

THE BOYHOOD OF "THE CONQUEROR."

BY ADELE E. ORPEN.



tings, though most of us know little of him before that great victory. In the years preceding the battle there was much that was notable in his career. Indeed, his whole life was stirring and full of incident.

The future conqueror of England was born at Falaise, Normandy, in 1027, about the middle of the summer-time; and he always loved Falaise with singular affection. Amid his greatest dangers, when surrounded by treacherous friends and relentless foes, his eyes turned instinctively toward Falaise as to a harbor of refuge. It is a charming place. There is the battered old castle still on the crest of the rock; there is the deep valley creeping around its base; and, above all, there is the little stream where women wash clothes, just as they used to do in the brave days of old.

The Castle of Falaise is one of the most picturesque ruins in all France. It consists mainly of an immense square keep, or stronghold, and high, round tower, with walls running around the whole. King Henry IV. battered at the walls and the tower and the keep during the Huguenot wars. Indeed, the breach in the wall, where the Béarnais troops clambered up to the assault, may still be seen. It is very steep, and a frightful place to climb. A dozen valiant men might have held the bastion against almost any number of foes; but the besieged left the spot unguarded, and paid no attention to that hole, thinking the deep marshes at the foot of the tower would prevent attack.

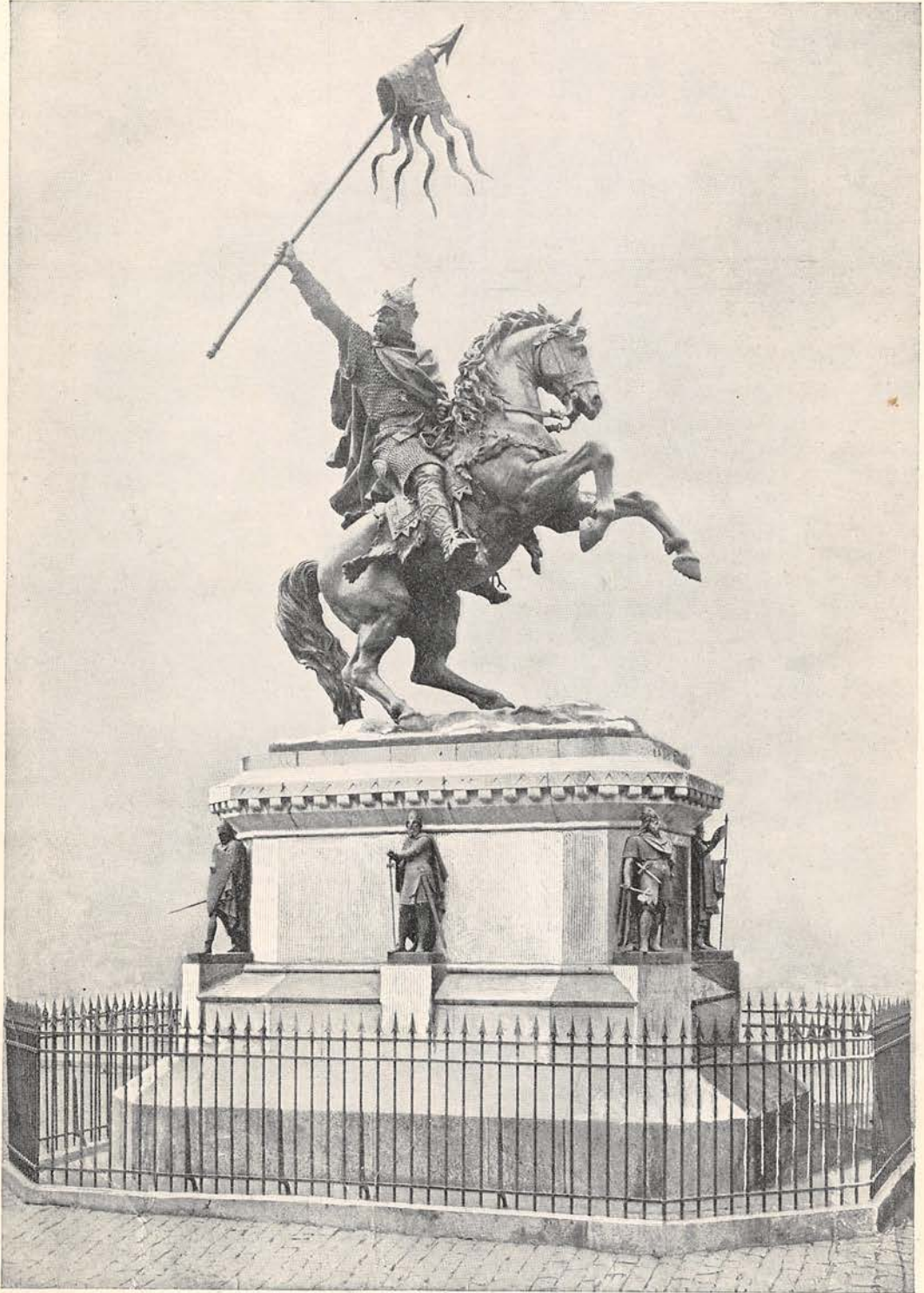
But the frost came and froze the marshes; the garrison forgot what a good roadway ice

