

THE QUEEN'S RIVIERA RESIDENCE.

With Illustrations by MAJOR E. BENGOUGH RICKETTS.



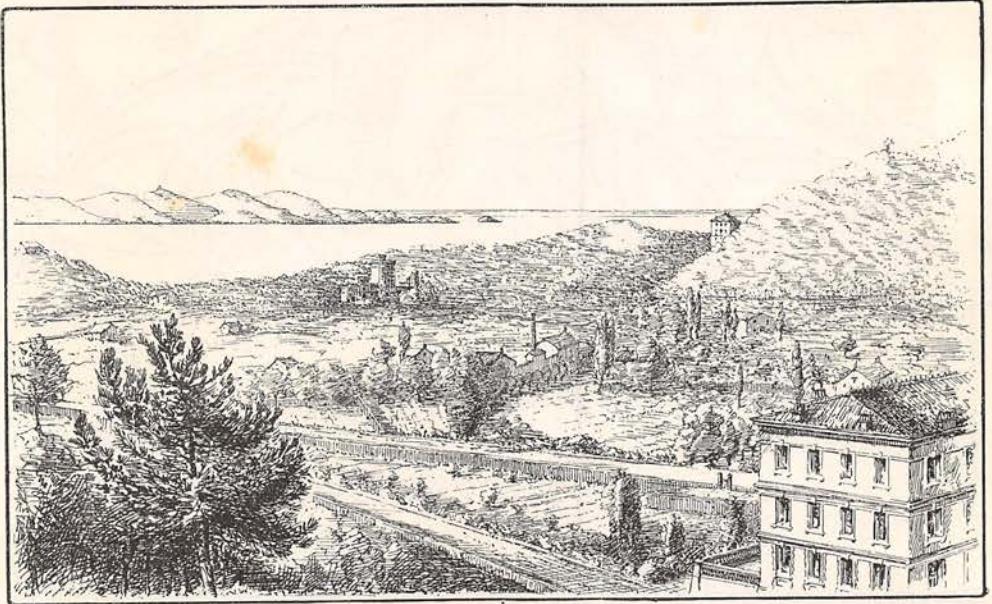
EUCALYPTUS GLOBULUS.

HYÈRES, known to us now as only one of the towns perched on the hills which line this part of the Mediterranean coast, has a past reaching back to a far antiquity. As in a few days' time the Queen will have left Osborne for Hyères, a short account of the place and its surroundings may not be inopportune. Before orange groves were seen in the Riviera, when the country down to the sea was a wild pine forest, and the frequent rains caused raging torrents to flow down every valley, there was a nameless Gallic town about three miles from the present site of Hyères at Pres-qu'île de Giens, where at low water the ancient pier, half hidden in mud, can still be seen. Here in the first century came the Imperial Romans, and christened the town and port Pomponiana. They built many villas, temples, and baths, the ruins of which here and there still survive.

Pomponiana passed away with its builders; but the inland settlement, Arae, which arose on the hill, was of considerable importance in the Middle Ages. Hyères was not more able than its neighbours to escape the perils of the times. The Saracens are known to have stormed it, and tradition says that on one occasion the population was almost exterminated by the Turks, who carried off those they did not kill.

Time went on, and rulers changed, and in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Hyères became of considerable importance. In the twelfth century were built the two churches of St. Paul and St. Louis, which unfortunately have not been restored in a satisfactory manner. In the former only the foundations and part of the buttresses remain of the original work. An arched doorway of wedge-shaped stones and a very ancient font inside the church are worthy of notice. At the church of St. Louis, which was the property of the Cordeliers (the Franciscans who wore a hempen cord round their waists), built in Byzantine architecture, are some beautiful canopied stalls, and a remarkable pulpit carved in walnut. From the entrance eleven steps lead down into the church as into a cellar. About this period also the old walls, long since dismantled, were built, and a little later the castle was erected, though it claims to be founded in the seventh century. Little is left of it now but high square towers, crumbling walls, and dungeons; while what was then the old courtyard is now a vineyard.

