

***MICHAEL MYERS
SHOEMAKER***



***WINGED
WHEELS
IN FRANCE***

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Winged Wheels in France

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PREFACE

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This is not a love story. These wings are wings of motion, not of Cupid, yet there is much of romance and story in these pages,—for who can travel the *plaisant pays de France* and not dip deeply into both?

When I entered my red machine at Nice no route had been laid out,—to me there is small pleasure in travel when that is done,—so I told Jean to start and left the direction to him. Being French he naturally turned towards his own country, and knowing whither the superb highways and enchanting byways could lead one, I tacitly agreed, and we glided away by the level sea and on into the olive-crowned hill of Provence, to where Aix—the home of politeness—dreams the years away and the air seems still to echo to King René's music. Arles, Narbonne, fantastic Carcassonne, Lourdes, and Pau followed in rapid succession, and then we rested awhile at Biarritz with short journeys into Spain. Turning northward we rolled off into Central France, pausing daily in some ancient city or quaint village, climbing mountains to long forgotten castles, or rolling into valleys in search of deserted abbeys.

So we wandered through Auvergne, through courtly Touraine, sad Anjou, and stormy Brittany, until Normandy and Picardy smiled into our faces and Paris received us within her gates. Exploring the surroundings of that great city as one can do only in an auto, we finally glided off through the forest of Fontainebleau and Côte-d'Or to the mountains of the Vosges and thence over the Schlucht to

the Rhine Valley to Freiburg, and up to Baden-Baden. There the spirits of the woods seized upon us and we promptly got lost in the Black Forest, and so rolled on into Switzerland to Geneva and finally to Aix-les-Bains, where the journey ended and I bade goodbye to my staunch car which had carried me without mishap or delay for near five thousand miles. To its winged wheels the highest mountains of France were no barrier.

If all this pleases you, read these pages—if not, drop the book.

M. S. M.

Union Club, N. Y.
June, 1906.

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WINGED WHEELS IN FRANCE

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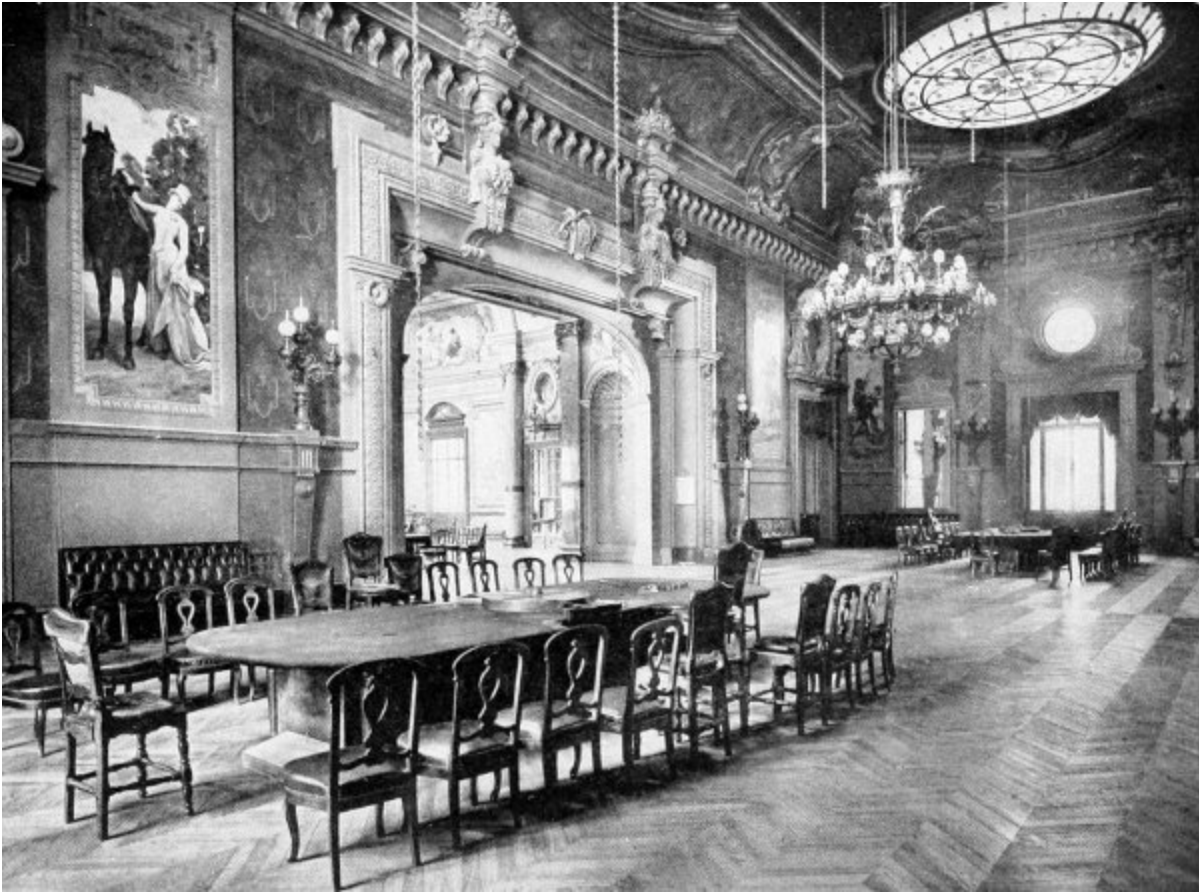
CHAPTER I