could make; the besiegers crossed over, crept up, surprised the place, and took it.

After visiting the breach made by the troops of Henry IV., one is taken to the Talbot Tower. This superb structure one hundred and ten feet high, crowned by a diadem of *créneaux*, is rightly considered the finest tower in France. It is not the work of a Frenchman, however, but was built by the great Talbot of England, and is one of the remains of the short-lived empire of Henry V.

Yet, you say, all these things, though interesting and historical, have nothing to do with William the Conqueror. No, they have not; neither has the keep. The fact is, the Castle of Falaise, as we see it to-day, has nothing to do with William, for the reason that it was not built until the reign of his son Henry. It is true, however, there was formerly a castle on that very spot, and no doubt the foundations are those of the older building. The old guide does not tell one this. He believes that William was born in the present castle; and since he knows that travelers like to see the places where famous people were born, he leads one up a little stairway, and around the inside of the mighty keep, and whenever he comes to a window he shows how thick the wall is,—fifteen feet,—and finally he brings one to a little chamber built in the thickness of the wall. Then he strikes an attitude, and says: "Behold, my lords and ladies, where William the Conqueror was born!" One looks at the alcove, and reads, doubtingly, the lofty words inscribed on the wall which set forth how the mighty Conqueror first saw the light in that tiny room.

William's mother's name was Arlette, and she was a washerwoman—at least, she was washing clothes when Prince Robert first saw her. There is a little washing-fountain at Falaise, now, which goes by the name of the