From Hyères the devout of the thirteenth century sailed as pilgrims for the Holy Land; and it was there that Louis IX.—St. Louis—coming to visit Bertrand de Foz, the last survivor of the powerful dynasty of the counts of Provence, landed with



VIEW FROM THE WINDOW OF THE HÔTEL DE L'ERMITAGE, WHERE THE QUEEN RESIDES.

his queen and children on July 12th, 1254. A picture behind the altar in the church of St. Louis commemorates the event.

In the fourteenth century Hyères was so important a place that Catherine de

Medici thought of building one of her royal palaces there; but soon afterwards the town began to decline, and there is nothing of historic interest to relate until 1663, when the birth of Massillon took place. His father was a notary, whose descendants have followed the same profession even in modern times. He was educated at the Oratory, but was afterwards articled to his father. He proved an idle apprentice, and spent



UMBRELLA PINE ON THE ROAD TO THE CHÂTEAU FROM COSTABELLE.

most of his time in mimicking the sermons and preachers he had heard, for the amusement of his fellow-students. After two years, his father, convinced that he did not possess the makings of a lawyer, gave his son his own way, and he entered the Church. He became a member of the Order which had given him his first lessons, and soon made such a reputation by his preaching that at thirty-five he was appointed Preacher

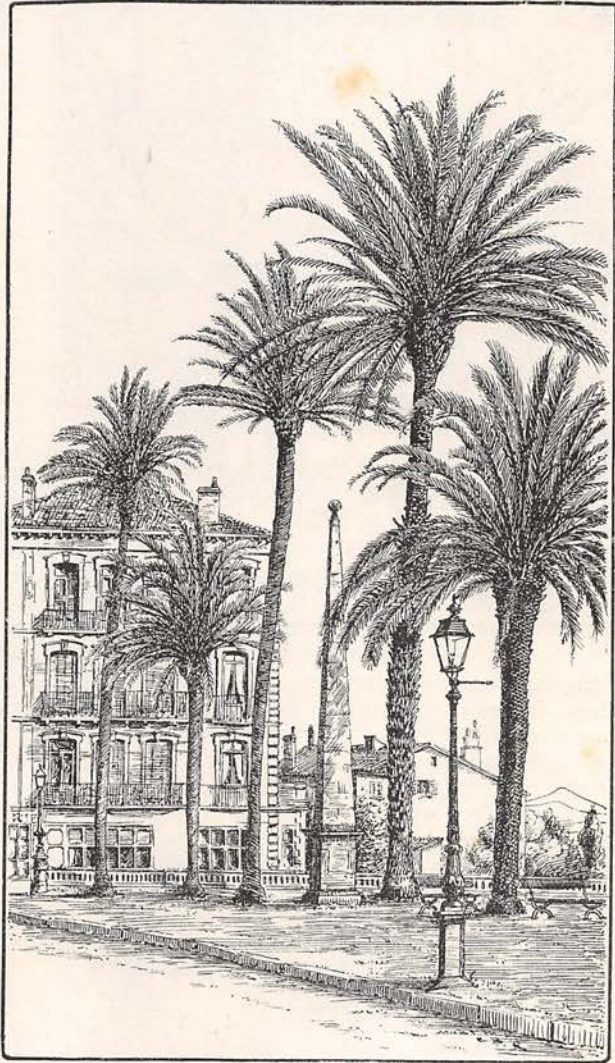
to the Court of Louis XIV. For the next twenty years Paris thrilled with his wonderful sermons, which have been often translated into English, and in 1717 he was appointed to the see of Clermont in Auvergne. He found so much to do in his diocese that he had no time for the preparation of sermons, and consequently never preached after obtaining the Episcopate. "Father, when I hear other preachers, I go away much pleased with them," said Louis XIV. to him; "but when I hear you, I go away much displeased with myself." The bust of Massillon now adorns the Place Royale, and the square in which stands the old church of the Knights Templar, now converted into the Hôtel de Ville, is called after his name.

Behind the town rise the Maure Mountains, rocky and broken, covered with Mediterranean heath, cork and pine, which protect this ancient town of orange-trees from all winds save the Mistral. The soil of the hill on which the old town lies is formed of mica and slate. One long street, the Rue des Palmiers, which takes its name from the trees on either side, is of modern construction; it was in this street that Napoleon I. rested after the siege of Toulon.

