now Coutances) by Emperor Constantine, whence comes the name of Cotentin peninsula.

Old chroniclers, great lovers of the wonderful and prepared to believe everything, relate that the first inhabitants of that region were descendants of Gomer, the son of Japhet, who was the son of Noah. Hence one of the counties near Lisieux is named "Montgomery" and gave its name to the Montgomery family. To be a member of this family was more glorious than to be descended from Eneus, Venus's son, like the Romans, or from Francus, Hector's son, like the Franks.

THE FIRST SIEGE OF PARIS

Seven hundred boats, forty thousand men, occupying more than five miles of the Seine in front of Paris: a real invasion of northern France. Paris was not yet known as Paris; it was called Lutèce, situated on a small island on the river, but already a capital. This was in 885.

Since 800 the Northmen, or Normans, had been raiding the coasts of France and, by way of her rivers, France's provinces from the Channel as far as the Pyrenees. In 845, Ragnar Lodbroq led his vikings to Paris with a hundred and twenty boats and took the town. In 885 the Vikings, those Scandinavian men sailing from somewhere in the wild north seas, raided the country along the Seine and the Loire Rivers. As they were pagans they directed their attacks chiefly against churches, monasteries, abbeys, from which they knew they could obtain great loot. They were roving sailors and, as such, could not all remain inactive during that very siege of Paris which lasted for a whole year. They raided the surrounding regions, and Bayeux was taken.

BOUNDARIES, MAN- AND RIVER-MADE

After having been defeated at various places, the Vikings turned back to their original starting point in France and began to settle in the Seine area. In 911 their chief was Rollo, also called Rolf the Walker, because he could not find a horse strong
enough to carry him. After taking Rouen and Bayeux, he led his men to Paris, but without success. Beaten at Chartres, he was finally ready to come to an agreement.

The two main points of the agreement between Rollo and King Charles II of France were, on the one hand, the cession of land by the King and, on the other, the christening of the pagan chief. This "gentlemen's agreement" took place at Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, a small town between Paris and Rouen on the Epte River, which latter marked the limit of Norman-occupied territories. This is how part of northern France came to be Norman, Normandy, and how the daring Normans became vassals of the King of France. The southern limits were the Bresle and Epte Rivers east of the Seine, and the Avre and Dives Rivers to the west. Twenty years later, in 933, Normandy was given its final boundaries when, at the death of his father Rollo, William Long-Sword took an oath of allegiance in return for the cession of the Cotentin and Avranchin provinces.

Finally, the Couesnon, a small river which marks the border of Brittany, shifted the position of its mouth and thus placed famous Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy. Hence the French saying:

*Le Couesnon, par sa folie,
A mis le Mont en Normandie.*

Even after having gained possession of Normandy and settling there, the Normans remained true to the spirit of the Vikings, those same Vikings who penetrated deeply into Eastern Europe and sailed to Iceland, Greenland, and probably even America. As an illustration of their pride, legend tells the following story. Rollo, refusing to kiss the King's foot as a sign of allegiance, asked one of his men to do it for him; and this latter, instead of bending down, took the King's foot and lifted it so high that the King fell over backwards, to the great enjoyment of the Norman spectators.

**ROBERT AND WILLIAM**

When the Normans were given rest from internal disturbances, their thoughts immediately turned to some conquest to be made or to some distant expedition to the Holy Land to obtain forgiveness for some dreadful murder. They usually set out on their journeys from Naples, Amalfi, or Bari, ports trading with the Near East, as they were accustomed to visiting the sanctuaries of Monte Cassino and Monte Gargano, the latter being dedicated also to Saint Michael, as was the famous Norman monastery. Thus such Normans as, for instance, the sons of Tancred de Hauteville, a poor gentleman from Cotentin, went to Italy, fought against Greeks and Saracens, and obtained from Popes Leo IX and Nicholas II the province of Calabria and the island of Sicily, which latter they made into a kingdom in 1130.

About a hundred years after the agreement of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, the Duchy of Normandy was ruled by Robert the Devil, who had his headquarters at Falaise, the epitome of all that is romantic in old castles, a great gray pile of round tower and square keep. The story goes that, when he was a youth of eighteen, he espied a matter of interest through the castle window. Under the flowering trees was a public place where women gathered to wash their linen. One of these was a young girl of such beauty that the youth fell in love with her at first sight and sent for her to be brought to the castle. Arlette was her name. And she became the mother of a son, named William.