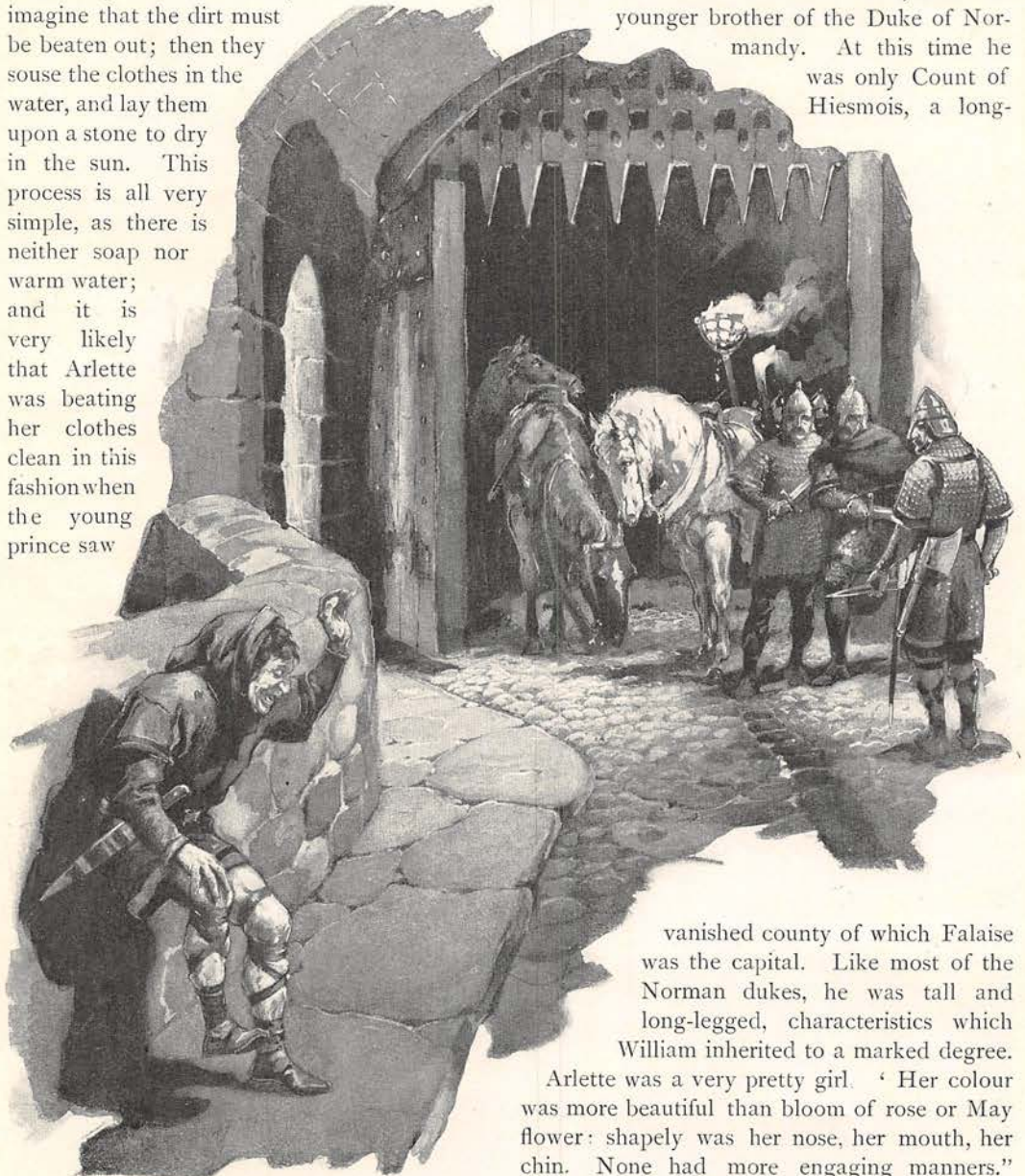


BRONZE STATUE OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR IN THE SQUARE OF FALAISE, NORMANDY, HIS NATIVE TOWN.

fountain of Arlette; and people wash there just as William's mother used to wash. They put the clothes down on a board or stone, near the edge of the fountain, and whack them with a wooden paddle until they imagine that the dirt must be beaten out; then they souse the clothes in the water, and lay them upon a stone to dry in the sun. This process is all very simple, as there is neither soap nor warm water; and it is very likely that Arlette was beating her clothes clean in this fashion when the young prince saw

name was Fulbert. There are tanneries on the same spot now, and the smells of the place are probably as terrific as in more ancient times.

William's father, who was eighteen at the time his renowned son was born, was the younger brother of the Duke of Normandy. At this time he was only Count of Hiesmois, a long-



"HA, HA!" HE CRIED, WITH MAD GLEE, "YOU 'RE LATE, MY SIR: YOU 'RE LATE. THE DUKE IS GONE!"

her, fell in love with her, and very soon afterward determined to ask her to be his princess.

She was a tanner's daughter, and her father's

vanished county of which Falaise was the capital. Like most of the Norman dukes, he was tall and long-legged, characteristics which William inherited to a marked degree.

Arlette was a very pretty girl. "Her colour was more beautiful than bloom of rose or May flower: shapely was her nose, her mouth, her chin. None had more engaging manners." So says Robert Wace, who wrote during the lifetime of her famous grandson. The first time she visited the castle she dressed herself with great care—put on a fresh white gown, and over that a pelisse laced at the throat, and then

a short mantle which well became her. Her hair was caught up in a net of fine silver. In fact she was so grand that the old chronicler cries out in admiration: "I know not if ever any one so beautiful was born." She was proud, too, this tanner's daughter, and would not come into the castle by the postern door, but bade the prince's servants open wide the great gate, so that she might ride in on her palfrey in all dignity, as befitted the chosen one of Count Robert.

Arlette dreamed a dream which turned out so very true that one suspects the dream was invented to fit the event—as often happens. However this may be, poets and chroniclers alike tell how one night she awoke sore affrighted, and on being asked what was the matter, said she had dreamed that she saw a great tree, and that it grew and grew until it overshadowed all Normandy, and the sea, and the broad English land. Of course this meant her son William, who from the very outset was a most vigorous baby. His first exploit was to grasp a wisp of straw with such force that the goodwives round about instantly predicted how he would hold all he got. The same superstition exists to-day, and nurses often foretell a baby's character from the way it holds its hands. If it sleeps with its hands open it will be of a careless, generous nature; if, on the contrary, the child keeps its hands tightly closed, it will in after years look well to its belongings. If there had been any truth in the common superstition, it was to be expected that William would grasp all within his reach and keep fast hold of it!