The country round the Hôtel l'Ermitage, where the Queen will reside during her stay in the South, is wooded and undulating. The hotel is situated two miles from the town, half-way up the Hermitage hill (in the district of Costabelle), on the top of which is the church of Notre Dame de Hyères, crowned with the golden statue of its patron saint, a beacon to the pilgrims who still annually visit the shrine.

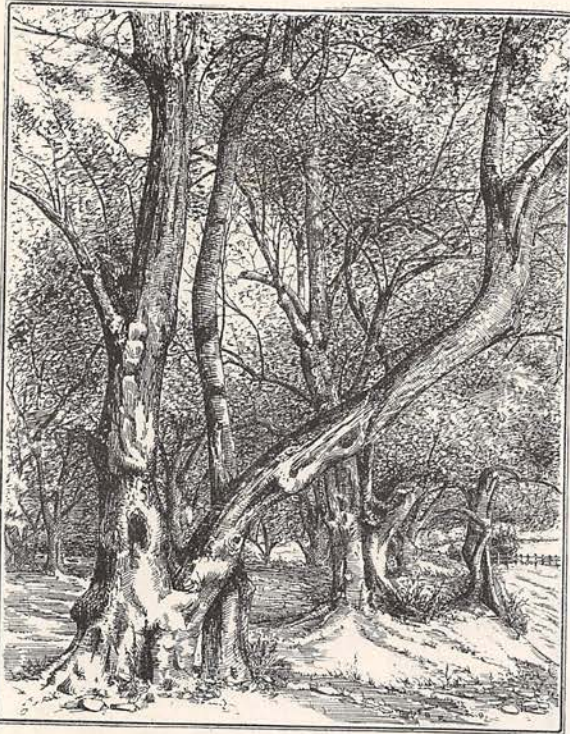
The view from the windows of the hotel is very fine. On one side lies the Mont des Oiseaux; on the other, the Isles d'Or. Beyond the Presqu'île with its pines, the village of Le Château is clearly seen, and in the distance, beyond the olive-mill and the castle of St. Pierre with its drawbridge, stands out the Duke of Grafton's villa, and near by on the Toulon road is the villa which belonged to Napoleon III.

On every side of the hotel the hills are covered with grey olive, cypress, pine, and cork trees; and delightful walks lead through the woods in every direction, where the visitor may wander without let or hindrance. The ground is carpeted with wild flowers, and here and there may be seen small patches of cultivation. As undergrowth, the *bruyère* with its dusty white flowers still lives, though soon doomed to destruction, as the peasants find a ready sale for its roots which are made into briar-wood pipes. The olive oil, once the staple product of the district, is now being rapidly driven from the market owing to the inferiority of its quality, and it is found better to break up the soil for other cultivation as the old trees perish than to replace them. However,



PLACE DES PALMIERS.

the orange and the palm, the eucalyptus and the aloe, flourish with great luxuriance at Costabelle, and in a measure compensate for the loss of the olive and the heath.

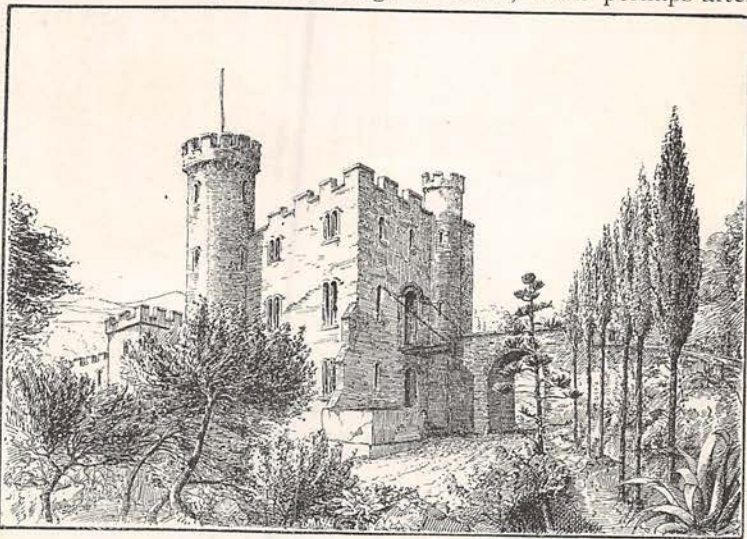


IN THE OLIVE WOODS.

