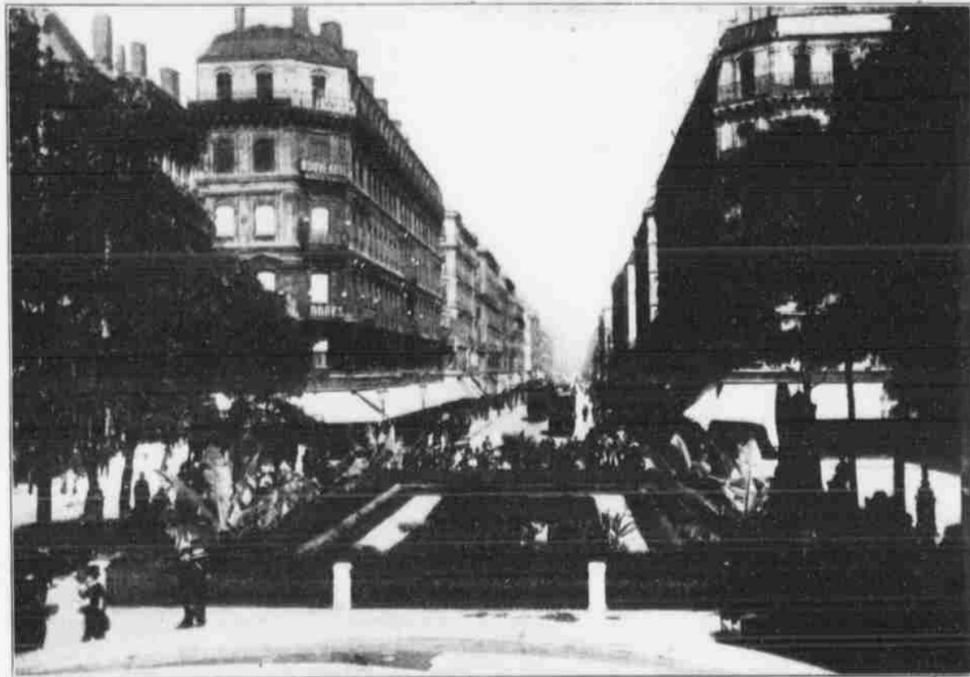


American Goods in the Silk Country of France



LYONS IS A CITY OF FLATS.



THE STOCK EXCHANGE AT LYONS.

(Copyright, 1902, by Frank G. Carpenter.)
LYONS, France, Oct. 22.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—This Rhone valley is one of the richest parts of the French republic. Its products amount to hundreds of millions of dollars a year, and there is scarcely a family which has not a hoard stored away in a woolen stocking under the rafters. It already buys many American goods, but the field is not half worked. Lyons, where I am writing, has a population of 500,000. It has excellent stores, but they are filled with French, English, German and Belgian goods, and the chief American products to be seen are California fruits, Chicago bacon, typewriters and sewing machines. And still the American shoe would walk rapidly into the hearts of the better classes, and our ice cream soda would soon make its way into the affections of the Lyonnese maidens. I found American soda fountains doing a good business in England. There are none in Paris and only a few in Berlin and Hamburg.

We should have a good trade here in American drugs. We ship many to England, but none to speak of to France. The French drugs are poor. They are made by the natives of diluted extracts and adulterated solids. You have to take doses the size of horse powders to accomplish the desired result, and the medicines as a rule are put up on the homeopathic plan. Our consul at Lyons recently sent out for a dozen two-grain quinine pills, representing the word grain by the letters gr. The druggist interpreted this to mean gram, and the result was that the dose taken was big enough to kill an ordinary man. The quinine was so weak, however, that it only made a buzzing in the consul's ears. He complained to the druggist and tried to have him introduce American specialties, but so far has only succeeded as to porous plasters. The druggist says that chemical products will not stand the voyage across the Atlantic, and he intimated that the French goods surpass the American.

There is one specialty in the drug line, however, that the Frenchmen concede to be worth imitation. This is the American drink. You see the sign "American bar" over one or more saloons in every continental city. The principal hotels of Europe advertise American drinks, and the genuine American bars have plenty of custom. The American cocktail makes the Frenchman smile and he rises responsively to the Kentucky "high ball."

The most of the bars, however, are frauds. They keep no American liquors and the drinks are manipulated by French bartenders who cannot speak English. The other day an American drummer dropped into one for a drink and called out in loud tones: "I want a glass of American whiskey."

