the Portuguese in 1508 and held by them till about 1650. In the 18th century Niebuhr speaks of it as a quite unimportant place ; Wellsted in 1836 assigned to it a population of 9000 ; Palgrave in 1863 estimated the population at 24,000, an estimate the more re­markable that in the interval the town had suffered severely from the Wahhabis. The *Red Sea Pilot* (1883) gives the more probable figure of 4000 to 5000.

SOISSONS, a city of France, in the department of Aisne, the seat of a bishopric and a fortified post on the left bank of the Aisne at the junction of the Crise, lies 65 miles north-east of Paris by the railway to Laon. The population in 1881 was 10,895 (11,112 in the commune). The cathedral of Notre Dame St Gervais and St Protais, begun in the second half of the 12th century and finished about the end of the 13th, is 328 feet long and 87 wide; the vaulting of the nave is 100 feet above the pave­ment. The single tower dates from the middle of the 13th century and is a fairly good imitation of those of Notre Dame of Paris, which it equals in height (216 feet). The transepts are of different dates and dissimilar in their arrangement. In the north transept there is a very fine door on the east ; the south transept is the oldest and most graceful portion of the whole edifice. The choir is surrounded with eight square chapels, and the apse with five large polygonal chapels, of which the three in the middle (as well as the high windows of the choir) still retain their fine 13th-century glass. The rose-window of the north transept represents the life of the Virgin in twelve medallions. The high altar is flanked by two marble figures representing the annunciation and above it is an Adoration of the Shepherds ascribed to Rubens ; the cathedral also has some rich 16th-century tapestries. Con­siderable remains still exist of the magnificent abbey of St Jean des Vignes, where Thomas a Becket resided from 1161 to 1170, and which was rebuilt in the 13th century; these include the ruins of two cloisters (the smaller dating from the Renaissance), the refectory, and above all the cathedral-like façade of the church (recently restored). Of the three portals with twisted columns the central one is adorned with statues ; above them runs a gallery, over which again is a large window; the two unequal towers (230 and 246 feet) of the 15th and 16th centuries are surmounted by beautiful stone spires, which command the town. The ruins of this fine building are unfortunately occupied by the military authorities. The church of St Léger, erected in 1139 and rebuilt at the beginning of the 13th century, was formerly attached to an abbey of the Génovéfains. Beneath are two crypts of the 12th and 13th centuries. Of the abbey church of St Pierre, built in the 12th century in the Romanesque style, the only remains are the façade and two bays of the choir. The royal abbey of Notre Dame was founded in 660 for monks and nuns by Leutrade, wife of Ebroin, the celebrated mayor of the palace. The number of the nuns (216 in 858), the wealth of the library in manuscripts, the valuable relics, the high birth of the abbesses, the popularity of the pilgrimages, all contributed to the importance of this abbey, of which there exist only some inconsiderable remains. The wealth­iest of all the abbeys in Soissons and one of the most important of all France during the first two dynasties was that of St Médard, on the right bank of the Aisne, founded in 560 by Lothaire I., beside the villa of Syagrius, which had become the palace of the Frankish kings. St Médard, apostle of Vermandois, and Kings Lothaire and Sigebert were buried in the monastery, which became the residence of 400 monks and the meeting-place of several councils. It was there that Childeric III., the last Merovingian, was deposed and Pippin the Short was crowned by the papal legate ; and there Louis the Pious was kept in captivity in 833. The abbots of St Médard coined money, and in Abelard’s time (12th century) were lords of 220 villages,