thing happens to the leader. At times they choose a new chief, but often they crawl about in inextricable confusion till they find the original leader, when perhaps after two hours they form up again and proceed on their journey. But woe to the unwary person who dares to touch these caterpillars with ungloved hand! For they emit a powder so poisonous that he is fortunate indeed who escapes with a badly swollen hand and arm; erysipelas is often produced, and sometimes ophthalmia.

In autumn the woods are also haunted by that strange creature, the praying mantis. If a visitor is much troubled by house-flies—rather a plague at Costabelle at times—his remedy is to tame a mantis, and the plague will soon diminish. A fly is a *bonne bouche* to the mantis; he will devour ten at a meal. This is his limit, but at the end of his meal he can be seen making a larder of himself, tucking an eleventh fly under

The woods are a paradise for the botanist and the entomologist. Rare flowers abound, and on the slopes and ravines of Mont Coudon, and nowhere else in the Riviera, can be found the *Styrax Officinalis*, a shrub with resinous bark and bunches of sweet, white, orange-like flowers. Trap-door spiders colonise the banks. Mason bees, like some builder, rough-cast the surfaces of walls and window-frames. Caterpillars infest the pine-trees, devouring the needles. Whole forests in Provence are destroyed by their depredations. The eggs are laid in some pine-tree, where they live in a great net of cobweb-like texture, but when the time comes for their change into chrysalides, they leave their net to hang untenanted in the deserted tree, and go in long procession, single file, following a leader over the ground, till they find a suitable resting-place to bury themselves in. These processions frequently consist of more than a hundred caterpillars, and it is amusing to watch their consternation if any-



CHÂTEAU DE ST. PIERRE, COSTABELLE.

his right elbow, a twelfth under his left, and will hold yet another between his jaws until returning appetite permits another meal. So far—to thirteen flies—can he go, but no further. These insects' nests are to be found in the olive woods, looking like leaves or buds enveloped in cobweb.

The volcanic nature of the neighbourhood is well known, and it is not uncommon to see the streets buttressed by arches, as shown in our engraving, to prevent the houses falling during earthquake shocks.

But it is not only in the near vicinity of the Hôtel l'Ermitage that the Queen will find interest and beauty. No place has more charming drives in its neighbourhood than Hyères. One of the prettiest drives is to the Pres-qu'île, and the remains of Pomponiana, interesting not only to the archæologist but to the naturalist, who will find there many rare plants and shells, and also some remarkably fine umbrella and maritime pines. To the west is the village of Carquieranne, through which the Toulon omnibus passes, with the peak of Mont Negre rising a thousand feet, further to the west again. The long narrow strip of land which connects the mainland and the Pres-qu'île is bordered by Les Salins, great salt marshes covering over a thousand acres, where during summer more than three hundred hands are employed in a tedious nature to produce large quantities of salt, which is made by the evaporation of sea water by the heat of the sun, and artificial basins are formed in the marshes for this purpose. Another favourite excursion is to the top of Mont Fenouillet, some four miles away. The path passes at first by the castle through arbutus and fir wood, past some fine cork-trees and a small favourite chapel to the summit, from which a magnificent view may be obtained.



