

Chapter Three

LÂON, RHEIMS AND SOISSONS

“**W**E passed Lâon in the dark,” is a confession frequently made by travellers. The Geneva express used to stop here for dinner, and during the brief interval allowed for coffee and cigarettes many a traveller has gazed up at the great buttressed hill, silhouetted against a twilight sky, and wondered what manner of place it might be, half-fortress, half-church, rising some three hundred and fifty feet out of the plain with its crest of towers and houses.

If Paris is the type of the island cities of Gaul, surely Lâon may be called the type of the hill cities. “Lâon is the very pride of that class of town which out of Gaulish hill-forts grew into Roman and mediæval cities. None stands so proudly on its height; none has kept its ancient character so little changed to our own day. The town still keeps itself within the walls which fence in the hill-top, and whatever there is of suburb has grown up at the foot, apart from the ancient city.”