

## CHAPTER XIV.

## ARGENTAN (DÉP. DE L'ORNE).

“ Vous qui voulez d'Argentan faire conte,  
 A sa grandeur arrêter ne faut ;  
 Petite elle est, mais en beauté surmonte  
 Maintes cités, car rien ne lui défaut ;  
 Elle est assise en lieu plaisant et haut,  
 De tout côté à prairie, à campagne,  
 Un fleuve aussi, où maint poisson se baigne,  
 Des bois épais, suffisans pour nourrir  
 Biches et cerfs qui sont prompts à courir ;  
 Plus y trouvez, tant elle est bien garnie,  
 Plus au besoin nature secourir  
 Bon air, bon vin, et bonne compagnie !”

*Des Maisons, 1517.*

*manuscript*  
*founder*  
 THE name of the little town of Argentan, whose points long rivalled those of Alençon, is familiar to English ears as connected with our Norman kings. Argentan is mentioned by old Robert Wace as sending its sons to the conquest of England.<sup>1</sup> It was here the mother of Henry II. retired in 1130; and the imperial eagle borne as the arms of the town is said to be a memorial of her long sojourn. Here the first Plantagenet held the “cour plénière,” in which the invasion of Ireland was arranged; and it was here he uttered those rash words which prompted his servile adherents to leave Argentan to assassinate Thomas à Becket.<sup>2</sup>

But, apart from historic recollections, Argentan is celebrated for its point lace, which, though generally confounded in commerce with that of Alençon, essentially differs from it in character. No history of the establishment of this manufacture remains. The geographers and local historians of Argentan do not even allude to its existence, but it is mentioned in one of the letters of the

<sup>1</sup> “ Li boen citean de Roem,  
 E la Jovante de Caem,  
 E de Falaise e d'Argentoen.”  
*Romant de Rou.*

<sup>2</sup> Henry founded a chapel at Argentan to St. Thomas of Canterbury.