Even yesterday, the women of Falaise still washed their clothes in that same ancient brook and talked of Arlette and her phenomenal son, who became King William I of England and went down in history as William the Conqueror.

When William was seven years old, his father, Robert the Devil, went to the Holy Land and made over the Duchy of Normandy to his son. A certain night in the year 1039, young William was sleeping by the side of his steward Osbern, his tutor having been treacherously slain not long before. Suddenly William awoke. The curtain was moving, somebody was in the room. And Osbern was sleeping deeply. Should he wake him? Too late, a man leaped onto the bed.

"Help! Help!" It was Osbern shouting.

"Ah! Bastard! Die . . . ." came Mont Gommeri's answer.

Osbern was dead, and William suddenly realized how great his power might be that a Mont Gommeri, allied to the great Talvas of Bellême, should have tried to kill him.

**A HUMAN DOCUMENT**

The story of William's conquest of England is told by the famous Bayeux Tapestry, one of those relics of the past of
About a mile off the coast of Normandy rises the sugar loaf rock of Mont-Saint-Michel, where Benedictine monks founded a monastery 978 years ago. At high tide, water encircles the Mount, and before the causeway was built in 1879 travelers walked or rode on horseback across the wet sand. Girt by sea and ramparts, Mont-Saint-Michel has held out against many a siege. It was the only Norman stronghold that successfully resisted the invasion of Henry V of England in the fifteenth century

NORMAN CASTLES AND CHURCHES

The Cathedral of Rouen, with its exquisite central spire and the two dissimilar towers of Saint-Roman and the Tower of Butter

The Castle of Falaise, the birthplace of William the Conqueror. It was from one of these windows that Robert the Devil, his father, espied pretty Arlette, the tanner's daughter, who became the mother of the man who conquered England in 1066
Short streets of timbered houses lead up to the Norman cathedral of Bayeux, whose northwest tower is shown here. The women moving sedately in their black dresses add to the impression of calm in this ancient little town.

The single hand of Rouen's big clock has pointed the time since the days when men in arms tramped through the narrow streets. In the ancient Norman capital, Joan of Arc was burned at the stake.

TIMELESS NORMANDY

A typical bit of the coast of Normandy. Today, as likely as not, it is pitted with the craters made by bombs and shells and strewn with the litter of an invasion.
which everyone has heard. The fifty-eight scenes, two of which we have reproduced, were embroidered on linen by Mathilda, William's wife, and give a pictorial idea of the Norman conquest. Crude as it is in design, and partly defaced, it nevertheless re-creates a momentous event in the world's history. It starts with William assembling seven hundred boats at the mouth of the Dives and "an innumerable host of horsemen, singers, archers, and foot soldiers." They were the biggest boats for their time, the largest able to hold fifty knights fully equipped with all their horses and men.

The two sections from the Bayeux Tapestry reproduced in this article show scenes from the life of William the Conqueror. This one depicts the Battle of Hastings in 1066, in which William conquered England.

This tapestry, intended for the Bayeux Cathedral, lay up to the present war in a double-glass case in the old bishop's palace, used as the town library.

As a result of the Norman conquest, the English parliament used Norman French for more than four hundred years when requesting the king to approve or reject his laws. Although the old Norse tongue died out quickly in Normandy, we can still find tokens of its Scandinavian origin in such place names as: Caudebec (beau meaning rivulet); Harfleur and Barfleur (fleur meaning small river channel); Yvetot (lot meaning turf). Or in those names ending in: beuf (encampment); dal (valley); ham (little village, hamlet); gard (garden); hus (house); torp (village); brique (bridge); and diep (deep).

LIVING HISTORY

Bayeux was, until the present invasion, a quiet little town dozing around its cathedral, with short strolls leading to its straggling borders. The cathedral, one of the most beautiful in all France, represented a particu-

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larly complete example of Norman art. Built on the remains of a Roman basilica at the beginning of the twelfth century, the cathedral acquired a central tower in the flamboyant style in the fifteenth century, as well as two lateral towers of the type commonly found in all the silhouettes pointing to the sky from Cotentin to the district of Caux.

The surrounding countryside is very green and of the flat, rather monotonous character typical of the region of Caen. It is the least picturesque part of Normandy and goes down to a seashore without cliffs invariably consisting of sandy beaches bordered by sand dunes. Only the small town of Port-en-Bessin presents the picturesque sight of a fishing harbor of ancient times.