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MONTE CARLO

"MONSIEUR smiles." To begin a journey with the greeting of a little child should be a happy omen. I am leaning over the terrace at Monte Carlo, watching the sparkle of the shifting sea. Away to the eastward glisten the villas on Cape Martan, to the west rises the ancient city of Monaco, behind me towers the Casino, the scene of more misery than almost any other spot on earth. Beyond and above it, rise the hills tier on tier, dotted with hotels and villas, while far in the blue dome of sky soar the eternal snows. A scene of beauty, yet one so familiar that I scarcely note it; neither are my thoughts of the nearby misery in the Casino when the little voice murmurs "Monsieur," and I see at my feet, seated on the marble of the terrace with masses of rhododendrons all around her, a mite of a girl, with sunny hair and blue eyes, who laughingly holds up for my acceptance a pink rose. It evidently is not considered proper for a young lady of her age to be talking to a strange man and she is accordingly hustled away, her wondering and rebellious eyes gazing back at me as she waves a farewell. Bless her little heart, it must be almost the only innocent thing in this sink of iniquity. With her disappearance, I have the place all to myself, the town gives up no sounds of life and soon even the sea has murmured itself to sleep, while yonder building, from the outside, is silent as a tomb now; yet as I enter I find every table in all the vast rooms so hemmed in by a

struggling humanity, that I must wait my turn almost before throwing away good money if such is my desire. All the nations of the earth come here, and to manage and keep them in check, hundreds of detectives in plain clothes are always present. Yonder a man has dropped a pocket-book, which is at once pounced upon, and he is hustled through some door in the wall which has escaped your notice. Probably he is a thief, and will not return. If you end your life at the suicides' table—the last on the right on your way out—your body will be hustled off in a like manner, and the crowd without turning to look after you will close in again, leaving no sign that you have ever been. It is said that there is a carriage belonging to this establishment especially arranged so that a dead man may be driven away seated erect as though alive without shocking the senses of those who are here for pleasure. These people would rather you did not kill yourself and will give you a ticket home if you will go, but if you must pass to the great beyond, there will be no high mass said over your silent face and no further attention paid to your stiff fingers which have ceased to pour gold on the green tables. This world has no use for one whose pockets are empty—his day is done and he might as well be dead.



INTERIOR OF THE CASINO AT MONTE CARLO

By permission of Messrs. Neurdein

You will not be impressed with the misery of Monte Carlo unless you walk this terrace after dark and note the dejected figures huddled up on the benches beneath the rhododendrons. The sea does not seem to receive many of them, yet it is a better mode of exit than to throw one's self beneath the wheels of the trains rushing east and west just beneath here. Yesterday a man was literally swept off the wheels of a locomotive—there was nothing to pick up.

