

admired and so often acted in a way to secure that love and admiration. France was the second country of most civilised men. And it was not only true that, as Tom Appleton said nearly a century ago, "good Americans when they die, go to Paris," but good or good-ish people of all nations went to Paris in their lifetimes. There were, and are, drawbacks to this assumption of cultural supremacy. Frenchmen often assumed, and even now assume, that controversies are being carried on in French fashion. And French confidence in being loved has led the French to attach too much importance to sentiment in international politics. So after the first world war the French expected too much remembrance of what they had done and suffered and so continued to expect special treatment, long after we and the Americans had decided to forgive Germany all the wrongs she had done to France.

To-day there are signs that France is bitterly conscious that her days of uncontested glory are over, that a great many things are going on in the world with which France has little concern and has no power to affect. If we think of France as a beautiful and much-loved woman whose power of attraction is no longer automatic, we may not be far wrong. It is an awkward period in the life of a woman or a nation. And one sign of that change is to be found in the novel readiness of the French to emigrate, to leave the *land* of France; we must insist on that. For France is still a country deeply committed to an agricultural way of life. It is not merely that she can, if she tries, feed herself, but that half the French population still lives on or near the land and that a far higher proportion of her population has close relationships with people living on the land than is the case with us.

As far as any single group sets its mark on French society, it is the peasantry. Many of the virtues, many of the vices that we can call French come from this fact. French thrift, how valuable? How maddening! What a source of national strength! What a source of national weakness! For peasant realism can be a good and a bad thing. It is a good thing as a corrective to the naïve optimism of the ignorant town dweller who simply cannot realise that his food supplies may fall short or that no amount of planning, no amount of political oratory or even action, can turn a disastrous harvest into a good one. It is a bad thing, too, for the peasant has no need for wider views to make him a good farmer, at any rate in the old style. But the State may need wider views. And peasant self-reliance can easily degenerate into a grim and formidable selfishness; peasant conservatism can be a source of great national loss; peasant suspicion of the townsman can be a deep wedge driven into the national unity. We in this country are learning what a loss it is that there is a gulf between the coal-miners and the rest of the population. The terribly impoverished France of to-day is learning what a handicap it is that there is this gulf between the peasantry and the townsfolk.

The peasant attitude, too, is present in the French view of the family. The

(continued on next page)

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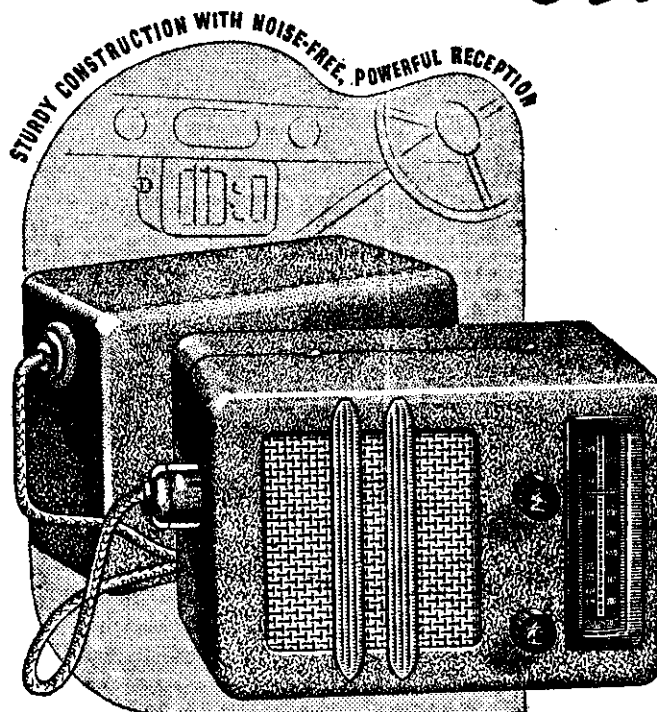
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