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A GERMAN IMPRESSION OF PARIS

BY MARK VIKTOR

PARIS (late in December).— This has been a sad Christmas season for the German people. The iron fist of the Entente lies heavily upon our country, and old and young alike contemplate the future with dismay. A person conscious of the misery which oppresses our countrymen like a nightmare, who knows at first hand the want and suffering of our weeping women and children, and whose joy during this festival of love and reconciliation is turned to bitterness by these facts, may easily be tempted to believe that Germany is the only country that suffers from the results of the war, and that in the land of the victors everything is joy and delight. That is by no means true. Paris is the soul of France — yes — we can still say it is France, and Paris is far from being what it was before the war.

Even the outer aspect of the city reveals the mighty change between the old days and the present. The shops and restaurants and cafés,— in short, all the places where the gay life of Paris formerly centred — are to-day nearly empty. Even on Montmartre, which prior to the war was the favorite haunt of Paris gayety, where from eight o'clock on, a flood of light fairly blinded the visitor and a carefree crowd thronged around the entrances of the cabarets and dance halls, to-day everything is dark and empty. A couple of lights glow mournfully in the half darkness, struggling faintly to beat back the encroaching obscurity

and illumining now and then a solitary seeker after pleasure. In the restaurants and bars you see nothing of that defiantly carefree night life which characterizes Berlin, where champagne flows in rivers and war profiteers lavish their easily won wealth. The sober citizens of Paris are too sensible and frugal to pay forty or fifty francs for a bottle of champagne. They sit placidly in their cafés drinking a glass of Bock and smoking a cigarette. A stranger coming from Berlin involuntarily inquires whether the world is not standing on its head, and the old Prussian thrift and frugality have not been, by some miracle, transplanted to Paris, and the old Paris gayety and thoughtlessness of the morrow may not have become a changeling in the cradle of the Prussian people.

Indeed, the Parisian is no frivolous *bon vivant* any longer. Paris is suffering under those modern plagues of Egypt — coal famine and high prices. The trains run at infrequent and irregular intervals. The underground and tram services are curtailed, and busses have become a rarity. Even the best hotels are uncomfortably cold. Prices have risen tremendously. For instance, a pair of shoes costs 125 francs, a simple lace blouse 80 to 90 francs. These are prices beyond the reach of ordinary Germans, with exchange what it is at present, and they also are out of reach of the average Parisian.

Neither is the political horizon calculated to give the people of Paris

particularly optimistic hopes for the future. France fears Germany in spite of its victory and the glorious peace of Versailles, and dread of Teutonic vengeance disturbs its soundest slumbers. This explains the bitter hatred the French feel for anything in the least German. All strangers arriving from Germany are under the special observation of agents of the Information Service. They are watched carefully and can never be sure that the secret police have not searched their luggage in their absence.

The only really gratifying feature of life in Paris is the excellent food situation. In this respect the city is in a truly enviable condition. The varied and sumptuous menus that one finds even in second-class hotels and restaurants seem to a guest coming from ill-nourished Berlin like a dream from the Arabian Nights. Moreover, the food in Paris, in spite of its variety and excellence, is relatively cheap. For instance, dinner of five courses, with cheese and dessert, costs only 10 francs. A person stopping at a middle class hotel on the American plan has his morning coffee, with bread and butter, a lunch of four courses, and a dinner of five courses, for 22.50 francs. Such ample portions of wonderful French white bread are served at every meal, that even a hearty eater leaves some to be carried back to the kitchen. The thought suggests itself that France would perform a great work of charity if it would merely send the crumbs from its table to the starving children of the Saxon mining districts and of Austria. But France is not ready yet for such great acts of generosity. Hatred of the 'Boche' dulls every feeling of humanity.