"Comment?" said the waiter, with a puzzled look on his face.

"Bring me a Manhattan cocktail!" said the drummer.

"Comment?"

And thereupon the drummer got angry and cursed the Frenchman for putting up an American sign, when he had no American drinks and could not even understand the American language.

There is a real American bar in Lyons, and it is the most fashionable drinking place in the city. It was started by a New Yorker, who thoroughly understood the science of making the insidious but destructive American cocktail, and who did it so well that he has made a fortune out of the business.

And still I don't see why the French should care for American liquors, when they have the best and the cheapest wines of the world. You can get good claret here by the barrel for 4 cents a quart, and champagne which is not at all bad for 20 cents a pint or 10 cents a glass. A fair claret is served in the restaurants at 16



FRENCH SCHOOL CHILDREN AND CONSUL COVERT—Photo by Mr. Carpenter.

cents a bottle, and all sorts of wines are remarkably cheap.

This is not far from some of the chief wine-raising sections. I passed train loads of Burgundy and claret on my way from Paris to Lyons. The wine was carried in tank cars, just as we carry coal oil, and some trains were composed of great hogsheads on trucks, each hogshead marked with wine. I rode for miles through vineyards, every vine having its individual stake, the whole country apparently growing poles about which the green vines were climbing.

I would advise our elevator factories to systematically work the European trade. Everyone here lives in a flat. Lyons is a city of flats and this is so throughout the continent. Paris is a gigantic beehive of living apartments, Marseilles is all flats and so are Orleans and Bordeaux.

The chief cities of Switzerland have flats. In Berlin and the other places in Germany the government proscribes the strictest of building regulations. There is a limit to the height of the houses and small houses cannot be built. The result is the people live in apartments and not one family in a thousand has a house to itself. The most of the flats are of five stories and only the newest of them have elevators. This is also true of the hotels. A vast amount of building is going on in all of the cities and hundreds of new apartment houses without elevators are being constructed. Such elevators as are made in Europe are twenty years behind the times. They are slow and stuffy. The doors open the wrong way and they look more like seaside bath houses than modern elevators. An enormous business could be built up for our modern elevators and many of our flat improvements could be introduced at a profit.

There are many curious features in French tenement houses. The renters put in their own gas fixtures and the landlords insist that the pipes be put outside the walls, saying that if they are inside they may leak. At the close of his lease the tenant takes the fixtures away with him or sells them to the incoming tenant.

The heating arrangements are very bad. As a rule every man heats his own apartment and stoves are used. Steam-heating plants are not known by the majority of French householders and only the newest of the apartments have electric lights.

It is wonderful how the people crowd themselves into small flats. To save room cupboards are often built in the malls of the larger apartments. Each cupboard when closed looks as though it might be a door leading into another room, but when opened you can see it has a bed inside it and you learn that it is there the children sleep. The rooms of such apartments are all connected. The floors are very good and they are kept shiny by means of iron shavings, which look much like excelsior. These are sold at so much a pound and they scour the floor until it shines.

One of the queer features of every front door is what the people here call a "Judas." This is a little plate of brass about as big as a visiting card with slits a sixteenth of an inch wide cut in it. This card is tacked over a little hole in the door and is so arranged that the person within can peep through and without being seen tell who is knocking before deciding whether she is at home or not. If she does not want to receive her caller the servant gives word that she is not in and therefore the name Judas. I don't know but that this is quite as honest as the Judas kisses which our ladies often give their callers when they wish that they are elsewhere.

I have gone through several flats here in Lyons. The best of them have no comforts for the servants. The usual place for hired girl is a little loft, made by cutting off half the height of the kitchen, just wide enough to hold a bed, where the girl crawls off to sleep. She has no light but from the kitchen and the ventilation is poor.

And still Lyons has some very good things. How would you like a bath for 3 cents? I had one today, and two women waited on me as I went in and out of the bath room. The bathing place was in one of the public parks. A little house about fifteen feet square had been there erected, and in this were six baths, or stalls, divided into compartments by a waterproof curtain. On one side there was an excellent shower. I turned one spigot and the water came down on my head, and another gave me a shower on all sides of my body at once. I was told that I could use ten gallons of hot water and all the cold water I wanted. I was furnished soap and towels, and at the close found a comb and brush ready for use. These baths are common in many French cities. They belong to a company, which

has a concession to operate them for thirty years, when they go to the municipality. Without each bath house averages at least 200 a day the city has the right to consider the experiment a failure and to cancel the contract. At present the patronage is greatly in excess of this number, and the company is making money.