The count was greatly delighted with his little son. He took the child to the Church of the Holy Trinity, just outside the castle gate, and there had him baptized with much ceremony. The church stands in a square which now bears the name of that famous baby, and in the center of the square stands a statue showing him grown to man's estate, and seated upon a charger who rears aloft with all the fire and movement that art can put into bronze. This statue of William the Conqueror is one of the finest works of modern French art, and represents the hero at the moment when the battle of Hastings seemed lost, and he turns back to

look at his fleeing followers, while fiercely waving his standard in the direction of the foe.

Robert named his boy after his own famous ancestor, William, called "Longsword," and treated the mother "as if she had indeed been the daughter of the king of France."

When he was two years old, his father became Duke of Normandy by reason of the death of an elder brother, Richard; and when William was just seven, his father went on that long pilgrimage to Jerusalem, whence he was never to return.

Before he started, however, the Duke went to Rouen, where he assembled his barons; and when they all were seated in the great hall of the palace, he had his little boy brought in, and then begged the barons to swear fealty to the child. They seem to have been somewhat taken aback at first; however, they ended by swearing to make his son William duke over Normandy, in case his father should never come back. Having, as he imagined, thus made everything safe at home, the Duke set off to Jerusalem.

But he was scarce out of Normandy before the whole duchy fell into confusion. Each baron seemed to think himself independent, and claimed the right to act as he pleased. And of course the child duke could do absolutely nothing to check the disorder. His friends had their hands full in keeping him alive and safe. His mother had married and was now the mother of another son, destined to become famous as Odo, Bishop of Bayeux; but William had a hard time of it. First one governor was murdered, and then another, then his uncle, then his seneschal—almost every one about him who was of consequence. The lad was at one time hidden away among the mean cottages of Falaise, because the castle, thick as its walls might be, was not strong enough to shield him from the enemies who broke into his lodging at night and stabbed his preceptor as he lay asleep beside the little duke.

And so the stormy years of his childhood passed, and William grew in size and strength until he became one of the tallest and strongest men of his time. He was a fearless rider, and could shoot well with the bow. This was a newly introduced weapon, and Norman nobles

were very fond of practising with it. William himself became a famous bowman, and nothing delighted him more than a shooting-match where he could show his skill, with his friends to compete with him.

One of these shooting-matches nearly cost him his life. He was about twenty years old when, in early summer of the year 1047, he went, with a large train of friends and attendants, to shoot at Valognes. In those days there were great forests covering the hills and valleys around Valognes, and as these forests were full of game, the young duke and his friends expected to enjoy themselves. They formed so large a party that they had to separate and lodge where they could in the town. This left the duke with only a few servants in the castle. In the middle of the night he was suddenly awakened by a loud knocking, and the shouting of some one mounting the stairs to his chamber. He listened, and recognized the voice of Gallet, a strolling buffoon, whom he knew very well, and to whom he had frequently given little trifles.

"Fly! fly!" shouted the buffoon. "William, thou art lost! Fly, sweet friend! Thy murderers are coming! I saw them. Fly, or thou wilt be taken!"

William had been through too many dangers, and had had too many narrow escapes, to neglect such a warning. He believed that Gallet, though but a fool, spoke the truth. He sprang from his bed, and in his night-dress, with only a short cloak flung upon his shoulders, dashed downstairs and into the courtyard. Perhaps he heard the sound of armed men approaching; perhaps he needed to hear nothing more in order to realize his danger; at all events, he seized the first horse he could find, leaped upon it bareback, and rode for his life.

Not a moment too soon. He had scarce galloped out of the courtyard before several armed men rode hurriedly into it. Gallet met them at the entrance. He had seen them a short time before from his hay-loft at the inn, when they were preparing for their murderous errand, and whence he had run to warn his "sweet friend" William. He knew them and their purpose. "Ha, ha!" he cried, with mad glee, "you 're late, my sirs; you 're late. The duke is gone!

William is off! Your stroke has missed! But hark ye; bide a bit. He will pay you! You made him pass a bad night — he will make you see an ill day." And then he capered derisively about them.

And what of the duke? He was riding furiously eastward, heading for the wide ford where the river Vire meets the sea in a great three-mile stretch of sand, nearly bare at low water. The young man plunged into the water at Sainte-Marie-du-Mont, and owing to the clear moonlight, crossed over in safety to Saint Clément's Church on the opposite side near Isigny. It was a dangerous place to cross alone at night, but he was in a sore strait, and he had no choice.