Caen (rhymes with dans), on the other hand, provides a note of contrast in its surroundings. Here William the Conqueror reigns supreme, not as a conqueror but as a man in private life. Through a maze of busy streets one may see among many beautiful buildings the great Norman Abbey of Saint Étienne, also called the "Abbaye-aux-Hommes." William, who had married his cousin Mathilda, hoped by this gift to the Church to be forgiven by the Pope for his marriage. At the same time, on the opposite side of the town, Queen Mathilda built La Trinité, also known as the "Abbaye-aux-Dames." Mathilda was buried here, and later on William was buried in the Abbey of Saint Étienne. Both are superb examples of the architecture which preceded the rise of early Gothic in the thirteenth century, inspired by the architectural form from northern Italy which, in Norman hands, became a distinctive living thing marked by great size, simplicity, massiveness, and love of geometrical ornaments. These and many other churches and buildings make Caen a Norman Athens and an unrivaled center for the study of Norman art.

Caen was greater than any town in England except London when King Edward III of England entered it on July 16, 1346.

"Dissidence" already!

The English King had invaded Normandy. He landed at Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue on the Cotentin peninsula, following the advice of a Norman "dissident," Geoffroy d'Harcourt, sire of Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte. Violent, ambitious, determined to be Duke of Normandy—not under the King of France but as a vassal of the King of England—Geoffroy
led the English army through his country, which was laid waste. The invaders landed at Valognes, in the heart of Cotentin. This ancient Gallo-Roman town of "Alaunia" was for a long time proud and pretentious; little by little it fell asleep, to become a quiet little place.

From there the English went to Carentan—Carentan, where Napoleon started to build a canal through the peninsula in order to avoid sailing around the capes of La Hague and La Hogue; Carentan, situated in such a flat landscape that the Douve, Seye, Merderet, Sèves, and Taute Rivers, which run through it, see the coming tide flowing back far inland when the floodgates remain open. The King of England was astonished at the wealth and size of the towns which, however, did not prevent him from setting fire to Valognes, Carentan, and Saint-Lô.

Up to the present, Caen enjoyed a brisk trade with Le Havre via the entrancing canal of Ouistreham. The harbor of Ouistreham was used by the English in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when they shipped home the loot collected in successful raids on Caen.

FRANCE'S TWO PATRON SAINTS

But all Norman roads finally lead to Rouen, passing through Lisieux. In Lisieux a basilica was recently built to Saint Thérèse, the young nun canonized only twenty-eight years after her death, whom Pope Pius XII has just made the second patron saint of France.

Rouen, Gothic queen of France, is the ancient capital of the duchy. Here "each monument is a book, each stone a souvenir." Yet still more appealing than architecture or antiquities is the figure of Joan of Arc. For Rouen is her town, saturated with the glorious and tragic memories of the heroine. The spirit of Joan of Arc, who helped to liberate France from the English, still hovers over the market place where, condemned for "having fallen back into errors," she went to her fiery martyrdom. Today Rouen is in flames, flames added by the English to her pyre.

One of Rouen's landmarks is the tower of the big clock, whose single hand has, thanks to constant repair, pointed the time for more than four hundred years. The Cathedral of Notre Dame is a superb example of the evolution of Gothic architecture in all its plenitude, from the Romanesque up to the flamboyant. Of particular interest are the two dissimilar towers, that of Saint Romain, which soberly united the three architectural styles, and the Tower of Butter, so-called because the money for its construction was provided by people who wanted to eat butter during Lent. This latter is all that one could dream in carvings of lace-like delicacy covering a structure of strong lines. With the cathedral, the two churches of Saint Maclou and Saint Ouen completed a wonderful trinity of religious art.

FIGHTING THE ENGLISH

After the martyrdom of Joan of Arc, the French rose up against the English. Normandy was in full ferment, and the "Godons"—as the English were nicknamed by the French after the familiar English swear words "God damn!"—were hunted down everywhere.

A short truce, and in less than a year there were almost no more English in the country, while a general amnesty was granted to the Français reniés, who had served the English. This was bad news for the English, and a new army was sent to Normandy via Cherbourg. Cherbourg—which was to be fortified by Vauban in the seventeenth century and later chosen by Napoleon as a naval port for his main defense against England—was the last French town in English hands. From there they advanced again on Valognes and through the Cotentin peninsula along the Vire River to Bayeux. They stopped at Formigny and were defeated in April 1449 in the territory of Aignerville, where names such as Préaux-Anglais, Pièceaux-Anglais, and Tombaux-Anglais recall their memory.