I have spent much time here about the United States consulate. It is the American center of the Rhone valley and does more business than any consulate in France except Paris.

It deserves to be made a consulate general, inasmuch as Lyons is the commercial center of manufacturing France and in the most thickly populated part of the country.

I am glad to find a consul here who speaks French. Our American representative is Mr. John C. Covert, who is well known to the newspaper world of the United States from his long connection with the Cleveland Leader. Mr. Covert began life as a printer's devil in the Leader office, but at the age of 21 came to Paris, with hardly enough money to pay a week's board bill. He lived in France for eight years, supporting himself by teaching the Frenchmen English. Like Bayard Taylor, he put on a blouse and tramped over the country from one end of it to the other, studying the people and learning the language. After a time he returned to the United States and remained there until the election of President McKinley, when he was sent to Lyons. He speaks French like a native, and this, in connection with his newspaper training and practical ability, makes him one of the valuable men of our consular service.

Consul Covert tells me that our American exporters are not doing their duty in the Rhone valley. There is a big opportunity here for the sale of all kinds of goods. This is a leather country, having some of the largest tanneries of France, nevertheless quantities of American glazed kid are shipped from the United States. American dried fruits are in demand, and there is an opening for American jams and preserves. There are macaroni factories, and the Texas hard wheat can be shipped here at a profit. Smoked salmon is much used.

There is an opening for our carpenters'

tools and hardware and also for American sewing machines. The chief machine sold here is the Singer. This company has thoroughly organized its foreign trade. It has agencies in every country and in every town, and it practically monopolizes its field. There is no reason why other machines would not sell equally well if they were properly pushed, for the French and Germans cannot make such machines in comparison with us.

I find Deering harvesters and McCrimm's reapers largely used in the Rhone valley, and think there should be a big opening here for American plows and other farm implements. Mr. Antrist, one of the Deering representatives at Paris, tells me that the farm laborers are gradually going to the cities. They are working in the factories, and the result is that machinery must take their place. This is so not only in France, but in all parts of the continent, and as a result there is an increased demand for agricultural tools. Every manufacturer of such tools should study the export trade. There is money in it.

The recent troubles between labor and capital in the great coal strike leads me to write of the workingmen's organizations in the Rhone valley. This city of Lyons has numerous trades unions. Every now and then there is a strike, but the men still work long hours and for small pay. They have, however, some very good institutions and among them are the workmen's aid societies. These are a sort of mutual benefit or pension associations, intended to give their members money in their old age. The members enter when young, and at 55 expect to have enough money saved to be able to retire and live on their pensions. The amount of pension is in proportion to the length and amount of saving, and the members range all the way from three years to sixty.

Hundreds of school children belong to such associations, and the government itself aids in their support. There are now more than 2,500,000 members. The societies pay out 60,000 pensions every year, and have assets amounting to about \$60,000,000. The societies are under the control of the Interior department, and the officials believe that they prevent strikes and divert the members from communistic and socialistic tendencies.

The associations were begun just after the French revolution, and they are in a thriving condition today. They can be organized by any class of workmen or employees. Some of them are composed of clerks, some of salesgirls and many of factory hands. The members are required to pay monthly dues, and the money is invested in government bonds at 3 per cent. This is added to by the government, so that the funds bring in at least 4½ per cent, which interest goes on at a compound rate and accumulates the vast amounts which are given out for old-age pensions.

Parents often lay aside money in these banks for their children, so that they can have a capital with which to begin life when they reach manhood or womanhood. Mothers lay aside money for their daughters' dowries, and girls thus save for their wedding trousseaus.

The most of such savings is invested by the government in bonds and mortgages. The government pays an interest of 2½ per cent on the deposits, but no account is allowed to run over \$400, after which the depositor can, if he wishes, draw out the money and start again. The government officials give depositors advice as to investments, and especially so when the government or the municipalities are about to issue loans. Such loans are made in bonds of low denomination and the result is that almost every family in France is a bondholder. Every man, woman and child who is interested in such bonds or in the government savings banks feels that he is a part of the government, and is consequently a patriot.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.