

**EVERY-DAY LIFE IN FRANCE**

Experiences of a Foreigner With the Merchants and Shops of the Small Towns

(By Capt. Edwin M. Burr)

Probably a subject as interesting as any would be a discussion of the modern conveniences to be found in the everyday life of our sister democracy. But before we enter the subject it will be well to explain that there are two districts in France, the civilization of which differ radically. These are, first, the cities, such as Paris, Lyon, Marseilles, Bordeaux, etc.; and second, the province or the rural district. Also we must bear in mind that there are two aspects of French life to be reckoned with; one, the pre-war phase, the other that of the war with which our soldiers are best acquainted. We must realize that the glimpse we got was at a time when our hosts were at their poorest commercially, industrially and morally. Let us not judge France too harshly by her ebb-tide showing.

The appearance of the small French town, ranging from fifty to five thousand inhabitants, have been described by the majority of letter-writers from the front. Nearly everyone has read of the little, low, stone structures with red tile roofs that are built along some narrow rambling road. But has everyone taken a close-up of the interior of one of these quaint business houses? Were you to enter a shop in a small town your interest might be attracted by some display in the shop-window, but it would generally be necessary to single out some one object from a generous maze of goods crowded into a tiny space. But once having the desire to enter a small shop, your next difficulty might be to discover the entrance. In many business places of this sort, the door is almost concealed because it is built like one of the windows, with hinges on the inside. The only distinctive feature in most cases is not a door-knob as we know them, but a "door-handle" or leet about three or four inches in length. This handle is common to most doors in France, both for inside and outside use.

When one opens the door the first thing to impress itself upon his unaccustomed ears is the tinkling of a bell in the front or rear of the store which announces to the proprietor that a patron has come. A contrivance of wires, pulleys and levers is acted upon by some edge of the door and the resultant tinkling of a bell heralds his approach as well as his departure. This warning calls the proprietor, usually a woman or her daughter, from some occupation in the rear of the place. In case neither party speaks both languages, the scene which follows, composed of earnest gesticulation and atrocious mispronunciation interspersed generously with "yes" and "oui" can easily be imagined.

Dry goods, meats, groceries, and such wares are generally displayed with attention to the dictates of neatness and order. But I have seen stationery, music and news stands, second-hand book stores and curio shops in a state of confusion and disorder that would make the proverbial editor's sanctum appear like a model of cleanliness and organization. Possibly in pre-war times this was not the case, and yet it seemed to me that establishments which were confronted with the problem of keeping in stock a multitude of small objects such as magazines, papers or books were very prone to allow their shelves to take on the common appearance of an American attic.

The completeness of stocks carried by French business firms does not compare with the corresponding establishments of our country, either in quantity or range of commodities. This fact is due, probably, to at least two causes, one of which is that the scarcity of money exercises a definite restraint on the selection of buyers. They take what they can get and are thankful for the opportunity. The other cause the writer thinks is the custom to be observed in many parts of France, that of traveling bands of merchants, who make their headquarters in some comparatively large city and make a regular schedule of little towns, selling their wares a half or whole day in each place. In this way they serve the people in several different capacities.

In the first place they bring the latest notions from the business centers, and incidentally make it inadvisable for merchants to carry anything but staple articles. Again they serve as did the troubadours of old who brought news from distant places. But in this case the news is exchanged over the gaily decorated little carts while the draft animal (usually some diminutive donkey or worthless pony, although sometimes large dogs are used) stands on a couple or three legs close by and dreamily listens to the sharp bargain that is driven in even the most trivial purchase. These itinerant merchants are respected and welcome visitors to these little towns. The inhabitants make a sort of weekly fair out of their coming, and the activity and interest are keen while the troupe stays in the village for the Frenchman truly loves to higggle over the price of something and exchange gossip meanwhile.

This love of higgling over prices can be said to be general in France, except in some of the large stores in the cities. In the smaller communities it is practically always the custom. And this national difference gives rise to one of the most heart-felt though least-appreciated complaints that the French have against the Americans. The writer knows that the great majority of soldiers who return from France will tell stories of high prices charged Americans while the same commodities were sold to natives at reasonable profit. It is not sensible to attempt to deny that such was undoubtedly the case in some instances. But it

is his opinion that such distinction was not common, and that every instance could be traced to some disreputable merchant whom the ordinary Frenchman detests.