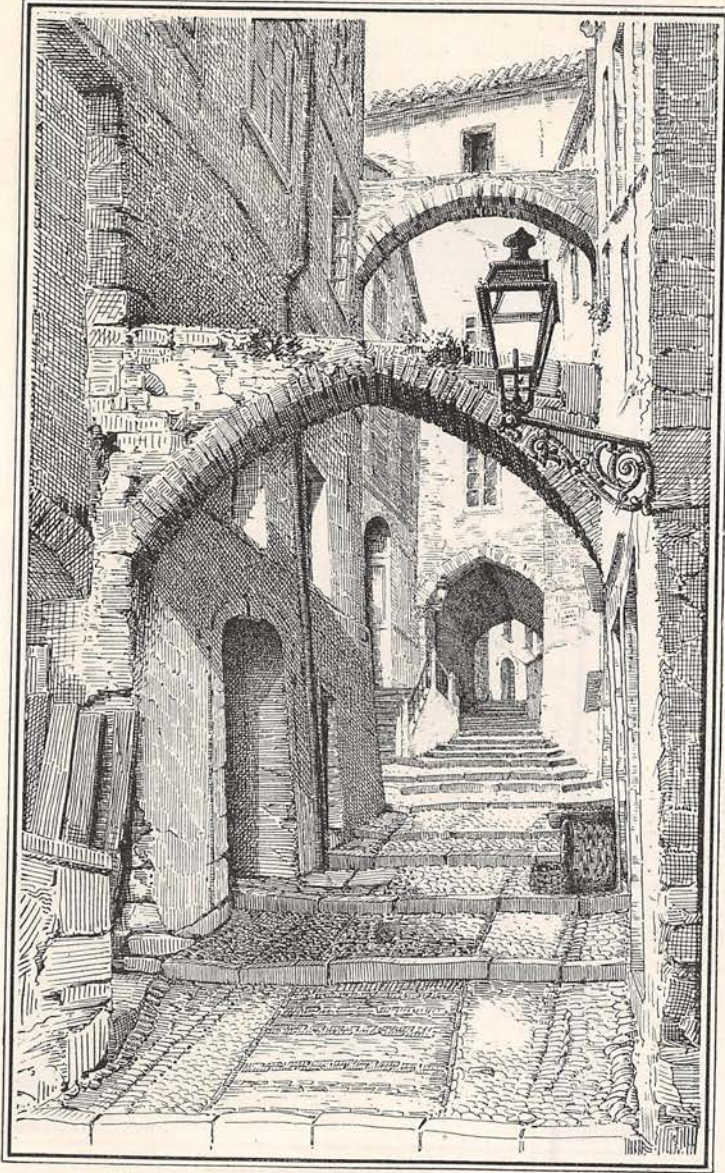
HÔTEL DE L'ERMITAGE.

The islands of Hyères, about six miles from the mainland, will well repay a visit. The branch railway runs from Hyères as far as Les Salins, whence a small boat sails daily for the port of Porquerolles. Porquerolles, the largest of the islands, lies furthest to the west; it is about five miles long and two broad, and is a well-wooded island with some 900 inhabitants. On the side of the hill above the landing-place is an imposing château with a fine round tower; it possesses barracks and a sanatorium for soldiers invalided from Algeria; below the castle is a village with about one hundred inhabitants. It is worth walking to the highest point of the island, 479 feet high, where is a semaphore for signalling to the mainland and neighbouring islands, and seeing the wonderful view that can be obtained from it. These islands were called the Stœchades

by the Romans, and so rich is the soil that the fame of their fertility caused them in the Middle Ages to be called "The Golden Islands." Here it was that the monk Cibo,

of a distinguished Provençal family, called the Monk of the Golden Islands, made himself famous as troubadour and miniature painter, illuminator and monk. The other islands, Porteroo and Levant, have no features of interest.

The longer excursions are numberless, and Toulon, the great French naval port, is only thirteen miles off. Hyères has suffered from being on a branch line, and the crowd of visitors have gone further, to Cannes, Nice and Monte Carlo; but now that the Queen has resolved to go to Costabelle, it is likely to be much better known. It is nearly two hours nearer London than Cannes, and can be reached from Paris in sixteen-and-a-half to seventeen hours. Its chief disadvantage is the Mistral, but it enjoys a greater dryness of air than any other winter resort on the Riviera, Mentone having even one full degree of humidity more than Hyères, and Nice three. It is famous for its palms, and no town



EARTHQUAKE ARCHES OF THE RIVIERA.

along the coast can match those in the Place des Palmiers. Pepper, eucalyptus and olive trees are at their best there, and early fruits, vegetables and flowers are grown in masses for the markets of Marseilles, Lyons and Paris, on the alluvial plain between the town and the sea.