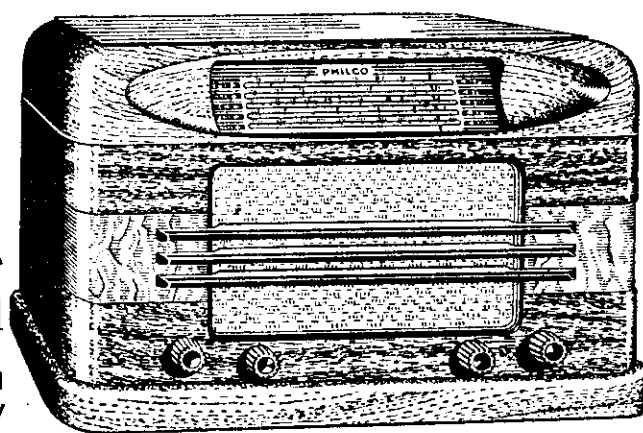


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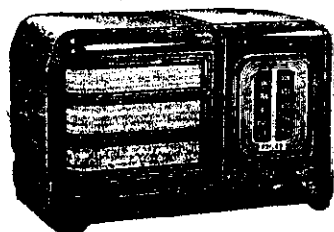


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(continued from previous page)

for them: they do not thrust themselves on your notice as do those of the following two decades. When I visited the prison of La Conciergerie I certainly had to look hard before I found, tucked away in a dark corner, the blade and other parts of the guillotine which cut off the head of Louis XVI. It was morbid curiosity that prompted the search, I admit, and it is probably right and natural that the French should be ashamed of the Terror, and do not like to be reminded of it themselves or to remind others. But the effect of this coupled with the emphasis on subsequent Imperial triumphs must be to obscure, at least in the popular mind, the causes of the Revolution—the economic condition of France and the tyranny which made the upheaval almost inevitable—as well as to relegate to the background the conceptions of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity which sprang from it.

This tendency was most strikingly illustrated in my experience by the attitude of the guides who show visitors round all such places as La Conciergerie, Versailles, Fontainebleau, and most notably the lovely Church of Sainte Chapelle. That prison of La Conciergerie is a grimly horrible place; you don't need a guide to stress the fact. But the one I encountered seemed to take a relish in doing just that, so that everybody in our party, French or foreigner, could hardly help being moved by the thought of what was suffered by the aristocrats and the Queen who were imprisoned there before massacre or execution. That, as I say, is right and natural; but as I have also said, it does rather put the picture out of perspective.

At Saint Chapelle and other churches and palaces, the emphasis was on the architectural beauties defaced and destroyed, the stained-glass windows smashed by the mob during the Revolution. "It is lovely, yes. But, ah, if we could only have seen it before those dreadful days," our guide would say. And the good solid bourgeois citizens crowding round him would exclaim, "Quel dommage! Quelle horreur!" and would bend down to explain to little Jean or Marie how that lovely statue of the Virgin had come to lose its nose.

I suppose it often happens thus, or much the same, in England when you are being shown round some ancient edifice defaced by the Cromwellians. But in Paris I think it happens rather too often.

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