The Christmas display in the brilliant shops in Rue de la Paix and Rue Royal is at its best. Autos and taxis

are parked in numbers before the entrances of the great shops, and ladies of the fashionable world, wrapped in costly furs, throng the portals. But in spite of the appearance of activity, the merchants of Paris complain that business is dull. No longer is the city flooded with Russian millionaires from Petrograd and Moscow, from the Volga lands and the wilds of Siberia, who used to be such generous patrons of the luxurious shops of the city on the Seine. Their place has been taken partly by Fifth Avenue beauties escorted by smoothly-shaven gentlemen from across the water. With a shrewd smile, they profit by the fall in French exchange to purchase at unprecedentedly low prices.

Paris is suffering from a scarcity of dwellings, and it is now very difficult to find accommodations for a family in that city. Yet, the situation in this respect is not so bad as in Berlin, where every hotel and boarding house is overfilled and where a newcomer runs serious danger of not finding any accommodations whatever. You can always count upon getting at least a room in Paris, not only in the expensive and palatial hotels, but even in those of more modest rank. The city still has the service of its underground and electric trains and auto busses and taxis. The latter dash through the streets at a speed which we do not permit in Berlin, even since the revolution. They excel our Berlin taxis in another conspicuous respect. The chauffeurs do not arbitrarily exact a small fortune from any stranger who falls into their clutches, but stick to the legal fares. Now and then you spy a cab rattling around a corner, but such vehicles have become such rarities that you are tempted to fancy that all the cab horses of Paris were eaten during the war.

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AMERICA CAUTIONS FRANCE

ONCE previously America gave us to understand that its aid would be conditional upon our mending our ways.

In the midst of the war, when these good Yankees, with their religious-minded fervor, were depriving themselves of white bread in order to send us wheat, their soldiers discovered with profound surprise that we were not rationing ourselves. Our bakeries and cake shops were packed with customers, and our light-hearted French had adopted the paradox of eating cakes when bread was scarce — for our war bread was execrable because so much wheat flour was used for pastries. It required the insistence of America to force the government to issue bread cards.

This lesson has not taught us wisdom. As soon as the worst crisis was over, we reopened our cake shops. Naturally, the quality of our bread at once deteriorated, and uncertainty immediately arose as to whether we should have flour enough to last until the next harvest. We elect, in other words, to eat our crops before they are ripe.

We have had plenty of warning. We know that we cannot count too much upon America. Moreover, exchange is so low that we shall buy of that country at ruinous rates, provided it will supply us at any price.

The government, persistently improvident, in place of renewing the bread cards, stopping the waste of flour, and preventing the peasants from feeding our precious wheat to their animals — now that it is costing them less than oats — is counting upon the increase of prices to restrict consumption. Naturally, such a policy has its

effect among the poor. But the rich continue to batten in plenty.

There is not enough milk for infants and invalids, but there are plenty of portly and well-conditioned people who gorge themselves with cream. That young lady needs it to preserve her complexion, and so she wastes for vanity what might preserve the lives of the ill-nourished children of the slums. In order to supply fat veal for gourmands, calves are still raised on milk.

We are told that coal is not to be had. One might question the truth of this at Paris, where the theatres and ball rooms and the drawing rooms of the wealthier quarters are brilliantly lighted. Meantime, the trams cease running because electric power companies have not coal to heat their boilers. Workingmen, forced to cover long distances on foot, receive at least this compensation, that in the drinking places along the way there is no lack either of light or of alcohol.

The trouble is, the government does not dare trespass upon private privilege; and it is a private privilege to waste coal and bread and milk. It cannot bring itself to impose restrictions of any kind, least of all, upon consumption.

We find everywhere this devotion to *laissez-faire*. The authorities proceed upon the principle that the free play of supply and demand will regulate our economic life so as to produce the greatest good for the greatest number. But what rational man to-day will accept as valid the assumption upon which this policy is based — that is, that unregulated commerce inevitably produces the best results for society?

But it is not this improvidence alone that America employs to justify refusing us assistance. Undoubtedly, our manner of living is confirming among our friends — and possibly among our