

LÂON, RHEIMS, AND SOISSONS

Geologically, Lâon is a limestone island in the denuded plain of Soissonais and Béarnais, and was a Celtic stronghold, as its name, a contraction of *Laudunum*, shows, *dun* standing for a hill fortress. The town resembles in plan a blunt crescent, one horn of which is occupied by the cathedral and citadel. An electric railway connects the upper with the lower town, and a street from the market-place leads through the Parvis to the very beautiful west façade of the church. Cathedral, strictly speaking, it is no longer, for at Lâon we have another of those instances, always somewhat melancholy, of a deserted bishopstool. Here it is almost more pathetic, when we remember that the Bishop of Lâon was second in importance only to the Archbishop of Rheims himself, and, going back to the days of William Longsword, we find Lâon not only a bishopric, but a capital town—one of the great trio of cities which ruled northern France and fought amongst themselves for the chief mastery. There was the Duke of Paris in his capital; there was the Duke of the Normans, an outsider who by force of arms had settled at Rouen, and was a source of continual trembling to the Parisian duchy; and there was the King of the Franks on the hill-top at Lâon, nominally suzerain of both the others, but really in daily fear lest one or other, or both, should swoop