Inside these halls everything is done quietly and in order. There is never any confusion or noise, and you must check hat, overcoat, and stick before you enter. Save for the orchestra in the outer hall there is nothing to be heard but the subdued call of the croupier, the click of the rakes

against the heaps of gold on the tables, and the whir of the wheels. The game does not interest me, as I always lose, but the circles of silent, intent faces form a study I never tire of until the perfume-laden air drives me out of doors. To-night there are some windows opened, the air is purer and as yet the crush is not too great; so let us watch for a time this world of Monte Carlo. As I wander through the over-decorated and gorgeous rooms there is space to move about, the people are not so absorbed in play and occasionally raise their eyes from the "green carpet," affording one a glimpse of the souls behind them—gay, desperate, indifferent—sodden with misery or drunk with the love of gambling; they are all here, the only impassive face is that of the man at the wheel who in both garb and countenance strongly resembles a funeral director, and his long rake generally buries your hopes as effectually as the spade of the grave-digger. What queer figures are hereabouts. Look at that old, old man intent only on the whirling of the wheel. His daughter stands behind him stowing his gains away. It is pure business with both of them. Beyond stands a woman who has not been young for years and who was never beautiful, though she may perhaps have possessed the fascination of the devil, with that red hair and those green eyes; but to-night at least, there is nothing about her which will make clear to you why a Russian Grand Duke should have gone crazy for her. She is gowned in soft sea green and trailing mosses, as though she had risen from the unsounded sea gleaming in the moonlight yonder, while upon neck, arms, and head is one of the most wonderful displays of diamonds I have ever

seen. Both in size and brilliancy, they rival any of the crown jewels of Europe, and were, so it is said, all given her by that Grand Duke. She is under the constant watch and ward of two armed detectives. She has the face of a vampire, and that word probably describes her character. The Grand Duke is not here and has probably gone the way of all men of his kind long since.

Near her, and most intent upon the game, is a young American, who is called the easiest victim that has come to Monte Carlo in many a day. He has a face which most American mothers would be apt to trust, a smiling countenance, with dark eyes and hair, while his slender figure tells of his youth. It is said that he has dropped one hundred thousand dollars on these green tables within a short time. To-night he is certainly dead to all around him save that whirling ball. Poor fool!

Near me moves a smartly gowned, chic, French, auburn-haired woman, delicate in form and features, and wedded to that man near her, a huge edition of Louis XVI. Cupid's mind was preoccupied when he made that match. She is the author of several novels which have made some stir in the world, especially in English high life which she handles without gloves.

A woman behind me, evidently an American, is telling of her desertion by an American and of her destitute state. She will not fool the man who is with her now, as I discover by a glance. But what fools we mortals be, especially we men mortals! The other day in London I was dining at Prince's. The dinner was well advanced when I became conscious of a voice behind me, evidently an American and as evidently

young. He was pouring out his life story to the woman, oblivious of all around him. To please his mother he had married a woman he could never love; in fact, he never had known what love was until he met his present companion.

"How old are you," he asked.

"How old do you think?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Not yet twenty-four," came the reply.

I managed by much manœuvering to catch a glimpse of her face; the usual thing, painted and dyed, certainly forty if a day. As I passed out, I asked the head waiter who she was. "Bless your soul, sir, one of the most notorious women of London; used to live at the Savoy; has ruined more men than she can count; age, well forty-five if a day; why she was old when I first saw her and that was long ago."

As he was talking, the couple passed me, the poor fool of a boy flushed with wine, the woman such a palpable fraud that it was of no interest to follow. In the glare of the street lamps she gave him a look and me a look, which fully told her story. While one may excuse such infatuation in a young man, one cannot do so in a man of middle life, for he surely knows that, while it is possible for him to attract the respect and even love of a good woman, a bad woman will have use for him only so long as his money holds out and he is a fool if he does not understand this. There are many such fools and homes are constantly being wrecked, lives destroyed by them. There are many such women in these rooms at Monte Carlo, and the ruin they strew broadcast is only a shade less in degree than that of the spinning wheels.

As I pass outside, the air is full of the balmy odor of the orange and lemon; the sky, deep blue, is spangled with myriads of stars and a new moon gleams over Monaco; while the waters of the sea lap a lullaby, and the world seems full of peace. The scene is beautiful past description and I linger a while on one of the many benches facing the Casino, linger until I discover that its other occupant is huddled up in the far corner with a face full of staring misery, and then as I pass onward I realize that almost every bench holds one or more such hopeless wretches.

But enough of Monte Carlo with its glitter and misery. Let us pass to Nice, stretching away on the shores of the sea with its pale yellow and green houses glowing in the sunshine and its promenade full of everything that can move.



