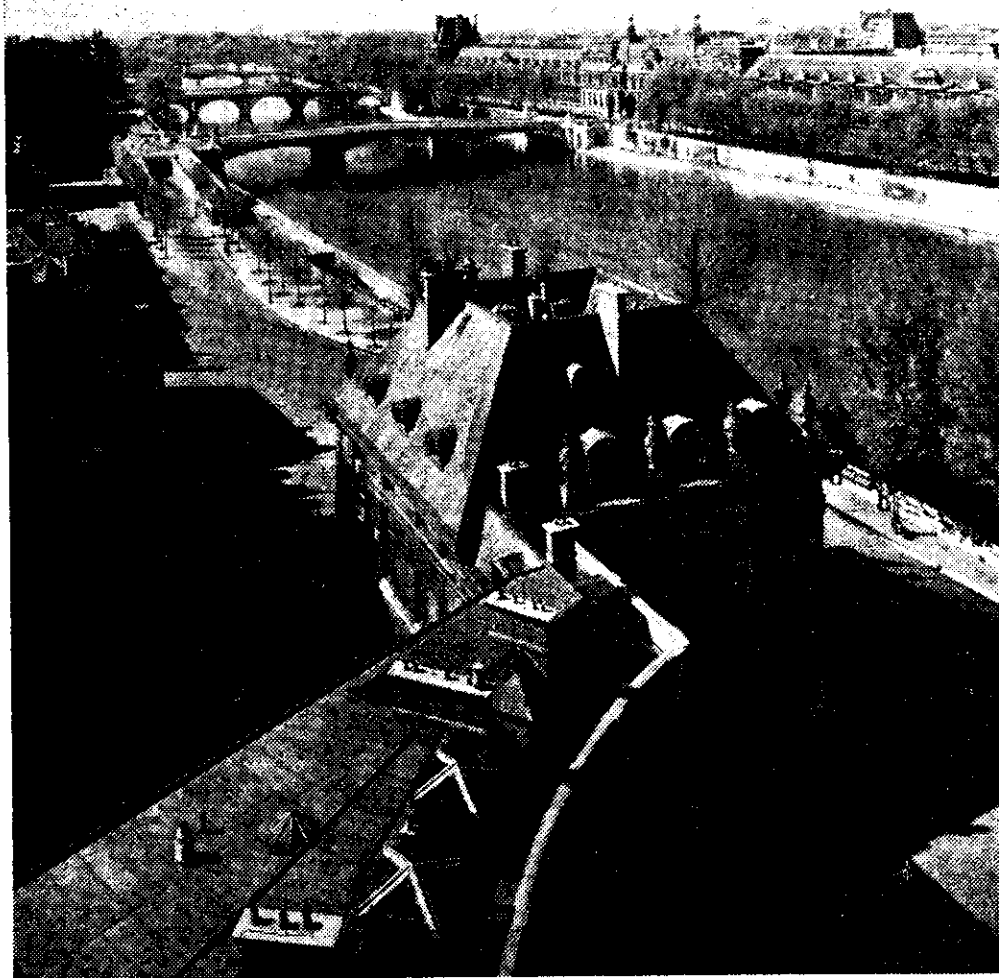


THE FIRST TIME I SAW PARIS



"The Seine is much less a waterway than a pure adornment to the place"

IT is now 18 months since I went to France, or rather to Paris, where I was to live almost the whole time; and partly because of laziness but mainly on principle, I have refrained until now, when I am back in New Zealand, from attempting to write down for publication any of my impressions of the country and its people. The laziness is easy enough to understand; the principle which held me back is the conviction that snap judgments are usually wrong and that it takes about a year for a foreigner in a country such as France, and in a city such as Paris, to acquire the knowledge, the sympathy, perhaps above all the humility necessary to appreciate properly the atmosphere of his surroundings and the true quality of his hosts—and also for the comparisons which one inevitably makes with other countries, especially one's own, to be based on something other than prejudice and partiality.

