

## FRANCE

# Report on the Fourth Republic

*"As France Goes," by David Schoenbrun (Harper, 341 pp. \$5), is an account of political and social conditions in that country by a reporter for CBS news. Geoffrey Bruun, who reviews it here, is the author of "Europe and the French Imperium."*

By Geoffrey Bruun

MILLIONS of Americans, tuning in a CBS round-up of world news, have heard the familiar announcement, "We take you now to Paris, David Schoenbrun reporting." Mr. Schoenbrun's lively commentaries on current crises, his ringside reports on the French Chamber in action, and his interviews with statesmen whose decisions made history, have helped more than once to make history themselves. He exemplifies in this age of telecommunication that omniscient man-about-the-globe, the foreign correspondent.

Understandably enough, he draws on some of his more spectacular interviews to highlight this "inquiry into the crises of France." His private talk with Ho Chin Minh in 1946 is heavy with irony now that the eight-year war in Indochina has run its course. His invitation in 1950 to a briefing by Jean Monnet on the Schuman Plan suggests how the great news services may shape history at critical moments. His interview with Sultan Mohammed ben Youseff of Morocco did shape history by speeding the sultan's dethronement.

The virtues of "As France Goes" are the virtues that mark Mr. Schoenbrun's news reports. His emphatic style, his conscious role as a mediator explaining one nation to another, his dexterity in stripping away deceptive labels and describing French parties and politicians in realistic terms are noteworthy assets. In this volume his commentaries are sharp and shrewd rather than novel or exhaustive. Six years ago in "Modern France" some thirty American experts supervised by Edward Meade Earle dissected France more thoroughly, and last year Alexander Werth covered much the same ground at greater length in "France 1940-1955."

French politics, so puzzling and ex-

asperating to foreigners, are a tawdry facade behind which French administrative processes and French energies function surprisingly well despite illogical handicaps. The more serious evils, in Schoenbrun's view, are economic rather than political. The inequitable tax system bears too heavily on the wage-earners and helps to explain why one French citizen in four votes Communist. The great majority of French farms are too small and fragmented to make mechanization of agriculture practical. Shops and industries are too often parochial and monopolistic, denying France the benefits of mass production and distribution. The transportation system is centripetal with Paris as the hub. Schoenbrun extols the plans of Monnet and Schuman for reforms and a European economic union while under-emphasizing the obstacles. But he is right to stress the natural wealth and resources of France and the post-war rise in the birthrate as hopeful signs of a potential revival.

Historians, safe in their hindsight, can isolate essential issues and pinpoint critical decisions. The foreign correspondent essays the more daunting task of explaining history while it is happening. For this, presumably, he needs an intimate knowledge of the past—how else does he generate those flashes of intuition whereby he illu-

minates the present? Mr. Schoenbrun himself insists that "The present of any country can only be fully understood in terms of its past." Yet the affirmation has a paradoxical ring. For the weakest elements of this incisive analysis of France today are its oversimplified statements concerning France in the past.

In a hasty mood Schoenbrun can write, "Had not Catherine de Medici been a fanatic and Henry IV a cynical man much of France's political woes of today would have been avoided." Confusing the fall of the Bastille with the execution of Louis XVI he says: "Europe had remained untouched by the revolutions of England and America. Yet every crown slipped and every throne trembled when the guillotine fell on the neck of Louis XVI of France. Men danced in the streets of Rome, Vienna, and Prague as well as in the streets of Paris."

Now the English civil war of 1642-1648 was one of six contemporaneous European revolutions and it did not leave Europe untouched. The succeeding English revolution of 1688-1689 changed the European balance of power. The American War of Independence drew France, Spain, and Holland into the fighting and hastened the fall of the French monarchy. The execution of Louis XVI did not provoke dancing in Rome, where Pius VI had condemned the French revolutionary excesses, nor in Vienna or Prague, because Austria was at war with France in 1793.

It is to be hoped such inexactitudes will be corrected in subsequent printings for this is in general a sprightly and informative book.



Jacket illustration for "As France Goes" (Bulloz).

"Every crown slipped and every throne trembled."



—From "Village in the Vaucluse."

Mayor Ginoux and, in background, Communist Party worker Moise Jannel.