farms, and manors. At the battle of Bouvines (1214) the abbot commanded 150 vassals. In 1530 St Médard was visited by a procession of 300,000 pilgrims. But the religious wars ruined the abbey, and, although it was restored by the Benedictines in 1637, it never recovered its former splendour. Of the seven churches and the con­ventual buildings of the ancient foundation there hardly remains a trace. The site is occupied by a deaf and dumb institution, the chapel of which stands over the crypt of the great abbey church, which was altered in the 12th century. In the crypt is a stone coffin, said to have been Lothaire’s, and close at hand is an underground chamber, reputed to have been the place of captivity of Louis the Pious. The civil buildings of Soissons are not of much interest. The hôtel de ville contains a museum with scientific and archaeological collections ; the hôtel dieu goes back to the 13th century ; the library contains 40,000 volumes and curious manuscripts. Among the industrial establishments are tanneries, saw-mills, and foundries and factories for the production of stoves, agricultural im­plements, candles, and chocolate. Grain, flour, haricot beans of exceptional quality, pease, wool, hemp, flax, cattle, timber, and charcoal are the principal articles of trade. There is also a large bottle factory, and work is done for the flannel and blanket factories of Rheims.

Soissons is generally believed to occupy the site of the oppidum of Gallia Belgica called *Noviodunum* by Cæsar ; but some writers identify this place with Noyon, Noyant, or Nouvion. One thing is clear, that this oppidum was the capital of the Suessiones, who occupied twelve towns and whose king, Divitiacus, one of the most powerful in Gaul, had extended his authority even beyond the sea among the Britons. In 58 B.c. Galba, king of the Suessiones, separated from the confederation of the Belgians and submitted to the Romans. At the beginning of the empire Noviodunum took the name of *Augusta Suessionum,* and afterwards that of *Suessiona,* and became the second capital of Gallia Belgica, of which Rheims was the metropolis. The town was before long surrounded with a regular wall and defended by a citadel ; and it became the starting- point of several military roads (to Rheims, Château-Thierry, Meaux, Paris, Amiens, and St Quentin). Christianity was introduced by St Crispin and St Crispinian, men of noble birth, who, however, earned their livelihood by shoemaking, and thus became patrons of that craft. After their martyrdom in 297 their work was continued by St Sinitius, the first bishop of Soissons. After the barbarians had crossed the Rhine and the Meuse Soissons became the metro­polis of the Roman possessions in the north of Gaul, and on the defeat of Syagrius by Clovis the Franks seized the town. It was at Soissons that Clovis married Clotilde, and, though he afterwards settled at Paris, Soissons was the capital of his eldest son Lothaire, and afterwards of Chilperic I., king of Neustria. It was not till the time of Chilperic’s son, Lothaire II., that the kingdom of Soissons was incorporated with that of Paris. In 752 Pippin the Short was at Soissons proclaimed king by an assembly of *leudes* and bishops, and he was there crowned by the papal legate St Boniface before being crowned at Saint Denis by the pope himself. Louis the Pious did penance there after being deposed by the assembly at Com­piègne. Under Charles the' Fat (886) the Normans failed in an attempt against the town, but laid waste St Médard and the neigh­bourhood. In 923 Charles the Simple was defeated outside the walls by the supporters of Rudolph of Burgundy, and Hugh the Great besieged and partly burned the town in 948. Under the first Capets Soissons was held by hereditary counts, frequently at war with the king or the citizens. Thus the latter bought in 1131 a communal charter from Louis VI. and their bishop. In 1155, at an assembly of prelates and barons held at Soissons, Louis VII. issued a famous decree forbidding all private wars for a space of ten years ; and in 1325 Charles the Fair replaced the mayor of Soissons by a royal provost dependent on the bailiwick of Vermandois, the inhabitants retaining only the right of electing four *échervins.* Louis of Chatillon, count of Soissons, was killed at Crécy, and his son, a hostage for King John in England, sold his countship to Enguerrand de Coucy to obtain money for his ransom in 1367. Finally the last count of Soissons, sprung from a branch of the house of Bourbon, rebelled against Louis XIII., and defeated the royal troops at La Marfée in 1641, but perished in the battle. The town had to suffer severely during the war of the Hundred Years, in 1414, when it was held by the Burgundians, it was captured and sacked by the Armagnacs under the dauphin ; and this same fate again befell it six times within twenty years. The treaty of Arras (1435) brought it again under the royal authority. It was sacked by Charles V. in 1544 and in 1565 by the Huguenots, who