

Uprising of the Wine Growers of the Midi and the Causes Thereof

PERPIGNAN, June 28.—The remarkable economic demonstration, unique in the variegated history of France, which the wine growers of the Midi have conducted now for the best part of two months with a view to bettering their material condition will end before these lines can be read in America, but the real causes of that demonstration and the conditions in the country affected have been told only fragmentarily in the cable dispatches and they form a most interesting, almost astonishing chapter in the long story of economic progress.

The people of the four departments bordering on the Mediterranean from the south of the Rhone to the Pyrenees are not Frenchmen as the world understands and thinks of Frenchmen. In speech, in manner, in type, they resemble somewhat the Spaniards, but they are less Spanish than they are French. For want of a better term they are often called by those who study them Pyreneans.

Their country in many respects a wonderful one and full of historical as well as contemporaneous interest, is yet comparatively little visited by the supposedly ubiquitous tourist. Daudet has made them best known to the reading world, but the Meridionaux are not all as Daudet painted his delightful characters.

There is the Midi of Daudet and there is the Midi of a different character, less brilliant, not less pronounced in independence. The Midi of Daudet has been seen in aggregates of hundreds of thousands in these last weeks of early summer and has been heard where the telegraph ticks around the world. It is the other Midi that the French government and Parliament have got to settle with in the last analysis.

For there is distress in the Midi, or more accurately in parts of the Midi—the distress that comes of a severe falling off in business. Of personal distress in the sense of suffering for want of food there is comparatively little, and what there is in the department of Aude.

To say the truth, not a person visible in the Aude wears the aspect of a hungry person, but citizens of Narbonne, in this department, declare that many of the working people are obliged to restrict themselves to one meal a day through inability to find employment enough to pay for more.

Argeliers, the center of the agitation, is little more than an hour's drive from Narbonne. There is a reason, a very simple one, for the greater distress manifesting itself in Aude. In this department the people cultivate practically nothing but the vine.

The vineyard laborers, and some some distress in the inevitable result. The towns suffer accordingly from the inability of anybody to buy much.

Land of the Vine.

For miles after miles one may traverse the country in the Aude and see nothing growing but vines. Even wild flowers by the roadside are few. The traveler drives or walks with vines within arm's length of the valleys and over the hillsides, vines extending as far as the eye can reach, relieved here and there by scattered olive trees perhaps.

The strong winds that sweep across the broad lands of the Aude, strong and steady as the trades, there is further suggestion of the ocean, but of a tropical ocean where the citizen of the north feels that he would parch and suffocate if he did not blow and bring him new life in the dry furnace of the midday atmosphere. Many a native wears a protecting handkerchief over the back of his neck, and country women do not disdain to screen themselves with parasols.

The people of Aude have sat quietly down and waited for the sun and the sunshine of their vale of fortune to bring them competence. When, through a multiplicity of causes this failed to materialize they began to bestir themselves, not to see what was rotten in this southern Denmark, but to demand that their Parliamen governors should assure them an easy living of the

sort to which they had accustomed themselves. In this period of agitation not half of them paused to think for themselves. Much of the fashion of thousands of Americans who credit an administration with good times and charge against an administration all bad times occurring under its tenure of office, these people were keen to blame the government for the consequences of their own want of perspicacity, coupled with an alteration of the social and economic conditions in France. And, finding a nucleus about which to accumulate themselves and their grievances, they set out to demand fallacious treatment for a misunderstood disease.

The Political Aspect.
To the great heart of humanity an appeal on the keynote of distress is never made in vain. If personal interest heightens susceptibility to this call the response is likely to be correspondingly accentuated. This was the case in the Midi, with the additional factor of the spontaneous gen-

erosity characteristic of the warm-blooded Meridionaux.

The departments of Hérault and Gard, on the northeast, and of the Pyrenees Orientales, on the south, whose wine industry languished even as did that of Aude, were keen to spring to the aid of distressed brothers. The people of these three departments were not seated on the edge of suffering, as were those of Aude, for they were not so exclusively viticultural, but their prosperity through the cultivation of the grape was at a low ebb. Succor for the Aude's wine industry would discernate its soothing beneficence among them.

The call to come over into Aude and help met an instantaneous response. Meetings were organized. Leaders were selected. The politicians, who in France are quite as indefatigable as, and less stable than those of Tammany hall or any other well organized American political machine, saw their opportunity and joined forces with the industrial population.

Clemenceau had held power too long. Socialists, monarchists, clericals, each had grievances enabling a rapprochement with a common destructive end, however different might be their several methods of reconstruction. That political machinery of the Midi is indispensible. That the enthusiastic hordes of excitable Meridionaux did not know that they were being exploited is equally beyond cavil.

