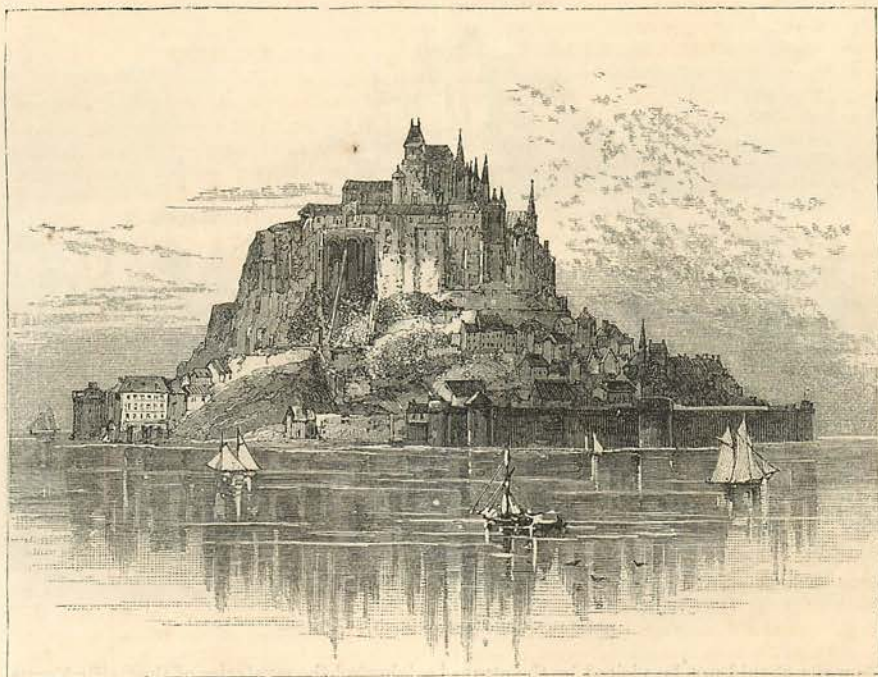


## MONT ST. MICHEL.



MONT ST. MICHEL.

OF the many picturesque inlets of the French side of the English Channel one of the most attractive is the bay of Cancale, which washes a part of the coasts of both Normandy and Brittany. With Granville on the right and Cancale on the left of its mouth, it rolls its tides directly into the broader Breton sea or bay of St. Malo, in whose throat lie the Chaussey and the Channel islands. Its shores, more like the banks of an inland lake than of the sea, are bordered with green slopes and wooded hills, and the grain fields lie so close to its waters that its foam is cast almost at the feet of the harvests.

At its foot, in the little bay of Avranches, an offshoot from its own, rises Mont St. Michel, an isolated pyramid of rock, whose summit overlooks a great part of the Norman and the Breton coasts, and in clear weather commands the cliffs of Jersey. On the west the eye takes in the Groin de Cancale, with its outlying fort of Rémoins; next Vivier, low and bordered with windmills; beyond it Mont Dol; then the towers and roofs of Beauvoir, Pas, Moidrey, and Huisnes; Avranches on its green ridge, the church of the Val St. Pair, the Roman tower of St. Leonard, the church of St. Genets, the tower of Dragey, and last the hill of St. Jean-le-Thomas and the rock of Tombelaine.

From the main-land the most prominent object in the view is Mont St. Michel itself, a sombre cone of granite rising from a sandy plain to a height, including the buildings on its summit, of about four hundred feet. This plain, which is called the Grève, presents many singular phenomena. From the peculiar formation of the shores and the outlying islands and rocks, the tide rises here to a height more than double that at any other point on the coast. While the average rise at Cherbourg during spring-tides is twenty-one feet, at Granville, on the east side of the bay of Cancale, it reaches forty-five feet. The bottom of the bay of Avranches, of which about ten square leagues are uncovered at low water, has so slight an incline seaward as to be practically level, and when the tide comes in an enormous mass of water is poured over it at once, so that the plain is transformed in a few minutes into an angry sea. It is said that the irruption is so rapid during the equinoctial tides that the swiftest horse could not escape it. Fortunately its visits are periodically exact, and the Grève, which is left bare four or five hours each day between the tides, is roamed over with impunity by the neighboring villagers. At low tide the rock is left at least five miles from the sea.

The Grève, though safe to those who know





ARRIVAL OF PILGRIMS AT MONT ST. MICHEL.\*

its ways, should not be visited by the stranger without a guide, for the sea is not the only enemy to be feared. No less dangerous are the moving sands, or *lises*, as the country people call them, which none but an experienced eye can distinguish from the solid ground, and in which the entrapped traveler, unless fortunate enough to be promptly extricated, would sink to fathomless depths. *Lises*, which are found oftenest in the neighborhood of the little streams that traverse the Grève, may be produced artificially by beating the sand, which soon transforms the solid surface into a wet, spongy mass, indicating that the entire plain is permeated with water at no great depth.