The tide was rising fast, and as William came dripping out of the sea he knew that he had won the first round in the game. There was no other ford across the Vire, and until the tide fell again no one could follow him. He entered the church and fell upon his knees, and offered up a prayer of thanks for his safety. The little Church of St. Clément, mostly rebuilt, stands to-day in the same place, at the eastern side of the ford, which, in memory of that night, and the man who rode across, goes by the name of Vé-le-Duc (the Duke's Way). But people do not any longer cross by that long ford, for there are bridges farther inland, which, had they existed in William's time, would have inevitably cost him his life.

Whither was William riding? To Falaise. And he got there, too, in safety, after covering one hundred and twenty miles. But he did not go all the way alone and friendless. At Rye he found a true friend who not only gave him a fresh horse but lent him four young sons as escort. Hubert de Rye had no reason to regret this act of kindness toward his fugitive sovereign. Many years afterward, when king of England, William showed that he remembered this timely help by heaping wealth and honors on those four boys who rode with him into Falaise on the day of the disastrous shooting-match of Valognes.

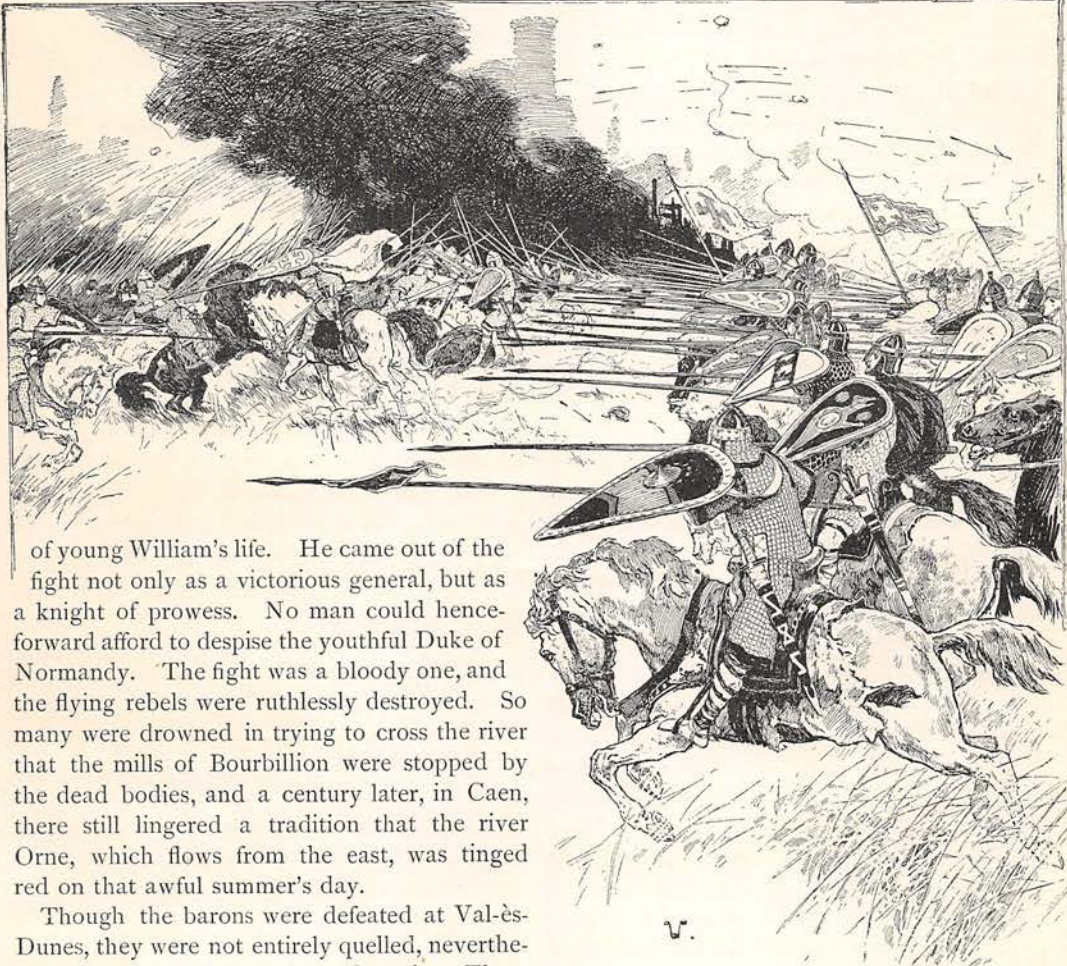
But the men who had intended to kill the young duke did not rest quiet when they found their intended victim had slipped through their fingers. They collected a great army, and

attempted to destroy him in open battle. William met them on the bleak plains east of Caen, and soon showed them he was a valiant soldier as well as a swift-footed fugitive.