SINCE I have been in London on only three occasions, of not much more than one week each, you will know how

to treat it when I say that although I feel respect and admiration for London, for Paris I came to feel affection. It is familiarity which brings affection; and by the time I left France I was becoming so accustomed to the daily sights and sounds about me that I was taking them for granted. I was no longer continually aware that the language being spoken all round me was French; I no longer felt it necessary to remind myself that the thoroughfare along which I strolled nearly every day was the veritable Avenue des Champs-Élysées, and that the monument ahead was the veritable Arc de Triomphe. In brief, I was beginning to feel at home. It got towards the end that what caught one's attention was to hear an English or an American voice—there are always plenty of those—and after a while one came to adopt an attitude of slight mental superiority towards many other fellow-foreigners and to dismiss them to the category of "obvious tourists."

This, I am sure, is a stage which is passed through by every for-

igner in process of acclimatisation in every city in the world. It is almost as important a milestone as to start to find the scenes and people of your new habitation being reproduced in your dreams. When that happens you know indeed that you are putting down roots into the once-alien soil. Yet in the case of Paris I think that this process of acclimatisation is likely to be accelerated by the fact that Paris is, in every respect and despite its size, a very intimate city. It is much more intimate than, for instance, London. For London sprawls hugely in all directions, while Paris, lying within the basin of the Seine, is so contained that, on a fine day from the Tour Eiffel, the top of the Arc de Triomphe, the towers of Notre Dame, or the heights of Montmartre by the Church of the Sacre-Coeur, you can comprehend almost its full extent. Similarly, if you approach Paris from the high ground around Montmorency, it lies practically all stretched before you—the vista which has tempted so many invaders in the past.

THE RIVER

LIKE many other cities, Paris owed to a river its birth as a centre of human activity and thereafter, for hundreds of years, its political and economic fortunes. The Seine was the cradle of the French capital. Back in those days two thousand years ago when the place first emerged into history through the pages of Julius Caesar—the anniversary which is being celebrated this year—there was already a stronghold of the Gauls on the island where the Cathedral of Notre Dame

THREE things have happened or are about to happen which are likely to bring the land of France and the city of Paris, though 12,000 miles away from us, closer to New Zealanders. One is the setting up of a New Zealand Legation in Paris. Another is the arrival of M. Emanuel Lancial as the new French Minister to this country. The third is the fact that various celebrations will take place this year to commemorate the two-thousandth anniversary of Paris—the anniversary, not of the founding of the city, which is hidden in antiquity, but of its appearance in history, thanks to Julius Caesar, who not only carried out the conquest of Gaul, which he completed before 51 B.C., but also left us a detailed account of this exploit. In this article, the first of a series which will appear from time to time, GORDON MIRAMS, who recently returned to New Zealand after working with Unesco in Paris, has set down some of his impressions of Paris to-day and life in France.

riser in process of a junction, a market, a halting-place, a relay-station for transport at the join of two valleys. But to-day, despite its historic and prehistoric influence on the origin and destiny of Paris, through the facts of physical geography, the River Seine is much less a waterway than, for example, the Thames; so much less a great artery of commerce, and so much more a pure adornment to the place—a ribbon to beautify the city rather than a rope to haul in the trade of the world. To give the contrast a New Zealand parallel, I would say that the Seine stands to Paris now in very much the same relationship as the Avon stands to Christchurch.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

AS for the city itself, it is not so much a great functional metropolis as a collection of separate but closely-linked communities, each one virtually self-contained in its shopping-centre and its essential civic services. Almost every one of the *faubourgs* and *quartiers* of Paris, and certainly each of its 20 *arrondissements*, has a flavour and atmosphere all its own. Well-to-do Passy is no more like the Quartier Latin than Clignancourt (with its "Flea Market") is like the Opera district; but one is not less Parisian than the other. It is this quality of variety which makes Paris such a constant source of pleasure to the visitor; and it is this other quality of uniformity or unity in diversity which makes it so easy after a while for you to feel on intimate terms with all your surroundings. Once you have recognised and captured the essence of one part of Paris you have captured it for the whole.

The effect is heightened, and made more aesthetically real by the nature of the architecture, its general uniformity and evenness. I do not mean that every part of Paris is artistically as magnificent as every other; that the broad and

(continued on next page)