Not even tradition tells when this rock first became the abode of man. Long before the Roman domination, when Armorica was the centre of Druidism, it was a sacred mountain, and some writers claim that it was the site of the college of the nine Druidesses to whom was given the power of healing maladies, of extorting the secrets of fate, and of controlling the elements. Hither came the mariner to purchase the arrows which possessed the virtue when shot into the sea of calming storms, and here were

celebrated the mysteries of the Gallic Venus, with rites not unlike those of the Samothracian Cabiri.

What it was called in those dark days is unknown, but when the Romans came they erected on it a shrine to Jupiter, and named it *Mons Jovis*. With the advent of Christianity some hermits built cabins and took up their abode there. In the sixth century St. Pair, Bishop of Avranches, formed these lone dwellers into a brotherhood; and in 708, when Childebert II. ruled France, Aubert, also Bishop of Avranches, built a church and surrounding cells, and dedicated the mount to St. Michael.

Under the protection of the Norman dukes the monastery prospered. In 963 Richard I. replaced the church and other buildings with finer structures, and bestowed the whole upon the Benedictines. It rapidly increased in wealth and in strength, and by the beginning of the eleventh century it had grown into an important fortress; and when William the Bastard was about to assert his claims to the English crown, Mont St. Michel contributed ships and men in aid of his cause.

The fortress remained an appanage of the English crown until the beginning of the thirteenth century, when it fell into the hands of the French king, Philippe Auguste, who expended large sums in strengthening and embellishing it. The English made strenuous efforts to recover it, notably in

\* Every year, and especially on the 29th of September (*l'époque de la fête patronale*), Mont St. Michel is visited by large numbers of pilgrims. In 1874 the *fête patronale* was celebrated with unusual ceremony. This illustration, and that which follows, have especial reference to the celebration last September.

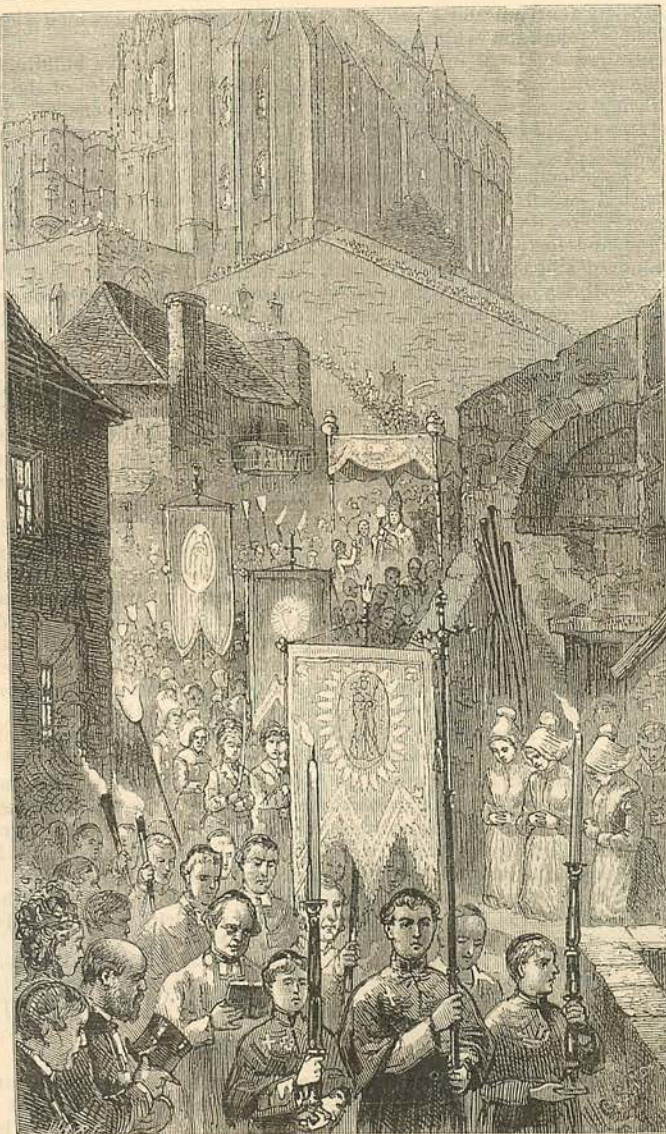


the years 1417 and 1423, but always unsuccessfully. In 1469 Louis XI. founded there the knightly order of St. Michael, in gratitude to the archangel for having preserved the mount to France when all the rest of Normandy had fallen; and from that time onward were held there the chapters of the order, which bore the fitting motto, "Immensi tremor oceani."

Mont St. Michel sustained several sieges during the wars of the League, after which its history is mainly peaceful. It was suppressed during the Revolution with the other religious establishments of France, and was made a prison for ecclesiastics who refused to take the civic oath. In 1811 it was converted into a central house of correction, a part of it being reserved for prisoners of state, and it was used as such until a few years ago. It is now in the possession of a few ecclesiastics, who occupy a part of the buildings as an orphan asylum.

