

THE FUTURE OF FRANCE

A GLOOMY PROSPECT

The Rev. J. T. Roche, LL.D., who had been on a visit to France towards the end of last year, gives his impressions in a recent issue of the *Catholic Tribune*, Dubuque. He says:—

This morning (December 1) I secured a map of Paris and an open carriage. The cost for the whole day was two dollars, or ten francs. I visited the Madeleine, Napoleon's tomb, the Palais de Justice, Saint Sulpice, L'Arc de Triomphe, the Trocadere, Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, etc. At the Madeleine I was fortunate enough to witness a marriage ceremony between representatives of two distinguished French families. A Marquis of something was marrying the grand-daughter of a princess, and the church was filled with the members of the aristocracy. Of the Madeleine itself a great artist has said that it is fair and beautiful as the Acropolis at Athens, which, according to all authorities, is the world's choicest specimen of architecture. My driver strongly dissented from that opinion. 'C'est moderne,' 'It is modern,' he said, and from his standpoint that was enough to discredit it. When we came to Notre Dame later on he exclaimed: 'Ah! ici est une eglise magnifique! N'est pas superbe!' And truly a superb specimen of architecture it is. The highest tribute I can pay to it is that the reality far surpassed my expectation. It is an exemplification of the wonders which can be wrought with stone. A thirteenth century production, it goes far to convince us that in many, many ways the thirteenth was the 'greatest of centuries.' The interior is in keeping with the exterior. The chapels range along the sides and in the rear of the main altar, and would require days of careful study; but it is a study which would be well repaid. The memorial to Archbishop Darboy, who was killed during the Commune, was of particular interest to me. Strange to say, there is a splendid portrait of him in the consultation room, near to the chamber in which the sessions of the Supreme Court are now held. Even the Republic has pride enough in the country's history to preserve

The Memorials of the Early Centuries.

In the centre of the Law Courts I saw La Sainte Chapelle of St. Louis, which is regarded by those qualified to judge of such matters as the purest gem of Gothic architecture to be found in the world to-day. And it is another thirteenth century achievement, with the exception of the oriel window, which is two centuries later. The other windows are truly wonderful. I stood in the centre of the church in the gathering twilight and the varied colors stood out with the suggestiveness of a glory caught from a crimson sunset on some far-off mountain top. Though it is now merely a national monument and the sound of prayer is heard no more within its walls, I instinctively felt like kneeling where a sainted king had knelt and prayed, and the faith and piety of six centuries had brought devout worshippers of Him Whom the impious Government is now seeking to dethrone.

It was a day of constantly changing impressions, but the more I saw the deeper grew the conviction that whatever France has to-day that is beautiful and inspiring can be traced to the days when the nation was truly Catholic, and that her modern attempts at adornment are so many evidences of that decadence which has overtaken her in attempting to restore to the world discredited pagan ideals. The France of to-day is the France of venal, corrupt leaders, of a mercenary and lying press, of a stage which is so low that no play can succeed which does not have adultery as its central theme, of fierce hatreds, of high-sounding shibboleths and strangled liberty, of impaired credit and a total loss of prestige amongst the nations, of visionary and spoliatory economic theories, which are driving capital from the country, of shameful vices and a moral degradation so deep and widespread that to those who know the country best the future seems exceedingly dark.

I started out on this trip with the idea of meeting men rather than that of hurrying from place to place in order to view the memorials of previous centuries. Thus far I have been exceptionally fortunate. To-night I met a dozen representatives of American business-houses—men who spend their time going up and down through the various European countries, making purchases of such goods as are in demand in the American market. I was surprised at their deep-seated hatred and contempt for France and everything French. 'A nation of polite liars and petty thieves,' said one. 'A nation,' said another, 'as destitute of business honor and honesty as the Japanese.' In striking contrast to these strictures were the tributes paid to the Germans, Swiss, and English. In the opinion of all, France at present is in an exceedingly chaotic state. One Englishman, who has represented an American house for almost forty years, told me that thoughtful Frenchmen of his acquaintance regarded their country's future as practically hopeless. He went into particulars and gave me some interesting facts and figures.