CHAPTER II

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OUR DEPARTURE FROM NICE—THE ROAD TO AIX—THE CITY OF KING RENÉ

I HAD greatly desired to make a long auto tour, but being alone save for Yama, my Jap servant, I had scarce the courage to start, so I decided to go by train to Paris, and was in fact booked by that of Saturday week. As I stand on the porch of the Hôtel des Anglais gazing with regret at the flashing machines as they glide by, an old acquaintance comes out and asks me to "take a spin in his," which I gladly do, with the result that before I return to the hotel I have engaged that same machine and driver by the month. So it is settled. I offer the owner some payment in advance, but he waves it aside, "Any friend of Mr. E. is all right." However, we shall see what we shall see. I secure, as is wise, a written agreement to the effect that I am to have the auto at the rate of six hundred dollars per month, everything included except the board, lodging, and *pourboire* of the driver, also that I am in no way to be held responsible for any sort of accident or breakage. This is necessary as otherwise one would certainly be charged with every scratch.

So it is settled that we start two days hence and I have some consultations with the chauffeur. Everything is arranged for an extended tour through Southern France or wherever I will, and then "Jean," the driver, says that the owner would like "half a month's pay in advance." I thought that smile of the other day meant something. He reminded me of Monsieur Blandois in *Little Dorrit* whose "nose came

down over his mustache and whose mustache went up under his nose," but a pleasant man withal. Having disposed of my railway tickets and forwarded my heavy luggage to Paris, and all being ready, we start, stopping a moment to pay Monsieur half a month in advance. That is of course as it should be. Off at last. Away over the beautiful Promenade des Anglais we roll with all Nice glittering and gleaming a goodbye at us, while the sea joins in in a soothing monotone. Our route leads over the long Corniche road, "Autos de course" thunder by us at an appalling speed, would we plod on at a modest gait of forty-five miles per hour.

A moment's pause at Cannes to say goodbye to a friend, and we are en route once more. Cannes is beautiful, but agreeable only if one owns a villa and knows the people. Hotel life there is desolate. It is the Newport of this coast. Gorgeous yachts lie in its harbor, splendid villas gleam amidst the olive trees, and the people are mostly English. Here we leave the coast and sail,—that seems the best way to describe our motion,—up into the hills of Provence until the olives vanish and we are surrounded by the peaceful mountains, while the air is laden with the balsam from the pines. We do not sight the sea again, but the ride is glorious. The racing machines are now few and far between, so one does not hold on for dear life and is not choked in dust,—one's own dust never bothers.

The roads are simply superb, hard as a floor and magnificently made. They appear to have been sprinkled with petroleum.

Towards evening as we are gliding into the peaceful land of Provence, high on an adjacent peak stands a Madonna (which forces from Jean the confession that he has not been a good Catholic). The setting sun turns her crown into glittering gold and the sad green of the olive trees into silver. The peasants' horses are plodding peacefully homeward, with their tired masters sleeping soundly in the rumbling vans. It has always been a desire of mine to visit Aix, but it seemed a sacrilege, almost, to enter it in a train of cars. To-day, however, sailing onward, soundless and with no sense of motion save that of gliding, it is almost as though we are borne on wings until the first paving stone of the city jostles us down to earth once more. But even so we are spared the usual porters and omnibus and all the paraphernalia of an hotel in the twentieth century, and moving up to the portals of the quaint hôtel Nègre Coste, are welcomed by Madame in a black gown and a white cap.

Here my first day in an auto comes to an end, and rising, I shake myself, and, rubbing my eyes, step out, and instantly the auto, Jean, and Yama vanish, and I stand,—almost wondering whether they have ever been—gazing up at the statue of King René who died four hundred years ago, and who seems to smile and hold out his bunch of grapes as he welcomes me to Aix in his fair kingdom of Provence.

The voice of Madame recalls me from the royal presence, asking, "Is it Monsieur's wish to have a chamber for himself and one for each of his domestics?"

"Yes." (Jean might go to a cheap hotel, has even so suggested, but my life is in his hands and I want good

service, such as can come only from good nature. Therefore Jean will stop in the house with me.)

