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Builder, Not Fighter, is What France Wants

Paris.—There is nothing deader than a dead tiger and Georges Clemenceau was a very great tiger. Therefore Georges Clemenceau is very dead.

Coming from Canada, where an interview with Clemenceau still makes the front page of the newspapers, it is one of the big surprises to find that the one-time Tiger of France is as dead politically as that ex-president of France who lost his place through falling out of a moving Pullman car in his pajamas. No one quotes Clemenceau, no one in the government asks Clemenceau's opinion, when you say "Clemenceau" people merely smile, and finally M. Clemenceau has been forced to start a small newspaper to get his views before the public at all.

If you want an explanation of the atrophy of Clemenceau as a political figure you can go to two places to get it. You may interview politicians who will talk about Versailles, the reparations question, open diplomacy, Genoa, the Ruhr basin, and the Kemalists. Or you can go to the cafes and get the truth. For no politician could keep a man out of the public eye if the people wanted him.

In the cafes the Frenchmen have nothing to gain or lose by the things they say, so they consequently say the things that they believe. Of course if they have been sitting in a cafe too long they sometimes say even more than they believe. But if you catch a Frenchman when he has been in the cafe just long enough to come to a boil, and before he has begun to boil over and spill on the stove, you will find out what he really thinks of Clemenceau or anything else. And if you catch enough Frenchmen in different parts of France, you will have the national opinion; the real national opinion, not the shadow of the national opinion that is reflected in elections and newspapers.

"The things Clemenceau says have turned sour in the mouths of the people. They do not taste like truth. They may have been true once, but they do not taste true now," one Frenchman told me.

"But has everyone forgotten what he did in the war?" I asked.

"The war is over and he was a very great tiger in the war, but he wanted to go on being a tiger after the war. After the war tigers are a handicap to a country. You need workhorses and mules, maybe, but not tigers. The people are tired of Monsieur Clemenceau, and he will have to wait until he is dead to be a great man again."

That is the result of the talk of many Frenchmen. It does not go into details, nor cite instances, but France wants a new type of statesman and needs him badly. She wants a builder instead of a fighter, a man who will think forward instead of backward, and because there is no fighting to be done, with the callousness of republics, she has dropped Clemenceau. He lived too long after his job was finished, and now, as the Frenchman in the cafe said, "he must wait until he is dead to be a great man again."