In 1528, Normandy found itself involved in the religious wars. Catholics with the help of King Philip II of Spain and Protestants with the support of Queen Elizabeth of England were fighting each other. Rouen was a Protestant town as were Bayeux, Coutances, Falaise, Vire, Carentan. Antoine de Bourbon, the father of the future King Henry IV, attacked Rouen, which was defended by the Count of Montgomery. The fall of the town gave all of Normandy to the Catholics, but not for long, for the fall of Caen soon after reversed the situation. History tells us that the Queen of England promised a lot of help to the Normans, but that the actual help given was very weak and, moreover, paid for dearly by the cession of the port of Le Havre.
After all this trouble there was a period of peace and order, which men from Normandy made use of to penetrate into the Saint Lawrence estuary in North America. Led by Cartier and Champlain, they built Quebec and Montreal, thus laying the foundation of Canada.

In 1759, Cherbourg was destroyed by the English. Caen escaped a similar fate thanks to a clever trick played on the English by a coastguard named Cabieu: when they landed in the Orne estuary at night, they were surprised to hear a drum being beaten and orders being shouted by Cabieu to an imaginary French army. So they quickly re-embarked to avoid pursuit.

**GHOSTS OF THE PAST**

The occupations of Normandy in 1815, 1870, and 1940 did not lead to anything like the destruction experienced in former days. But the reports about the present invasion speak of total destruction being wrought by the invasion of 1944. This leaves us little hope that even part of those inestimable treasures of French history and European art will be saved.

The present war has linked up all those names that stand out in Norman history. Normandy itself is once again being invaded; one of the commanding generals is named Montgomery. The towns of Bayeux, Caen, Carentan, Valognes, Cherbourg have been the scenes of bloody fighting and wholesale destruction; the invaders themselves, Americans, English, Canadians, include without doubt some descendants of those adventurous Norman emigrants; and the various European war theaters mentioned in the communiqués of this war were once the scenes of the exploits of those same Normans, from Russia to the Near East, from the North Sea and the Channel to Sicily and Italy.

**THE NORMANDY OF YESTERDAY**

In a landscape of green, the Normans of yesterday not only raised cattle and horses, made butter and cheese, known all over the world as Isigny butter, Camembert and Pont-l’Évêque cheese: they also had prosperous industries such as that of Rouen linen, Alençon lace, Cherbourg mirrors, and faïences of Rouen. Normandy is also the land of good food with such specialties as andouillettes (small sausages) from Vire and tripes à la mode de Caen, with which one must drink Normandy’s favorite beverage, apple cider.

This part of France, which nature seems to have showered with her gifts, also gave France writers like Malherbe, Corneille, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Barbyd'Aurevilly Guy de Maupassant, and Flaubert, musicians like Aubert, and Boëldieu. Who has not seen at least a reproduction of “The Angelus” by Millet or “Le Radeau de la Méduse” by Géricault, both sons of Normandy, as was Nicolas Poussin, the master of classical painting in France! Science, too, owes something to Normandy: Laplace and Le Verrier are well-known astronomers, and Fresnel brought about great progress in the field of optics.

In spite of these famous names in so many different spheres, the Norman remains a peasant well balanced in mind, thrifty without being a miser, a hard worker, and famous for his special way of answering questions: “P’I être ben qu’ouit! P’I être ben qu’ouin!” (“Maybe yes, maybe no!”). And when he leaves his country for a while, he always bears in mind the Norman song:

*J’irai revoir ma Normandie,
C’est le pays qui m’a donné le jour.*

**Conscripts Born in 1926**

In the spring of 1944 Germany called up her young men born in 1926. What does this mean in figures? According to official statistics, 632,370 boys were born in the old territory of the Reich in that year, i.e., excluding Austria, the Protectorate, etc. Some 16% of these boys died between the years 1926 and 1944, so that, by the spring of 1944, 531,190 young men born in 1926 were still alive. As the result of the careful medical and athletic supervision of German youth, the number of those unfit for military service is unusually low, namely, according to a Transocean report dated March 10, 1944, 1.5%. Hence the males born in 1926 now called up represent an increase of more than half a million young men—originating solely from the old territory of the Reich—for the German Army.