

The Commoner.

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FRANCE AND HER PEOPLE

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My call upon President Loubet was the most interesting incident of my visit to France. It was arranged by General Horace Porter, American ambassador to France, who conducted us to the Elysee palace, which is the White house of the French republic.

President Loubet is probably the most democratic executive that France has ever had. He reminded me of our former President Benjamin Harrison and of another of our distinguished citizens, Andrew Carnegie—not exactly like either, but resembling both—the former in appearance, the latter in manner as well as appearance.

President Loubet is below the medium height, even of Frenchmen. His shoulders are broad and his frame indicative of great physical strength. His hair is snow white, as are also his beard and mustache. He wears his beard cut square at the chin.

His eyes are dark blue, suggesting that his hair and beard were blond before the years bleached them. His voice is soft, and he speaks with great vivacity, emphasizing his words by expressive gestures.

He received us in his working room, a beautiful semi-oval apartment, whose large windows open into the beautiful gardens attached to the Elysee palace. The oval end of the room bore great priceless Gobelin tapestry, depicting abundance. On a pedestal under the tapestry was a marble bust of the Minerva-like head of the Goddess of Liberty of the French republic.

The president's desk is a long, flat table, eminently business looking, covered with paper and lighted by two desk lamps and green shades. A huge electric chandelier dependent from the frescoed ceiling filled the room with light.

The president wore a frock coat, the tri-colored button of the Legion of Honor adorning the lapel.

President Loubet is a very cordial man, and takes pride in the fact that, like most of our American presidents, he has worked his way up from the ranks of the common people. His father was a farmer near the village of Montelimar.

Young Loubet studied law, and then public affairs. He has held nearly every office in the gift of the people. He was mayor of Montelimar, where his aged mother still lives in the old farmhouse.

He was elected a deputy in 1876, and in 1886 was elected to the senate. He was minister of public works in 1887, and minister of the interior in 1892. In 1895 he was elected president of the senate, and in 1899 he was elected president of the republic.

He talked freely of various questions that came up for consideration, and showed himself to be thoroughly informed upon the economic as well as the political questions with which France has to deal. His personal popularity and strong good sense have been of inestimable value to his country in the trying times caused by the Dreyfus case.

President Loubet has been prominently connected with the bimetallic movement, and shows himself familiar with the principles upon which bimetallicists rely in their defense of that system of finance.

The president, like all the Frenchmen I have met, feels very friendly toward the United States, and it goes without saying that France under his administration is not likely to do anything at which our country can take just offense.

It was gratifying to me to hear him express so much good will, for it was evidence of the attachment which the French people feel toward those republican principles of government which they have established by so much struggle and sacrifice.

Municipal ownership has not made as much progress in France as in England, although most of the cities now own their water works, and some of them their lighting plants. The railroads are nearly all owned by private corporations, but

they operate under charters running about 100 years, half of which time has now elapsed.

According to the charters, the government guaranteed a certain rate of interest on the investment, besides the contribution to the sinking fund, and at the end of the charter the roads become the property of the state.

Although it is nearly fifty years before the charters expire, the course to be adopted by the government is already being discussed, some insisting that the government should take over the roads and operate them—others favoring an arrangement that will continue private operation, although the government will be owner of the property. The same difference of opinion to be found in our own country is to be found here, and some of the high officials are strongly opposed to the government entering upon the operation of the roads.

President Loubet spoke with evident gratification of the general diffusion of wealth in France. He said that they had few men of large fortunes, but a great many men of moderate means, and he felt that the republic was to be congratulated

THE BEGINNING OF THE FOURTH YEAR.

With this issue The Commoner enters upon its fourth year. Its success has gratified an increasing circle of friends and disappointed those who thought it a temporary enterprise. With a circulation of 140,000 per week, with the gratitude for the support given by its readers, and with a firm faith in the sincerity, loyalty and purpose of those who in the campaign of 1896 and 1900 made such a brave fight for democratic principles, The Commoner faces the future. It will, as in the past, add new features and improvements as experience demonstrates their wisdom, but its main purpose will continue to be to present the democratic side of the questions now before the people and those which from time to time shall arise. It invites the co-operation of all who desire to have the government administered according to the maxim of "equal rights to all and special privileges to none."

upon the fact that the resources of the country were so largely in the hands of the people.