On the other hand, it is the writer's honest belief that the Frenchman had a more legitimate complaint to make against our soldiers in the matter of prices. The American was not in the habit of arguing over the price demanded for an article. He looked the object over, heard the price, and either took or left it. The French merchant, accustomed to higgling, naturally demanded more money than he expected to obtain. The consequence, when the American bought, and he usually did buy, he paid a good stiff price. Then when the Frenchman approached the same merchant to buy, he was asked the high price but could obtain no reduction, because the merchant would say, "Well, if you won't pay that, the Americans will." In that way the Americans unthinkingly and unnecessarily raised the cost both to themselves and others. If our soldiers had been able to argue a little and would have done so, no unnecessary raise could have been effected by the merchants.

To return to a comparison of the business houses in the respective country towns: Their range is not so wide as ours and yet they naturally have some we do not. In the ordinary French town the size of Aurora there would be no bank, newspaper, garage, real estate office, dentist, soda fountain, grain elevators, farm machinery store, commercial club, movies or opera house. But they would have numerous cafes where beer, wines or liquors are sold, at least one brewery, a few second-hand stores where curious and old furniture would be on sale, and probably a "sage-fem" (mid-wife) or two to help out the only physician in the

(Continued on Page 5)

**A Timely Help**

The face is often the first to betray a decline in strength. When you feel rundown and your face is colorless, the need for

**SCOTT'S EMULSION**

is plainly evident. Those who have tried Scott's know its power to strengthen the body, enrich the blood and put the color back in the face. *Don't be pale-faced—take Scott's Emulsion.*

The Norwegian cod-liver oil used in Scott's Emulsion is super-refined in our own American Laboratories. Its purity and quality is unsurpassed. Scott & Bowne, Bloomfield, N. J. 19-25



**DELICIOUS**

is their name and DELICIOUS is their nature.

We have them—the finest eating Apple that can be bought. Try just one and you will be converted to our belief. This is only part of our

**CARLOAD OF APPLES**

Fancy Jonathons and Winesaps make up the remainder of the car. They are all in fine shape and are priced right to justify the purchase of your winter's supply. By the bushel or pound. Come in and look at them.

**CARLOAD OF FINE CABBAGE**

We have just received a carload of high quality cabbage that we are disposing of at attractive prices. This cabbage is the Danish Bald Head, and the heads are solid and well preserved.

**TO ALTERNATE WITH THE IRISH**

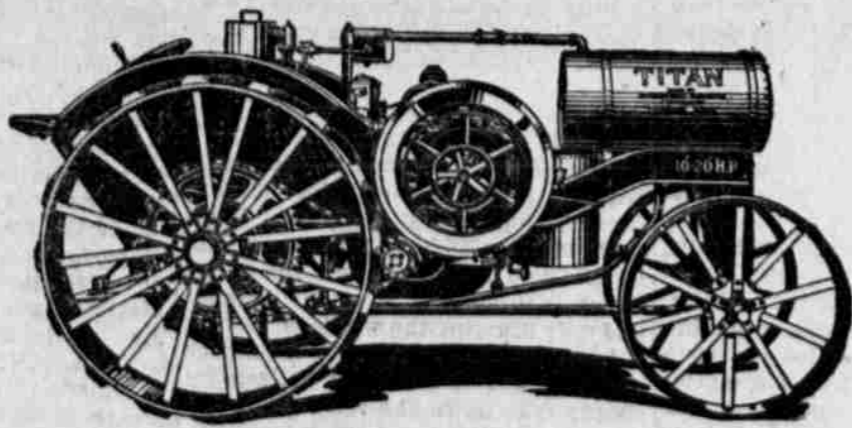
Both the Irish Potatoes and the Sweets will taste much better if you alternate them. Give the family some of the finest sweet potatoes they have ever tasted. We can sell you the Yellow Jersey sweet potatoes that will stand comparison with any of them.

We also have a good supply of Tokay Grapes and Kefer Pears that are sure to sell fast—they're priced right.

**Alliance Floral Co.**

204 Box Butte Avenue

**TITAN TRACTORS**



*Newberry's Hardware Co.*

Sells Them



Silver Prize Cups Won by Box Butte Potatoes

**The Prize Winners**

Box Butte county potatoes are the prize winners. Raised in the comfortable, quick-growing climate of western Nebraska, under the beautiful Box Butte skies, and cradled in the rich, moist, potash-bearing, chocolate loam soil, they grow and grow until they become a delicious article of food. Once tasted by those unused to them, nothing else in the spud line will suffice thereafter.

We sell the lands which grow the prize-winning potatoes. Prices are low, terms are easy. The lands are awaiting the farmer who wants big returns on his investment. Write or see us personally and ask for our list of bargains in raw lands, farms and ranches.

**Thomas-Bald Investment Co.**

LLOYD C. THOMAS

Phone 209

ALLIANCE

F. A. BALD

Alliance National Bank Bldg.

Box Butte County

NEBRASKA