One of his statements was that it was not uncommon, in hotels, restaurants, and other places of business, to find the sign: 'No Frenchmen employed here.' Their universal tendency to prey upon their employers and the general public have rendered the employment of honest foreigners an absolute business necessity. And the French themselves, knowing this to be the case, do not resent it. He told me, too, that French capital was being taken out of the country as speedily as possible and invested in foreign securities. As a result of sabotage or wilful destruction of property, strikes, etc., there is hardly a French company to-day which is paying dividends as high as formerly. Last year, over two hundred million francs of French money were deposited in Swiss banks. In real-estate transactions eight per cent. of the purchase money goes to the State, and this is only one of the many forms of practical confiscation. To-day European investors, but most of all French, do not seek French securities. In 1900 two of their leading steamship companies paid dividends of 50 francs a share; in 1908 they paid nothing. A few years ago France held second place in the world of commerce; to-day it is tenth. The government of its colonies is conducted at an immense loss each year, and France is so thoroughly hated in these colonies that a large standing army is necessary to keep them in order. Last year I heard Mr. Louis Lombard, the well known litterateur, musician, retired American millionaire and proprietor of the Castle Trevauc in Switzerland, tell a little story about the late Cardinal Lavigerie. Once he asked an Arab sheik in Algiers what he thought of the Cardinal. 'He is a good man,' replied the sheik, 'so good that our people cannot believe that he is a Frenchman.'

Sabotage and Strikes.

Sabotage is another name for the wilful destruction of property in revenge for real or fancied grievances on the part of anarchistic workmen. This has reached appalling proportions everywhere throughout France. Steamships and railroad trains are wrecked deliberately and innocent lives snuffed out by villainous thugs, who are never brought to trial and who cannot be convicted, because of perjured testimony. Private individuals are in mortal fear for both their lives and property. Then strikes are of daily occurrence and on the most childish pretexts. The country's business to-day is at the mercy of the syndicates or workmen's associations, which in many cases are controlled by loafers, who have never done an honest day's work. Most of them are anarchists and Socialists, who ultimately hope to destroy capital and thus bring about the new Utopia, in which all will be on an equal footing of misery and poverty. The most discouraging feature of the whole situation is that these syndicates can make or unmake the nation's political representatives, and as a result of time-serving demagogues who fill the Chamber of Deputies and stand ready to grant the syndicates' demands. Atheistic schools and universities have covered the land with discontented idlers, who are living by their wits and increasing the nation's criminality. In the last five years crime has doubled amongst boys between fifteen and twenty years of age. The nation's morality is reflected in the lowest birth-rate of any country in the world, and were it not for the immigration the population would show a perceptible decrease. A striking fact stands out in connection with this general decline. Though French capital is rapidly abandoning the country, the Germans in recent years have bought up considerable property, and with the spectre of a German army in the background they are treated with a consideration which native Frenchmen rightly envy. I have been assured by a man who associates with those high in the diplomatic world that Germany stands ready to pour her troops into France on the slightest provocation. He was firm in the belief that men now living would see France a German province, and that it would be the best thing that could befall the country.

Another View.

This morning I had a long interview with one of the priests attached to the English Church on Avenue Hoche. His picture of affairs was not quite so depressing. He still believes that the Church has enough of vitality to save France. All, he said, agree that the Church is stronger to-day than at any time since the Revolution. The free-will offerings of the people are sufficient for the temporalities. The bishops have an independence never known before. The Archbishop of Paris has started seventeen badly needed new parishes; he is planning forty more. The people's fighting blood is up, and last year there were more Easter Communions than at any time in the country's history. Even the noisiest infidels have grown afraid and are looking to the Church to save the country. They recognise that whatever honor, honesty, or morality there is in the land to-day is to be found amongst those who still call themselves Catholic. The priests are now treated respectfully on the streets. Even the press has ceased its attacks. As Napoleon discovered that he could not govern without the aid of religion, so the unbelievers are now beginning to realise that they may have to tear a page out of his book.

I have thus given both sides of the case as they were given me by men who are on the ground. I trust that what I have written will help your readers to understand something of the mystery surrounding the currents of French politics in recent years.