The rock of Mont

St. Michel rises abruptly from the Grève on all sides excepting the east and the south-east, where it is defended by a high crenelated wall, strengthened by round towers. Between this wall and the wall of the abbey proper, where the rock has but a gradual rise, are crowded the houses of the little village of Mont St. Michel. Above the village is seen the rock, bearing a stunted growth of pines and evergreen oaks; higher still rise the walls of the abbatial buildings, strengthened with many buttresses; and above all, forming the apex of the pyramid, towers the church with its square tower and graceful Gothic spires. On its topmost



FÊTE DU MONT ST. MICHEL.—THE TORCH-LIGHT PROCESSION.

pinnacle once gleamed a colossal gilded figure of St. Michael, erected in the twelfth century, but it was destroyed by lightning in 1788.

From the exterior gateway a steep narrow street winds around the south side of the mountain to a second gate flanked by two towers. At each side of the entrance, which is closed with an iron-covered gate nearly twelve feet high, is placed one of the great bombards taken from the English in the siege of 1423. These guns, which are made of bars of iron bound together with iron rings, are twelve feet in length; one has a bore of nineteen and a half inches, the



other of fourteen and a half. A steep stair leads through the vaulted gateway to a third entrance, defended by a portcullis and by machicolations, which opens into the guard-room, whence concealed wickets and narrow stairways led into the different parts of the abbey.

The principal of the conventual buildings is that called the Merveille, from its immense size, its walls measuring two hundred and forty-six feet in length and one hundred and eight feet in height. It has three stories of halls, with a cloister above and vast vaulted crypts beneath. Of the halls, that called the Salle des Chevaliers, where the knights of St. Michael held their chapters, is the finest. It is ninety-eight feet long by sixty-eight wide, and is divided into four naves by three rows of columns. Like the greater part of the superstructure of the Merveille, it dates from the twelfth century. Above it is the cloister, a gem of Gothic architecture, and by far the most beautiful part of the building. Its windows, which look out on the bay, are three hundred and thirty feet above the sea.

The church occupies the summit of the rock, and is in the form of a Latin cross. Its nave and transepts are in the massive style of the twelfth century, but the choir is of the fifteenth century, and one of the best examples of the flamboyant style extant. Beneath the latter is a curious crypt, in the middle of which is a circle of short thick pillars set close together around a central one. They support the entire apsis and the base of the great tower, which do not bear perpendicularly on the main platform of the rock. Under the north transept is the great cistern, excavated in the solid

rock, from which the abbey was supplied with water.

Under the buildings upon the south and the west sides of the rock are the subterranean dungeons, of which there are several stories. Some of them are oubliettes, and many of them have fitting names, such as the Trap, the Devil's Dungeon, In Pace, etc. At the extremity of one of the larger caverns on the south side is shown the place where stood the cage in which prisoners of state were confined. It was here that Louis XV. shut up Dubourg, the Frankfort journalist, to be devoured by rats, because he had dared to lampoon Madame De Pompadour. The cage, which was built of heavy beams of wood placed three inches apart, was destroyed in 1777 by the sons of Philippe Égalité, Duke of Orleans, during a visit made by them to Mont St. Michel in company with their "governor," Madame De Genlis.

When Mont St. Michel became a house of correction, the church, the cloister, and other parts of the buildings were transformed into workshops, and the sound of hammer and file was heard where once echoed the clang of knightly arms and the voice of praise. But a few years ago the wooden platforms and partitions were destroyed by fire, and the place thus purified has not since been contaminated by the presence of criminals. Every lover of art will unite in the hope that this noble monument of a period which has left few other memorials comparable with it, this "grandest work of the Benedictines," as the Marquise de Créquy enthusiastically calls it in her *Souvenirs*, may receive henceforth the care commensurate with its historical and artistic value.

## THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE REPUBLIC.

[Fifth Paper.]

MECHANICAL PROGRESS (Concluded).

PRINTING.

THE art of taking an impression from an inked stamp is of great antiquity, being found in the most ancient Egyptian and Assyrian remains. Of yore the rude king who smeared his hand with red ochre or the soot from a burning lamp, and then made the impression of his palm and digits beneath a grant of land, was a printer in his way in thus *putting his hand* to the document. Then came seals, engraved in *relief* or *intaglio*, and delivering an impression of the design upon bark, leaf, or skin, either white marks on a dark ground or dark on a light ground, according to the character of the engraving. Seals containing the pronouns of the Pharaohs, each in its cartouch, rewarded the early explorers in the

valley of the Nile, and more lately the stamps and tablets of the recorders of the cities of Mesopotamia have been disinterred by thousands. The impressions, having been made in plastic clay, and then baked, have endured without injury a sepulture of twenty-five centuries. They exhibit the kindred arts of engraving and plastic moulding. It may be safely assumed that they were also used for giving printed impressions, but such memorials are, in the nature of the case, less permanent. Some of the ancient stamps in the British Museum are of bronze, and have reversed raised letters, evidently intended to print on bark, papyrus, linen, or parchment.

To this stage of progress various nations of the world had advanced, and yet it can hardly be said that printing, as we understand the word, had been thought of. This