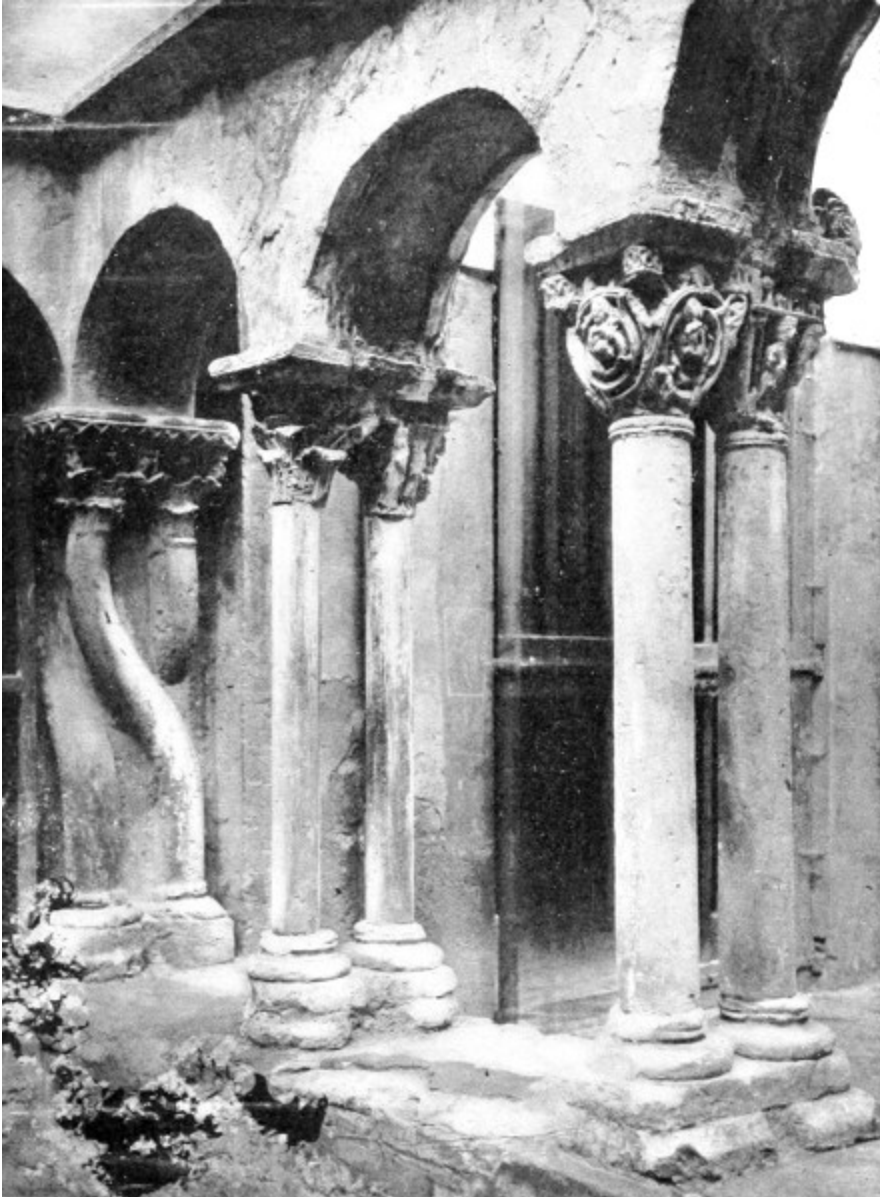
This hôtel Nègre Coste has made no changes since before the great Revolution, and I doubt not but that members of the Committee of Public Safety or Revolutionary tribunals have entered this same door, nay, slept in that same bed where I shall presently forget all about them. It is my day now, theirs is done, and most of them have not even graves alone, but rest in the public fosses.

From my window I look down upon the Cours Mirabeau, though it bore no such name in his day. In this city King René lived and reigned in peace, the centre of all the music and romance of this section and apparently unaware of that werewolf Louis XI, awaiting just outside for his death in order to seize the kingdom. The "Cours" is long and narrow, with a promenade in its centre, the whole being sheltered by double rows of plane trees cut square over the tops, and forming beneath a long tunnel where the sunlight filters through the green gloom of the leaves, as thick here as in Vallambrosa. At the head of the Cours the statue of the king gazes downward upon the two old moss-grown fountains, where all form and shape has long since been lost in the passing years and plashing waters. To the music of one just outside my window in the quaint little hotel, I sink to sleep and dreams of King René and Margaret of Anjou intermingle with those of wild rushes over long highways.

The morning sunlight shines brightly, and Jean would like to move on, but Jean has not that sort of a man to deal with. The twentieth century and the automobile must wait while I spend some hours in exploring this quaint town, a decision

of which Madame, mine hostess, approves, as she smiles from a seat near the door where she sits knitting and watching her hotel. Madame is old and knows many things, amongst them, that "Monsieur would visit the Cathedral, it is ancient and very curious, and is to be found far up by the first turn to the left."

