

THE PULL OF THE PAST

EVERYTHING in Paris reminds you of history. It is almost as if everything conspires to do so. You could, I suppose, walk through a few parts of the city and not feel the past tugging continually at your coat-sleeve to draw your attention to some building, some piece of statuary, or some small square rich in historical associations. But thus to escape the pull of the past in Paris, even in the more recent quarters, you would need to be both ignorant and insensitive.

Indeed, Paris is so prodigal in all its intellectual and aesthetic offerings that, unless you wish to remain a mere dilettante, you feel almost compelled to limit the range of your interests and specialise in something—whether you are a student of art, literature, or history; a connoisseur of prints, coins, furniture, books, or old weapons; or nothing more than a modest collector, as I was, of model soldiers ("toy soldiers" if you like, but they are rather more than that). It is one of the attractions of Paris that anyone, whatever his hobby and taste, will find his private interest or eccentricity catered for somewhere

by some museum, art gallery, or library, or by some craftsman or specialised shopkeeper. To cite my own perhaps rather peculiar case, I came in the course of time upon several small shops concerned with nothing except the making, gathering together, and selling of model soldiers and figurines of different historical periods and of almost limitless variety, intricacy—and cost.

So you may, if you like, in your browsing through the city concentrate on the Gallo-Roman period when what was to become Paris was known as Lutèce (Lutetia), growing outward from its cradle on the Ile de la Cité, along the left bank of the Seine, and forming what later came to be known as the Latin Quarter, and leaving its traces in the enigmatic ruins of the Thermes of Cluny past which the traffic of the Boul' Miché now bustles, in the Arènes de Lutèce of the Rue Monge, and in the Church of St. Germain-des Prés.

Or you may prefer to specialise in the 13th and 14th Centuries when Paris was becoming the artistic and intellectual capital of the West and when Notre Dame was taking shape. Perhaps it is the 16th or the 17th Century which specially attracts you—the era of Henri

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Quatre, of Cyrane de Bergerac, of Cardinal Richelieu, and the Three Musketeers. If so you will find a Paris still rich in reminders and relics of those days—on the Ile St. Louis, behind Notre Dame, where building after building dates from about 1650; in the Gardens of the Luxembourg where the Musketeers met the Cardinal's Guards "at one o'clock" in the affray that Dumas has immortalised; in the Place des Vosges (once the Place Royale) where Henri II was killed in a tournament and where the Mignons of Henri III fought their famous duel in 1575; or perhaps in the Rue St. Honoré where a modern tea-and-cake-shop with the same name stands on the very site of the Rôtisserie Ragueneau frequented by Cyrano.

NAPOLEONIC GLORIES

YET though Paris offers the student and even the casual visitor a deep sense of continuity with every century and almost every year of its history,

there is one epoch above all others which the city commemorates—the Napoleonic. I do not like to generalise, but I am afraid it is true that for the average Parisian, if not the average Frenchman, history begins about the year 1796 with the emergence of Napoleon and ends on June 17, 1815, the day before Waterloo.

Everywhere you turn you are reminded of the Napoleonic legend and the glories of the First Empire. The Little Corporal now sleeps secure in his massive tomb beneath the Dome of Les Invalides, where ancient battle flags, rotting away to the semblance of spiders' webs, hang thick on the walls; but the magic power of his name still lies over the nation. Curiously enough, one seldom hears that name invoked in public utterance by to-day's leaders; but you have only to look at the crowds who queue up in their hundreds at week-ends and on anniversaries to pay homage before it to realise that the Tomb of Napoleon is the most sacred shrine of all to the Parisians, more sacred even than that of Ste Geneviève.

And there are many other places where the Napoleonic myth is almost as strong. You cannot avoid it at Versailles, at Fontainebleau, and of course at Malmaison, though that most charming of show places on the outskirts of Paris

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