The remarkable demonstrations by hundreds of thousands in the principal towns of the four departments of which the world knows were the result. Word was sent broadcast that the people were starving, yet to the astonishment of the world these people instead of improvising weapons and attacking the broadshops compassed orderly pilgrimages in astounding numbers and cried "please" where their power might have wrought ruin, destruction, revolution.

Dream Ended in Bloodshed.
Amazed at their own success, misled by the specious exhortations of deluded leaders and the more reprehensible instigations of political charlatans, the people worked themselves into the belief that by a sort of laying on of hands the government could be instantaneously a deep rooted disease. If not they would have none of the government, albeit they failed to recognize that refusal to carry on relations with the central authority at Paris was tantamount to secession.

They wanted to show their resentment to live their own lives and to force the government to enable them to live as they had always lived, but they imagined that this could be accomplished without seceding from the republic, which they hadn't any real intention or desire to do. The bloodshed at Narbonne probably caused through mistaken severity on the part of mounted troops, riddled their dream and left them dazed upon awakening.

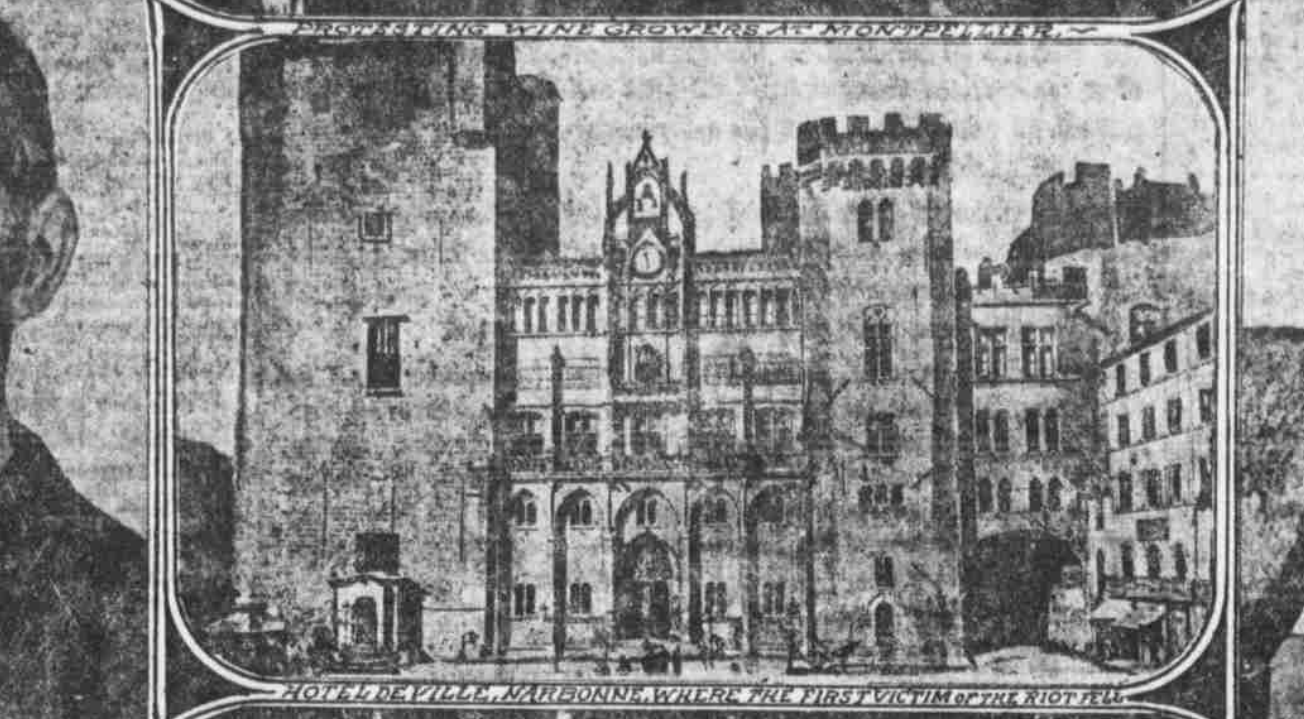
Deplorable as it was, this blood-letting marked the beginning of the end of serious difficulties. It gave people time to think of the ignominious flight of him whom they dubbed "Apostle," "Redeemer," a small wine grower and cafe proprietor of the village of Argeliers, a hamlet of 1,400 people.

He had been acclaimed as a leader of men. He proved to be more facile in flight than glib in oratory. The people soon dropped him from his pedestal, although grudgingly relinquishing their idea that one whom they had taken so warmly to their hearts must be worthy of a higher place.