He explained that the government loans were taken by the people in small sums and subscribed many times over. Very few of the bonds representing the French debt are held outside of France. The debt furnishes a sort of savings bank for the citizens, and their eagerness to invest in "rentes" (the government bonds) is proof of their patriotism as well as of their thrift.

I had heard so much of the French peasant that I devoted one day to a visit into the country. Going out some fifty miles from Paris I found a village of about eighty families. Selecting a representative peasant, I questioned him about the present condition and prospects of the French farmer. I found that about three-fourths of the peasants of that village owned their homes, but that only about one-fourth owned the farms they tilled.

I should explain that the French peasants do not as a rule live upon the farms, as is the custom in the United States. With us, whether a farmer owns forty acres or a quarter section, he usually lives upon the land, and the houses are therefore scattered at intervals over the country.

The French peasants, on the contrary, are inclined to gather in villages most of them owning their houses and gardens, but going out into the

country to cultivate their fields. Sometimes a peasant will have a vineyard in one direction from his home, a pasture in another and a wheat or beet field in yet another direction.

These fields are sometimes owned, but more often are rented. The landlord aims to get about 4 per cent annually on his investment. The tenant, however, pays the taxes, which sometimes amount to 1 or 2 per cent more.

The peasants complain that the horses which they need to cultivate their crops are made more expensive by the increased consumption of horse-flesh as food, the demand having raised the price of horses.

The same cause has operated, so I was informed, to reduce the price of cattle. The widespread use of automobiles has lessened the price of straw in Paris, and this has been felt by the wheat growers.

I found the peasant with whom I talked to be an ardent protectionist. He spoke as if the farmers were driven to it as a last resort. As I was leaving he assured me that he was glad to speak to a "republican" and said he would not have talked to me at all if I had not been one.

This was an evidence of his loyalty to the existing regime in France and also gave additional proof of the fact that the republican party in the United States has an advantage in appealing to newly-arrived immigrants merely by reason of its name.

Foreigners are much better acquainted with the word "republic" than with the word "democracy," and I find that republican speakers have taken advantage of this fact and represented the republican party as the only exponent of the doctrines of a republic.

The New York Independent about a year ago printed the autobiography of a foreign born citizen, who presented the same idea and told of a republican speech in which this argument was made by the orator.

The birth rate in France scarcely exceeds the death rate, and to my surprise I found that the increase in the country was even less than in Paris, in proportion to the population. One Frenchman, apparently well informed, told me that there were small villages in which it was difficult to find a child.

In the village which I visited I was told that the families averaged two or three children. To show, however, that the small family was not the universal rule, attention was called to one family there in which there were eleven children.

The French peasant is a very industrious man and cultivates his land with great care, and as soon as he saves a little money he tries to add to the area of his farm. The wife is usually an efficient helper, whether in the city or in the country. In the city she is often co-partner with her husband in the store, and assists him to save.

Whether the tendency of the peasants to gather in villages rather than to live each on his own farm is due to their sociability or is a relic of the feudal system, I cannot say—both reasons were given.

The French peasant has reason to feel the burden of militarism, but the recollection of the last war with Germany is so fresh in his mind that he is not likely to make any vigorous protest as long as he believes a large army necessary for the protection of the republic.

The sentiment of the French people on this subject is shown by the fact that the figure representing Alsace-Lorraine in the group of statues in the beautiful Place de la Concorde is always covered with mourning wreaths.

I visited the Bank of France, where I was received by the governor, M. Georges Pallain. The bank's capital stock is about \$40,000,000, and it pays a dividend of about 12 per cent, equal to about 4 per cent on the present market value of the stock. The deposits are much smaller in proportion to the capital than most of our large American banks. This is true of the Bank of En-