The battle named Val-ès-Dunes, which was fought on August 10, 1047, is the turning-point

ous profession for the good bishop, but at Hastings he laid about him with a heavy club, killing every one he struck! He had refused to wield a sword, because he was a churchman and a man of peace.

William resented furiously any allusion to or



of young William's life. He came out of the fight not only as a victorious general, but as a knight of prowess. No man could henceforward afford to despise the youthful Duke of Normandy. The fight was a bloody one, and the flying rebels were ruthlessly destroyed. So many were drowned in trying to cross the river that the mills of Bourbillion were stopped by the dead bodies, and a century later, in Caen, there still lingered a tradition that the river Orne, which flows from the east, was tinged red on that awful summer's day.

Though the barons were defeated at Val-ès-Dunes, they were not entirely quelled, nevertheless. They rebelled again and again. There was a William at Arques who stood a long siege and was subdued only by hunger, and one, Guy of Brionne, held out for three years. Both these men were powerful nobles, and relatives of William, but he conquered both. It is curious to see how stern and unrelenting William always showed himself toward his kindred on his father's side, while he was the most loving and generous of lords to every one related to his mother. He made his half-brother Odo Bishop of Bayeux. It was rather an incongru-

CHARGE OF DUKE WILLIAM'S KNIGHTS AT VAL-ÈS-DUNES.

slur upon the unsavory trade of his grandfather. He could not bear to be called a tanner. The most wantonly cruel action of his life may be directly traced to this feeling. When besieging Alençon, the inhabitants exercised their wit at his expense by hanging cowhides along the outside of their walls, and shouting: "Hides for the tanner!" William fell into a violent rage. He solemnly vowed that he would cause all who fell into his power to repent of their mirth.

Soon afterward he captured thirty-two prisoners, and treated them with the greatest cruelty. Alençon belonged to that old William Taloas who had prophesied about William when that great conqueror was yet a baby; and in after years the old man's prophecy was amply fulfilled, for the house of Taloas was indeed brought to ruin and to shame by the hand of William of Normandy.

When about twenty-five years old, William married Matilda of Flanders, who was always a faithful and most loving wife to him. She is popularly supposed to have busied her-

self in elaborate worsted-work while her lord was away at the English Conquest. But that quaint and intensely interesting production known as the Bayeux tapestry, by far the most authentic piece of contemporary Norman history which has come down to us, was not stitched by Matilda and her maidens. It deals exclusively with the later drama of William's life, the conquest of England, for which his long and stormy boyhood had prepared him by making him, in the words of the Saxon chronicler, "eke so stark a man and wroth that no man durst do anything against his will."

OLD EGYPT AND ITS NEWEST WONDER.

BY JENNIE DAY HAINES.



was one of the most noted places of ancient times, and she was only one of the great Egyptian cities. The Pyramids stand today, and will stand for ages, as lasting monuments of the gigantic labor and wonderful skill of the ancient Egyptians.

The Sphinx still faces the desert, as when, according to the story, she is supposed to have asked her famous riddle, "What is it that walks on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon, and on three in the evening?" Many generations of men (for "Man," who creeps, walks,

and then uses a staff, is the answer to the riddle) have walked to and fro on the face of the earth, and come and gone; but the Sphinx of the Egyptian desert still remains.

The Egyptian custom of preserving their dead is one of the most remarkable things in the history of the world, as you know from your books, and from the mummies in museums.

It is said, too, that geometry began with the Egyptians, and their system of hieroglyphic writing puzzled the learned men of all nations for ages, as St. NICHOLAS has already told you.

The oldest known canal in the world was built by Joseph (the son of Jacob and brother of Benjamin) at Pharaoh's command, and for four thousand years it has never ceased to fulfil its purpose of watering an entire province, and it has thus enabled that territory to support a large population through all these centuries.

In fact, the whole country of Lower Egypt has long been crossed and recrossed by canals, through which the yearly overflow has watered the Nile country; and the artificial Lake Mœris was dug deep, that it might draw off any excess of the river's flood.

So it seems fitting that now, during the closing years of this nineteenth century, old