From the day that Aude and Narbonne woke up the other departments lessened their interest. None had suffered so much or gone so far, and to subside gradually into habitual calm was easy.

In the most northerly department, Gard, the nearest to Paris, where the people read more newspapers and think more, there was never at any time real trouble. In Hérault, the most important of the departments, with the largest city, Montpellier, such trouble as there was was caused chiefly by hoodlums, although the troops exaggerated many by heedless and needless disregard for the citizens' rights.

After traversing these departments, to enter into the departments of the Pyrenees Orientales is to behold the realm where nature itself, the arch coquette, invites to all the sweet enjoyments of Andalusia, of Granada, with a flourish which south of the Pyrenees is wanting; thus men say when analyzing their sensations on a return from



erages consumed in the Midi are enormous. With government aid the Midi again prospered in its wine growing, but it did not return to its former habits of wine drinking. In the meantime a change was coming over the habits of the people of France.

The bourgeois, who formerly took care to put down a lot of wine for home consumption, began to take to the custom of buying its wine as needed. Later still the fashion changed from wine drinking to water drinking, and it is today fashionable in France to drink water and not wine.

It is mainly the foreigners in France and the inhabitants of foreign countries and the poorer people of France who drink wine. Here was the explanation of a large falling off in the demand for wine, which for ages had been grown and bought of the Meridionaux.

Again, the Bordeaux people had standardized their wines and could sell a more or less staple and stable product throughout the world, so that a man buying one of the well known brands—which is in no

case meant wine of one and the same vineyard in each instance—could be reasonably certain of securing a wine tasting about as he expected it to taste.

Not so the growers of the Midi. Their wine continued to be whatever nature made it, be it better or worse. Truth compels one to say that it is generally worse. The Midi wine is not good from the viewpoint of the lover of Bordeaux, not yet of him of Burgundy, although Burgundy wine has been "helped" ever since the phylloxera year by various forms of treatment.

The Midi wine is not strong enough in alcohol to stand long keeping or distant transportation and the growers resorted to sugar to increase the fermentation and its alcoholic strength. From the small beginning of "medical treatment" the step to fraudulent adulteration was short, and it was simple and scarcely more than a ventral sin, inasmuch as the adulteration did not make the wine particularly deleterious to health.

From this practice the rewards of viticulture, already large, were greatly enhanced and the Midi swam in luxury. The sugar raisers of the north saw their opportunity and made it easy for the Midi to obtain sugar for its treatment of the wine, not to say for the wine's adulteration.

Being business men, they were not slow to enable merchants to see that they, too, might increase their profits by utilizing sugar for the strengthening of wines of inferior grade. Adulteration became a wholesale trade and the Midi was one of the largest practitioners.

Not only was the first cru strengthened and fortified by sugar additions, but succeeding crus were rendered possible and profitable by similar means. The market was flooded with spurious wines at the same time that the consumption and demand for genuine wines was for reasons already seen rapidly falling off.

Result, a Midi full of wine and emotion and face to face with the necessity of hard work of changing its habits, of changing its business principles. The Midi wouldn't think of doing this. Not even would a man think of looking elsewhere to sell his wine than the place where his fathers had sold it before him.

The Midi sat under its olive trees and said: Things are wrong; the times are out of joint. Let Parliament—the locum tenens of the king—do the things right. Nature and the king made this a wine-growing country. The world has always bought our wine; let the world buy it now. What if we did help out our profits by using sugar—in a proper way, oh, of course, in a proper way—what right did that give to anybody else to fabricate wine of dregs and chemicals and flood the markets so that we should not be able to sell our wine? Supposing we do like to drink beer and abstinence, it is still the world's business to drink the wine the Midi grows. Let the government help us.

These same Meridionaux would not even recognize a further cause for the falling off in the demand for their wine. Their wine, especially in its second cru, was the wine of the poor people of Paris and of the stock of the small dealers. The patrons of these dealers, the poorer people through many degrees, came to prefer the inebriation due to a glass of abstinence to that of a poor glass of wine. And they, too, like the Midi growers, took to abstinence and helped to leave the wine market slow and slack.

The Remedy.
The Midi is truly in hard luck, but the fraud practised in the fabrication of wine, in which the Midi is itself a participant, is not the whole story of its distress, nor will a bill against fraud restore the Midi's prosperity, especially if the bill is only directed against the northern sugar growers and leaves the merchants free to adulterate the wine.

So much for the economic cause of the Midi's distress, and not all of them are told here. As for the complications due to the political causes of the uprising, to trace these causes would involve a more or less intimate understanding of French politics and would involve too long a story for one newspaper article.

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