Modern Aix holds some thirty thousand people, and to the great outer world is but little known. One hears much of Aix-la-Chapelle and of Aix-les-Bains, but little of Aix in Provence, yet to my thinking it is more interesting than either of the others, certainly than Aix-les-Bains, though the German city with its memories of Charlemagne holds its own for interest intense and abiding.



CLOISTERS OF THE CATHEDRAL AT AIX

From a photograph

The Cours Mirabeau divides the modern city from its ancient fellow, and as I leave the hotel, I plunge at once into the dark and narrow streets of the latter where in René's day the poets, troubadours, and gallants held high revels. Aix was the home of politeness, the theatre of the courts of love, which in the valley of the Rhone can never be platonic—and there were held fêtes and tournaments, and life was

all a song. It is not always the well-known objects which attract one most in these old mediæval towns but the quaint bits and corners, fountains and monuments unnoted in any guide-book. Yonder stately façade was surely the dwelling of some one of importance in the old days. To-day it is occupied by many of a far different order. An arched portal gives entrance to a courtyard with an old fountain. A stately façade beautifully carved rises beyond; and through a distant archway one catches a glimpse of a deserted garden where the trees form a wild tangle around broken statues, and there is the murmur of water, but the soul of the house has long since passed away. Perhaps in the days of the terror those doors resounded to thunderous knocking while the silence of the night and the peace of the house vanished forever at the dread summons, "Open in the name of the nation," a sure bidding, in those times, to the guillotine; and I doubt not that, with the courage of their class, Monsieur le Marquis and Madame la Marquise went forth to their doom calmly and with great dignity.

One could stand and dream forever in this town of old Provence, but the boys are gathering in curiosity as to why I gaze at a spot that has never attracted a passing interest in their minds. "No one save Jacques the huckster lives there, why should he excite any attention?"

The faded gilding in the ceilings of the great salon visible through the dusty window tells no tale of bygone splendour to the boys, no picture of Watteau figures in high heels dancing around that broken god Pan in the garden pass before their mental visions. To-day one shaft of that old cart

rests upon his flute and a blossoming plum tree casts its white shower over his head, but his music is silent for ever.



CLOISTERS OF THE CATHEDRAL AT AIX

From a photograph

In the square beyond stands the Hôtel de Ville which shelters in its courtyard an excellent statue of Mirabeau, and just outside rises one of the old towers of the city, now dedicated by a tablet to the souls of those who have lost their lives for their country. A young woman under its shadow tells me that I shall find the Cathedral just beyond, and in company with the archiepiscopal palace and the little university, there it stands in a square by itself. The Cathedral of St. Sauveur is very ancient. As I enter, the whole interior rests in silence save for the droning voice of some priest. Candles twinkle before the many altars, and

the sunlight filters through the trees outside and the painted windows, casting wavering shadows down upon the empty aisles and many tombs. In the nave one may see the portraits of King René and his second wife Jeanne de Laval, and as you gaze upon them, the picture of his life unrolls itself across your mental vision. Born in the grim castle of Angers in 1409, René was married when but twelve years of age and his eldest child came on earth when the father was but eighteen. Eventually René, Duke of Bar and Lorraine, became Duke of Anjou, Count of Provence, and King of the two Sicilies. Though he held the last-named honour but eight years he never surrendered the title. He was a friend of Agnes Sorel and of Joan of Arc, women much more to his liking than his fierce daughter Margaret. René gave all his love to this land of Provence where his palace stood intact—here in Aix—until destroyed most wantonly in 1786. His progress thither was by state barges up and down the rivers—on the Loire to Roanne and thence over land to the Rhone at Lyons and so to Tarascon. Music and flowers, sunshine and happiness seem to have been his portion, yet there was one shadow—that of Louis XI. then the dauphin, whom he met for the first time in the Castle of Tarascon. At Tarascon he instituted the Order of the Crescent and held a fête which is remembered to this day. To his credit it is recorded that he gave protection to Jacques Cœur, fleeing from the ingratitude and treachery of Charles VII., and enabled him to escape into Italy. Having already said farewell to France and Anjou, René plainly saw the absorption of his beloved Provence by King Louis. His picture—some say painted by himself—here in the Cathedral does not impress one