## Life Off the Tourist Track

*"Village in the Vaucluse," by Laurence Wylie (Harvard University Press. 339 pp. \$5.50), is a sociological study of a small French town by a professor of French literature. Professor Henri Peyre of Yale reviews it.*

By Henri Peyre

**L**AURENCE WYLIE, a professor of French at Haverford College, has long felt that his role was not just to impart the intricacies of French grammar and of the mute *e*, the esoteric beauties of Symbolist poets or the obvious stylistic effects of Mérimée and Maupassant to American students. He wished to observe, away from the track beaten by tourists and away from the glamorous cultural centers, how the humble people lived in the most written about, yet the most baffling of countries. With his wife and two children, he settled for a year in an average "department" of France, Vaucluse, and in a picturesque but poor village, Roussillon, which he thinly disguises in the book as Peyrane. The village used to prosper on the ochre which was extracted from its colorful cliffs and was exported widely, until synthetic colors ruined its trade. It has now no industry to speak of, its soil is poor, its trade with the rest of the country insignificant.

Laurence Wylie supplemented his literary training by a solid acquaintance with the methods of sociological inquiry. But French villagers are more reticent and more distrustful of

foreigners, especially of "wealthy Americans," than the natives of almost any other country. They had to be won over to granting their confidence to the observer in their midst by the charm of two American children, the devotion and modesty of an American wife different from the hysterical actresses of the screen, by the professor's talent as a photographer, and by his humor and disarming cordiality. Seldom, if ever, has the daily life of a humble French community been delineated with such patience, such smiling tolerance, such objectivity.

Objective observation inevitably proceeds through the accumulation of a great many anecdotal facts and average data. The peril of such a method is repetitiousness and the lack of an overall pattern. There is some occasional repetitiousness in Laurence Wylie's book and occasionally some lengthy writing. But the book on the whole is written with alertness and with literary skill. It is untainted by sociological categorizing and by jargon.

**T**HE structure of the volume is impeccable. The reader becomes acquainted with a number of individuals, observed in their outward behavior but hardly analyzed in the silent tragedies of their lives. He follows the customs surrounding birth, child care, schooling, adolescence, the discovery and the sane and restrained acceptance of "the facts of life." Adult problems are then described at length: setting up a home, eating,

working and loving habits, eking out a living, resisting hygiene stubbornly yet living healthily, distrusting others yet merging political dissensions and the anarchistic individualism of the French into a happy and well integrated community. Recreations and pleasures—very unexciting pleasures by American standards—feasts and rites are described in the last chapters and a restrained epilogue offers wise and suggestive conclusions on one of the mysteries of agrarian France: communities of placid and otherwise traditionalist farmers where half of the population chooses to vote for Communism or for Poujadism.

This patiently collected and intelligently interpreted treasury of observation on a Southern French village should reveal to many an American reader a France far different from that which has been presented to him in "Moulin Rouge," "Lust for Life," and even in Proust's and Mauriac's fiction. Is this unglamorous but very sympathetic portrayal of the French as a serious, clean, fatalistic population truer to life than the French people delineated in fiction? Is the average truth the truth in those matters? Is not a culture more significantly represented by its gifted, more turbulent and more anguished, but more creative elements?

Doubts linger in the mind of this reviewer. There are stifled passions of avarice and greed and sex, haunting dramas of love and hatred, unexpressed dreams of sentiment and of escape in those not very vocal farmers of Provence. They know that they are being left behind in the race for modernization, that their thrifty way of life, which entails poverty as well as an appearance of independence, is doomed. They curse the government, as Laurence Wylie justly remarks, and all the mythical "big powers" at home or abroad, but do nothing to change anything. Is not such a truthful and vivid description of a French village misleading after all? Those villages are less typical of the France of today (indeed they are populated in part by emigrants from Italy) than industrial suburbs or small towns where machinery and cooperative methods have transformed agriculture. They are inhabited by children and old men and women. Most of the robust males go to the cities, work on the railways or in garages, as barmen or coal deliverers or department store clerks or domestic servants. Some even become doctors, lawyers, politicians, men of letters. The absent ones, as a French saying has it, are too easily in the wrong, or left out from this otherwise admirable sociological portrait.